



## **Statement of the International Communist League**

**Down With the UN Starvation Blockade!**

**Defend Iraq Against U.S. and Allied Imperialist Attack!**

PAGE 4

## Prometheus Research Library Book

**Dog Days**

**James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman  
in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933**

PAGE 20

Racism, Sexism, Religion and Anti-Muslim Bigotry

**Women and Immigration in France**

PAGE 40

## **Spartacist South Africa Comrades Address ICL Gathering**

**The Anti-Apartheid Struggle and the  
Need for a Leninist Vanguard Party**

PAGE 12

## Letters

# Paul Johnson Unmasked, Al Richardson Disrobed

London  
9th October, 2001

Dear Sir,

(I will not dignify slanderers such as yourselves with the term "Comrade.") My attention has been drawn to the latest issue of your irregular publication *Spartacist*, containing a long and turgid attack upon an issue of our magazine that is now over seven years old. Does it really take so long to chew over material elaborated by the Trotskyist movement over sixty years ago?

Since Comrade Mike Jones is framing a reply to the particular attacks made upon him, I will not repeat the points he makes. However, I must draw attention to the blanket label of "laborite" (sic) which you persistently apply to our magazine as a whole, and highlight the dubious nature of it. First of all, let me point out that along with much of the rest of your highly coloured cult language, it has few, if any, roots in Marxism, and is to be found rarely, if at all, in the works of Lenin or Trotsky. Lenin, as some of you must be aware, seconded the amendment that brought the British Labour Party into the Second International, and while he lived consistently advocated the affiliation of the newly founded Communist Party to it. Trotsky devoted an entire chapter in his *Where is Britain Going?* to arguing that those who opposed affiliation to the Labour Party should be regarded as scabs, and from 1935 onwards argued for his supporters in Britain to become members of it, again, a position he held up to his death, as far as we are aware. If you are happy to keep your followers in ignorance of these well attested facts, all well and good. But, as Trotsky once said to Simone Weill, everyone has a right to ignorance, but it is important not to abuse that right.

I am quite prepared to accept the view that the essence of the Labour Party has changed since, which is not at all impossible, but until I see a fully worked out Marxist analysis along the lines of those of Lenin and Trotsky, I shall remain with their position—I am certainly not to be swayed by the extravagant name-calling that passes for analysis in your ranks.

Secondly, perhaps you are not aware of the fact that only three of the editorial board shared enough of this position to vote for the Labour Party at the last election in any case. If "laborism" is such a dirty word as far as you are concerned, shouldn't you hold back a bit from slandering everyone else on the board? But then, how can I expect any better from those who see fit to bracket the heroic names of Ignace Reiss and Walter Krivitsky with the East German regime's miserable spies and provocateurs, seeking to excuse their oppression of the workers on the pretext of defending their state against them?

As for the argument that anyone who advocates a vote for the Labour Party is a supporter of Blair's politics, I would be a bit more careful with that argument if I were you, for it would logically follow that everyone who calls for a vote for Harpal Brar is equally to be regarded as endorsing the Moscow Trials.

Is it really too much to ask for these dirty methods of polemic to be replaced by Marxist methods of analysis and argument?

Al Richardson

### *Spartacist* replies:

Al Richardson is the editor of *Revolutionary History*. One would never know from his letter that the article which prompted his long-winded vituperation dealt with the aborted German Revolution of 1923 ("Rearming Bolshevism: A Trotskyist Critique of Germany 1923 and the Comintern," *Spartacist* No. 56, Spring 2001). The defeat in Germany marked a decisive point in the history of the international workers movement. *Spartacist's* carefully researched article, reflecting a discussion which took place within the International Communist League, contained a sustained polemic against the social-democratic worshippers of the accomplished fact—including, as a rather secondary point, those on the *Revolutionary History* editorial board—who dismiss the revolutionary opportunity which opened up in Germany with the French invasion of the Ruhr in early 1923 as wishful thinking on the part of the leadership of the Communist International (CI). The reasons for the 1923 defeat are irrelevant to Richardson because he is exercised over the main question that exercises British Labourites...the British Labour Party.

*Spartacist* documented that the hyperinflation in Germany in 1923 left both the political and trade-union bureaucracies of the Social Democracy suspended in midair. But Mike Jones argued in the pages of *Revolutionary History* that it was *impossible* at that time to break the hold of the Social Democratic Party on the German working class. Similarly, Richardson upholds the eternal sway of the Labour Party over the British working class. Labour's "broad church" is patently a version of Karl Kautsky's "all-inclusive" party of the working class. Richardson cites Lenin's position in 1908—i.e., pre-1914, prior to his fully developed understanding of the need for an organizational split with reformist Social Democracy—to argue for affiliation to the Labour Party in permanence. To hear Richardson tell it, the Comintern should have sought the affiliation of the British Labour Party. But the CI was born in the struggle against all varieties of reformism and social-chauvinism to forge a revolutionary, proletarian vanguard.

Empirically we could impugn the scholarly pretensions of Richardson on the simple basis that Trotsky used the word "Labourite" quite a lot, as a cursory glance at his writings on

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## Marx and Gladstone

Sir,

Your Californian correspondent Martin Malia (February 15) strikes me as a typical intellectual, that is, he puts ideas before people. Because Communism was “a movement of intellectuals” and “the great political religion of the modern age,” he finds it “simple-minded and disreputable” for me to draw attention to its huge cost in lives, wealth and human happiness.

Malia also objects to my description of Marx as “an intellectual crook.” But the evidence is overwhelming. I summarize it, listing sources and authorities, in the essay on Marx in my book *Intellectuals* (1996 edition), especially pp 60-69. Marx was not interested in truth. As the philosopher Karl Jaspers puts it:

“The style of Marx’s writings is not that of the investigator...he does not quote examples or adduce facts which run counter to his own theory but only those which clearly support or confirm that which he considers the ultimate truth. The whole approach is one of vindication, not investigation but it is a vindication of something proclaimed as the perfect truth with the conviction not of the scientist but of the believer.”

In addition, Marx and his principal source and collaborator, Engels, were guilty of gross carelessness, tendentious selection and distortion, and downright dishonesty in their use of evidence. I give only one example. It was essential to Marx’s theory of Capitalism that the exploitation of the working class should increase, and its condition deteriorate. In fact, the reverse was happening in Marx’s lifetime. In his budget speech of 1863, Gladstone said: “I should look almost with apprehension and with pain upon this intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power if it were my belief that it was confined to the class who are in easy circumstances.” But, he added, “the average condition of the British labourer, we have the happiness to know, has

improved during the past twenty years to a degree which we know to be extraordinary, and which we may almost pronounce to be unexampled in the history of any country and of any age.” In September 1864, in his inaugural Address to the International Working Men’s Association, Marx has Gladstone say: “This intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power is entirely confined to classes of property.” Challenged to account for this deliberate inversion of what Gladstone said, Marx gave as his source the *Morning Star* newspaper. But the *Star*, like other newspapers, and Hansard, quoted Gladstone correctly. None the less, Marx refused to retract, apologize or amend the misquotation, brazenly reproducing it in *Capital*, and insisting to his dying day that the lie he had placed in Gladstone’s mouth was true.

Paul Johnson

—*Times Literary Supplement*, 22 February 2002

\* \* \*

It is a pity that Martin Malia, in his reply (Letters, March 1) to Paul Johnson, accepts without question the latter’s allegation that Marx attributed to Gladstone a sentence which Gladstone never uttered in the House of Commons. This allegation was comprehensively answered by Marx’s daughter Eleanor in the February 1884 issue of *To-day*. Contrary to Paul Johnson’s assertion, the *Morning Star*’s parliamentary report (April 17, 1863) did contain the sentence in question: “This augmentation [i.e. of wealth and power] is an augmentation entirely confined to the classes possessed of property.” Substantially the same sentence appeared in the *Daily News*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Herald*, *Morning Post* and *Times* of the same date.

Yours faithfully,  
Peter Fryer

—*Times Literary Supplement*, 15 March 2002

Britain would prove. More to the point, the tactics (including short-term entrism) advocated by Lenin and Trotsky toward the Labour Party in an earlier period differed from time to time, but they were always *tactics*—designed to further the work of revolutionaries in *splitting* the working-class base from the pro-capitalist leadership of what was then clearly a bourgeois workers party. As regards the Independent Labour Party (ILP), Trotsky insisted:

“The ILP broke away from the Labour Party. That was correct. If the ILP wanted to become the revolutionary lever, it was impossible for the handle of this lever to be left in the hands of the thoroughly opportunist and bourgeois careerists. *Complete and unconditional political and organizational independence of a revolutionary party is the first prerequisite for its success.*”

—“For the Fourth International,” 27 January 1934,

Trotsky, *Collected Writings and Speeches on Britain*, Vol. 3, New Park Publications (1974)

Today the Labour Party’s ties to the organized British working class are being broken, not from the bottom, as envisioned by Lenin and Trotsky, but *from above*. Tony Blair—who takes his domestic policy from the rightist Italian prime minister Berlusconi and his foreign policy from George W. Bush—is hell-bent on transforming the Labour Party into a bourgeois party. But this is engendering outrage in the working class, as the popularity of the firefighters struggle against the Labour

government proved. As a scion of British Menshevism facing the death throes of the old Labourite culture, Richardson is beside himself. History is taking a big bite out of his derrière. He would do well to contemplate Trotsky’s scathing condemnation of “the theoretical banality and the lack of revolutionary dignity, which characterize the authorized leaders of British socialism. They are not the heralds of a new world; they are but the surviving relics of an old culture, which in their person expresses anxiety for its further fate” (“Between Red and White,” 1921, *Collected Writings and Speeches on Britain*, Vol. 1). Richardson’s admonition that “dirty methods of polemic be replaced by Marxist methods of analysis and argument” rings entirely hollow.

In the same vein is Paul Johnson’s attempted cheap shot at Karl Marx (see box above). A former editor of the Labourite *New Statesman* turned right-wing demagogue imbued with religious reaction, Johnson is particularly fond of Baroness Margaret Thatcher and, logically enough, Tony Blair. Johnson is reduced to smearing the revolutionary genius Karl Marx as a liar because of an alleged misquote by Marx of the Liberal prime minister Gladstone. As documented in the response by Peter Fryer, Johnson’s allegations were shamelessly rehashed from earlier slanders already comprehensively rebutted. ■

## Statement of the International Communist League

# Defend Iraq Against U.S. and Allied Imperialist Attack!

The following statement was issued on October 23.

U.S. imperialism is leading the world to war. Tens of thousands of American and British troops are getting positioned for a full-scale attack on Iraq, while other powers from Australia to Turkey elbow each other for a role in the slaughter and a share of the loot. The White House has already revealed plans for a post-Saddam Hussein military occupation of Iraq. Look at the war chest of nuclear weapons the U.S. has and threatens to use today and it's clear that the fate of life on this planet is threatened by the continued existence of this imperialist order.

In the war against Iraq, the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) clearly takes a side: We stand for the military defense of Iraq without giving a milligram of political support to the Saddam Hussein regime. Hussein is a bloody oppressor of Iraqi workers, leftists, Shi'ite Muslims, the Kurdish people and others. As such, he was a close ally and client of U.S. imperialism for two decades before he made a grab for Kuwait in 1990. Now the U.S. wants a more pliant regime and tighter control of the oil spigot, not least to put economic rivals like Japan and Germany, who are more dependent on Near East oil, on rations. With its renewed saber rattling over North Korea, Washington makes clear that that country will be next on its hit list in the event of an easy win in Iraq. The fact that the imperialists have not already threatened to bomb North Korea in response to news that it may be developing a nuclear capability only underlines that nuclear weapons are the sole guarantor of a country's sovereignty in today's world. Every victory for the imperialists in their predatory wars encourages further military adventures; every setback serves to assist the struggles of working people and the oppressed.

The colossal military advantage of the United States against neocolonial Iraq—a country which has already been bled white through 12 years of UN sanctions which have killed more than 1.5 million civilians—underscores the importance of *class struggle* in the imperialist centers as the chief means to give content to the call to defend Iraq. Every strike, every labor mobilization against war plans, every mass protest against attacks on workers and minorities, every struggle against domestic repression and against attacks on civil liberties represents a dent in the imperialist war drive. To put an end to war once and for all, the capitalist system that breeds war must be swept away through a series of revolutions and the establishment of a rational, planned, egalitarian socialist economy on a world scale. *Anti-imperialism abroad means class struggle at home! Defend Iraq against imperialist attack!*

The extent to which Washington's allies in the United Nations, especially Germany, have openly criticized the Bush administration's rabid provocations in the Near East is a measure of the growth of tensions among the imperialist powers in recent years. But while objecting to the rudeness of an American cowboy boot on their necks, all the subordinate imperialist states will acquiesce to the diktats of the master of capitalist ruling classes, U.S. imperialism, because they lack the might to oppose the U.S. and they want to be rewarded with at least a share of the spoils. As an official for the French oil company TotalFinaElf bluntly stated, "We want the oil and



London, 28 September 2002: Spartacist League/Britain contingent at demonstration of nearly 500,000 to protest U.S./British war moves against Iraq.

## Down With the UN Starvation Blockade!

we want to be in the game of rebuilding the country. If there were a new regime and we have not been with the Americans, where will we be?"

### War: The Continuation of Politics by Other Means

The American ruling class cynically manipulated the grief and horror felt by millions at the criminal and demented attack on the World Trade Center to wage war on Afghanistan. But the patriotic consensus in the U.S. is wearing thin, and elsewhere there is massive opposition to a war against Iraq. War demands civil peace, and from Los Angeles to London the imperialist warmakers are revealed as vicious domestic union-busters and strikebreakers. Declaring that a strike could "threaten national security," the Bush administration has brought down the force of the capitalist state to coerce the powerful American dockers union, the ILWU, to work under the dictates of the union-busting employers association. Across the seas, British firefighters are threatened with strikebreaking by the army. Plunging stock markets rob millions of workers of their pensions while public scandals expose insatiable corporate greed. Tens of thousands of working people, including the entire workforce at a number of Fiat plants in Italy, face a future of being chopped off like a gangrenous limb by owners seeking to protect their own profit margins amid the capitalist economic crisis. Civil liberties have been shredded and the capitalists have intensified their assault on social welfare and other gains wrested through decades of workers struggles.

Everywhere, the anti-immigrant witchhunt has been whipped up to fever pitch in an effort by the capitalist rulers to deflect working-class struggle with racism and xenophobia. The anti-immigrant hysteria provokes a tide of blood as *thousands* of desperate refugees die trying to cross the U.S. border from Mexico or to land a rickety boat in Australia or Europe. Having brought in large numbers of immigrants when their labor was needed, in the face of recession the bourgeoisies of West Europe do not need more immigrants as a supply of cheap labor. All this shows clearly that the capitalist system is the biggest threat to working people everywhere. A decade ago, the rulers crowed about the supposed "death of communism." But capitalism has brought the world to an impasse which the Iraq war illuminates with the terrifying glare of missiles streaking across a night sky. The fight for authentic communism (not its Stalinist perversion) through the instrumentality of revolutionary workers parties is the only way forward.

In the U.S., not even dizzying flag-waving or the heavy fist of state repression has induced the masses to embrace war with Iraq. In Europe, hundreds of thousands of workers and anti-imperialist youth have demonstrated their opposition to this war. The problem is that the antiwar protests in Europe have all been channeled into a national-chauvinist direction of getting one's "own" rulers to stand up to the Americans. In the U.S., antiwar liberals and leftists bleat, "Money for jobs, not for war" and so fuel the lie that fundamental priorities of the capitalist rulers can be altered to serve



Aral/Sipa

Baghdad residential neighborhood flattened by U.S. missile strike, 1997 (top). Iraqi women demonstrate against UN starvation sanctions, 1998 (bottom).

Le Nouvel Afrique-Asie



the interests of working people.

The truth is that this whole capitalist system is based on the extraction of profit for the owners of the means of production through the exploitation and subjugation of the workers who produce the wealth of society. War is a concentrated expression of this, as competing capitalist ruling classes scramble to steal natural resources and to carve out new markets for export of capital and fresh sources of cheap labor. The leader of the Russian Revolution, V.I. Lenin, emphasized the difference between *bourgeois pacifism*, which lulls the masses into passivity and embellishes capitalist "democracy," and the yearning for peace by the masses. Following the outbreak of the first inter-imperialist world war, Lenin wrote:

"At the present time, the propaganda of peace unaccompanied by a call for revolutionary mass action can only sow illusions and demoralise the proletariat, for it makes the proletariat believe that the bourgeoisie is humane, and turns it into a plaything in the hands of the secret diplomacy of the belligerent countries. In particular, the idea of a so-called democratic peace being possible without a series of revolutions is profoundly erroneous."

— "The Conference of the R.S.D.L.P. Groups Abroad"  
(February 1915)

In wars between the imperialist predators and plunderers and their colonial and semicolonial victims, the proletariat



Workers Vanguard photos

Oakland, California, 9 February 2002: Demonstration initiated by Bay Area Labor Black League for Social Defense and Partisan Defense Committee mobilized longshoremen and other unionists in defense of immigrants and workers in the crosshairs of U.S. government's "anti-terrorism" repression.

has a side. As Lenin stressed in his 1915 pamphlet *Socialism and War*: "If tomorrow, Morocco were to declare war on France, or India on Britain, or Persia or China on [tsarist] Russia, and so on, these would be 'just,' and 'defensive' wars, *irrespective* of who would be the first to attack; any socialist would wish the oppressed, dependent and unequal states victory over the oppressor, slave-holding and predatory 'Great' Powers."

There are palpable opportunities to organize class-struggle opposition to imperialist war and to break the narrow nationalist and economist limits of strikes contained by labor lieutenants of the capitalist class. During the 1999 U.S./NATO war against Serbia, Italian COBAS unions organized a one-million-strong political general strike against the war. Fiat workers, who today battle plant closings in Italy, organized a campaign of material aid—a campaign which all sections of the ICL actively supported—for their class brothers and sisters at the Yugoslav Zastava car plant, which had been bombed by the imperialists. Last year, Japanese dock workers at Sasebo pointed the way forward by "hot-cargoing" (refusing to handle) Japanese military goods destined for the war in Afghanistan. Today, courageous Turkish workers at the U.S. airbase in Incirlik, which is planned to be a major launching pad for the Iraq war, threaten a strike.

What's essential is to draw a class line and unshackle the working people and anti-imperialist youth from bourgeois politicians, their agents in the trade unions and their left servants, who seek to channel justified hatred of war into illusory calls for parliamentary reforms of the profit-driven system that breeds war and, in West Europe, into support for their own national bourgeoisie against the Americans. In the heart of the imperialist beast, the Spartacist League/U.S., American section of the ICL, has pointed the way forward with revolutionary internationalist contingents in the antiwar protests. We demand: *For class struggle against the U.S. capitalist rulers! Defend Iraq against imperialist attack! Down with the UN*

*starvation blockade! All U.S./UN/imperialist troops out of the Persian Gulf and the Near East!*

### Bush Doctrine: Nuclear Top Cops of the World

In September, the Bush administration released its "National Security Strategy," a diplomatic bombshell enshrining the principle of "pre-emptive" war, including with nuclear weapons, against anyone who steps in America's way and avowing that no power will ever catch up with the huge military advantage the U.S. has amplified since the Soviet Union was destroyed through capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92. (The U.S. military budget is now greater than that of the next 19 countries combined.) This threat is directed first and foremost against China, as well as against America's imperialist rivals. The new policy represents a significant shift from how America has dominated the world since it emerged triumphant over its rivals in the first and second imperialist world wars. For decades, the U.S. has wrapped its outright brigandage in the guise of "democracy" and "liberating" people from "dictatorship." The United Nations often served as the "humanitarian" fig leaf for the terror and destruction of U.S. imperialism worldwide, from the 1950-53 Korean War to the starvation blockade of Iraq.

Complaints by European social democrats and fake leftists about American "unilateralism" do not represent any *class* opposition to U.S. imperialism, merely the squeals of less powerful states and their apologists who want a bigger cut of the take and would prefer to be treated less rudely. Their maneuvers in the UN are essentially power plays to squeeze the U.S. a bit for their own rival national interests. Lenin called the UN's predecessor, the League of Nations, a "den of thieves," and the UN serves that purpose today: regulating global disputes within the framework determined by the most powerful imperialist powers, covering all its maneuvers as "peace" missions. Now the U.S. feels confident to drop this mask and snarl an overt "Roll over, or you could be next."

And they do roll over, acquiescing to exempting the American military from international war crimes tribunals and to U.S. appeals to Iraqis to assassinate their head of state!

The White House policy change is not merely semantic nor an absence of diplomatic niceties. This is the shape of the "new world order" emerging from the demise of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was the homeland of the October Revolution of 1917, the world's first and, to date, only victorious workers revolution. The exploitative capitalist system was overthrown and replaced by a planned, collectivized economy. Yet in the absence of socialist revolutions in Germany and other advanced industrial countries, the young workers state remained impoverished and encircled by hostile imperialist powers, and the Soviet workers themselves were politically expropriated by a conservative bureaucratic caste, akin to the labor bureaucracy which sits atop the trade unions in capitalist countries. Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the October Revolution, fought the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union under Stalin and struggled to return the Soviet Union to the road of revolutionary internationalism. In 1933, Trotsky called for a political revolution to oust the bureaucracy, while continuing to insist that it was the duty of the proletariat internationally to militarily defend the world's first workers state from internal or external attempts at capitalist restoration.

Despite Stalinist deformation, the Soviet Union represented the industrial and military powerhouse for every state that overthrew capitalist rule, from Vietnam to Cuba. Without Soviet military might to stay its hand, U.S. imperialism has been riding roughshod over and expanding its military presence on every continent and on every sea. Interimperialist rivalries that were usually subordinated to the common cause of destroying the Soviet Union have now come to the fore. The re-election of German chancellor Gerhard Schröder on the basis of his anti-American stance in the Iraq conflict, the first time since the end of World War II that capitalist Germany has expressed overt opposition to a major American military-strategic policy, is one indication

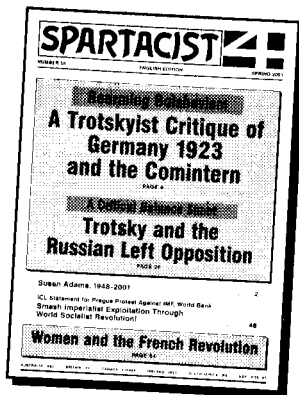
of the widening rift in the imperialist camp. Japan's wooing of North Korea in September in defiance of Bush's aim to starve and quarantine that "rogue state" is another. Mexican president Fox, who wants to be Bush's man in Latin America, can't even get a diplomatic crumb tossed from Washington's table for his services rendered. During the 1991 Gulf War, Germany and Japan alone paid over 25 percent of the cost of the war, with other U.S. allies (like Saudi Arabia) covering almost all of the rest. Yet Schröder vows not to pay a pfennig this time, and Japan has made clear it does not intend to contribute either. The deepening world economic recession is exacerbating tensions between the West Europeans, the United States and Japan. Economic trade wars between and within the rival blocs for larger shares of the world market will ultimately lead to military conflicts.

Today the U.S. has its sights set on holding and grabbing more of the oil wealth of the Near East, but the ultimate prize it wants is China. Emboldened by capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union, the U.S. is mounting military pressure on China—from the expansion of U.S. bases in the Philippines to new bases on the Afghan border. At the same time, the U.S. and other imperialists, as well as overseas Chinese capitalists, promote incursions of the capitalist market in "Special Economic Zones" for free-market exploitation in the heart of the Chinese deformed workers state. China is one of seven potential targets in the cross hairs of U.S. plans for a *nuclear first strike*, as laid out in the "Nuclear Posture Review" issued by the Pentagon earlier this year. Nonetheless, the miserable Beijing Stalinist bureaucracy endorsed the U.S. "war on terror" in Afghanistan. As well, elements of the bureaucracy seek to become a new capitalist ruling class, assisting the economic penetration of China by the imperialists and the overseas Chinese bourgeoisie. The terrible reversal of human progress by every measure, from infant mortality to life expectancy to literacy, since capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union and East Europe is a warning to the Chinese working masses that a sellout to the "free world" means a free fall into capitalist

# SPARTACIST

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Revolutionary Marxism

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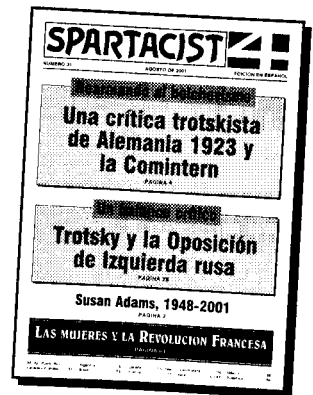
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Spartakist

East Berlin, 14 January 1990: At demonstration to honor martyred German communists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, Spartacists raise banner calling for "A red Germany of workers councils in a socialist Europe." ICL opposed counterrevolution, fought for revolutionary reunification of Germany through proletarian revolution in the West and political revolution in the East.

exploitation and misery—and so much the more so for China, with its vast expanses of economic backwardness. The gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution, which lifted China from the yoke of imperialist domination, ended the enslavement of women and vastly improved the conditions of life of the worker and peasant masses through the creation of a planned, collectivized economy, are at risk. We Trotskyists fight for the *unconditional military defense* of China—as well as North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba—against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution, while fighting for proletarian political revolution to oust the treacherous Stalinist bureaucracies which undermine the workers states.

The ICL threw every resource at its disposal into the fight to stop capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union, and earlier in East Germany. We sought to reimplant the authentic communism of Lenin's Bolsheviks, and to bring to the working class Trotsky's brilliant analysis of the contradictory character of the deformed workers states, in order to build revolutionary internationalist parties as the instrument to defend the old gains and conquer new ones. We did not succeed, but the bitter result of capitalism's victory—a far more dangerous world of unbridled imperialist exploitation and war—makes the struggles at hand all the more urgent and steels our resolve. In contrast, virtually the entire "left" howled along with the imperialist wolves in backing the forces of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and the deformed workers states of East Europe. In so doing they expressed their rapprochement with their national bourgeoisies. Thus it is not surprising that, reflecting growing differences among the major capitalist powers, these "leftists" went on to act as "human rights" drummer boys for their imperialist rulers against Serbia in 1999 and today adopt an "antiwar" posture which is nothing but pink window-dressing on the national interests of their own capitalist ruling classes.

### Fake Left Marches to the Beat of Their Own Capitalist Rulers

It is correct to oppose American imperialism, but to promote the idea that the European imperialists are more benevolent and progressive than their American rival is nothing but vile social-chauvinism. Yet this is precisely the

counterfeit currency of the European "left." Thus the Italian Rifondazione Comunista (RC), the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Workers Power (WP), among a raft of others, signed a call "To All Citizens of Europe and to All Their Representatives" which proclaims:

"Those who show solidarity with the people of Iraq have no hearing in the White House. But we do have the chance to influence European governments—many of whom have opposed the war. We call on all the European heads of state to publicly stand against this war, whether it has UN backing or not, and to demand that George Bush abandon his war plans."

What a poignant appeal to the German bourgeoisie of Auschwitz, to the French imperialists who soaked Algeria in blood, to the British who pillaged the Indian subcontinent and carved up the Near East and whose imperialist troops enforce brutal repression of the Catholics in Northern Ireland! How about today's minor players, like the Belgians, whose colonial occupation of the Congo was unrivaled in brutality, or the Dutch, who subjugated Indonesia and also engaged in an intercontinental slave trade? Let's not forget it was the Italian bourgeoisie which set up concentration camps in Libya and which used poison gas against the Ethiopian population. Moreover, this bloody colonial past paved the way for the murderous repression of dark-skinned immigrants by West Europe's rulers today, from the racist *Rasterfahndung* (a computerized system for racial profiling of mainly Muslim immigrants) in Germany to the institutionalized racist cop terror of France's "Vigipirate" campaign, Italy's drowning of boatloads of Albanian refugees, Britain's deportations of asylum-seekers, and on and on.

Perhaps the "leftist" signatories of the above-quoted statement feel their imperialist masters "owe" them one. After all, they *did* help install the reactionary governments in place across Europe. The British SWP declared itself "over the moon" when Bush's poodle Tony Blair first became prime minister. The French LCR vigorously campaigned "in the streets and at the polling booths" to "stop Le Pen" and install the right-wing Gaullist Jacques Chirac. The German Cliffite group Linksruck helped put Schröder, who seized on the Balkans War to become the first man to roll Bundeswehr tanks out of Germany since Adolf Hitler, back in office as an anti-



American “peace” candidate. Italian RC leader Bertinotti talks out of the left side of his mouth about a “European general strike for peace” (conspicuously excluding the American workers), while simultaneously appealing to the European heads of state, including the right-wing, fascist-allied Berlusconi, to oppose the war. In effect, Bertinotti calls for a “strike for peace” by capitalist governments. *Proposta* and Falce-martello (the Italian offshoot of the British Grantites), nestled inside RC, refuse to take a side to *defend Iraq* and promote mobilizations against U.S. military bases in Italy without addressing Italian imperialism. Indeed, *Proposta* supported the previous RC/“Ulivo” government which invaded Albania in 1997. In cyberspace, Workers Power and its League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) calls to “defend Iraq,” but on the streets of Britain they campaigned

for Tony Blair, who wages war on Iraq. Workers Power openly campaigned for the defeat of Serbia by the Kosovo Liberation Army—tool of NATO imperialism in the Balkans War—and turned up at a London demonstration which featured the call “Good luck NATO!” WP also issued the demented proclamation that “in the aftermath of NATO’s victory in Kosova, a pre-revolutionary situation is maturing” (“The Fight to Overthrow Milosevic in Serbia,” 11 August 1999 LRCI statement).

In Britain, the Cliffite SWP froths mightily against “Bush’s war,” yet it supported the entry of British imperialist troops into Northern Ireland in 1969 and still can’t bring itself to call for their immediate unconditional withdrawal! While occasionally denouncing the United Nations in their newspapers, various international affiliates of the Cliff tendency make up the right wing of the antiwar movement and criminally build illusions in the UN, whose sanctions against Iraq are *a murderous act of war*. In 1990-91, the



National Geographic

**British troops march into Baghdad, 1919, amid imperialist carve-up of Near East, following World War I.**

SWP built the Committee to Stop the War in the Gulf headed by Tony Benn, who supported UN sanctions. Now Linksruck has published a petition on its Web page demanding: “We appeal to the German Federal Government with much concern: To do everything possible in the framework of the UN in response to the U.S.A. to avoid the threatened war!”

In Australia, the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) announces in its 4 October issue of *Socialist Worker* that it backs the Victorian Peace Network (VPN), an antiwar confab which states, “UN resolutions on disarmament and human rights will only work if they are applied equally, without fear or favour. All the nuclear powers and all Middle East states must abolish their stocks of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.” This is an openly pro-imperialist call for the *disarmament of Iraq* in the face of impending U.S./British attack. As for the imperialists, they will only be disarmed when they are expropriated by victorious workers revolutions. Clinging to the coattails of liberals like the VPN, the ISO ends up again in the camp of the imperialists.

Similarly, the Marcyite Workers World Party (WWP) in the United States talks a little more left in its newspaper but in practice dedicates its efforts to subordinating the antiwar movement to capitalist politicians in the Democratic Party of war and racism. The WWP promotes Ramsey Clark, who was top cop under the Vietnam War administration of Lyndon Johnson and today demands that U.S. imperialism “lead us on the road to peace”!

U.S. military bases across Europe and Asia, as well as high-tech spy installations such as Australia’s Pine Gap, have become deserving targets of antiwar protests by leftists and trade unions. It would be a good thing if the U.S. were deprived of its international launching pads for war against Iraq. For all of German chancellor Schröder’s electioneering against war in Iraq, it is highly unlikely that he will interfere in any way with the key American air bases and military installations across Germany which house some 70,000 American troops. What we need is not an “antiwar movement” of social-chauvinist support to one’s “own” bourgeoisie, but a revolutionary proletarian and internationalist opposition to the U.S./NATO bases. The Spartakist Workers



no credit

**“Democratic” French imperialists assassinated and tortured Algerians in failed attempt to defeat war of independence, in late ‘50s and early ‘60s.**

Party, German section of the ICL, calls for the immediate withdrawal of all German troops from the Balkans, Afghanistan and the Near East. And while much of the left campaigned for imperialist intervention in East Timor in 1999, the Spartacist League/Australia opposed the Australian military presence there from the outset.

The French *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) group appears to have set itself apart from the swamp and even denounced “the total hypocrisy of the European states regarding the escalation of Bush’s warmongering” (*Lutte Ouvrière*, 6 September). Yet LO offers *no* perspective for any class-struggle fight against war, much less against the domestic reflection of this war drive: an escalation of police-state terror against immigrants, *sans-papiers* (undocumented immigrants) and “second generation” youth. LO has swung wildly in recent months, from grotesque support to cop “strikes” and calls for *more* cops in poor neighborhoods to opposing police brutality. Yet where LO is consistent is precisely in their steadfast refusal to fight for anything but the most narrow economic demands in the proletariat. Incredibly, in months of LO factory leaflets you can not find one word against anti-immigrant racism, but plenty of their perpetual reformist babble about “banning layoffs.” Thus LO does its bit to tie workers to their exploiters with the lie that the capitalist system can somehow be regulated under a “good” government to be humane.

In Lenin’s classic antiwar primer *Socialism and War*, written in 1915 in the crucible of World War I, he wrote:

“Opportunism and social-chauvinism have the same politico-ideological content—class collaboration instead of the class struggle, renunciation of revolutionary methods of struggle,

helping one’s ‘own’ government in its embarrassed situation, instead of taking advantage of these embarrassments so as to advance the revolution.”

Indeed, the pseudo-Marxists’ support to their own rulers as somehow more moral and humane than the American bourgeoisie is the same argument used by the German Social Democrats as “justification” for “defense of the fatherland” and voting war credits to the Kaiser in 1914. This renunciation of the fundamental Marxist perspective of class vs. class—encapsulated in the clarion call of the *Communist Manifesto* “Workingmen of all countries, unite!”—impelled Lenin to rip off the dirty shirt of the Second International and build a new, Communist, Third International. The betrayal by the Social Democrats made Lenin realize that opportunism had a material base in the workers movement itself, particularly in the trade-union officialdom which tied its fortunes to the capitalist system. Lenin’s greatest contribution to Marxism was his conclusion that a decisive *split* from the opportunists was the *precondition* for the proletariat to fight for its own class interests and its own class rule. Contrast this understanding with the base opportunism of groups like Peter Taaffe’s Committee for a Workers International, headed by the British Socialist Party, which may occasionally make orthodox-sounding statements about capitalism being the root cause of war but is wedded to support to social democrats like the German Party of Democratic Socialism.

Lenin explains in *Socialism and War*:

“Today *unity* with the opportunists *actually* means subordinating the working class to their ‘own’ national bourgeoisie, and an alliance with the latter for the purpose of oppressing other nations and of fighting for dominant-nation privileges; it means *splitting* the revolutionary proletariat of all countries.”

He concludes that the task at hand is:

“To rally these Marxist elements, however small their numbers may be at the outset; to reanimate, in their name, the now forgotten ideals of genuine socialism, and to call upon the workers of all lands to break with the chauvinists and rally about the old banner of Marxism—such is the task of the day.”

### Near East Trip Wire for Nuclear War

In order to fully and effectively mobilize the workers and rural toilers of Iraq against American imperialism, it is necessary that the Iraqi regime be overthrown and replaced by a government of workers and peasants councils (soviets) such as was established by the 1917 Russian Bolshevik Revolution under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. A Leninist-Trotskyist party in Iraq today would thus seek to combine the struggle for national independence against American militarism with a social revolution against the Iraqi capitalists and landlords. Arab leaders throughout the Near East fear that a U.S. invasion of Iraq will ignite social turmoil in their own countries. Meanwhile, Israel continues to pound the Palestinians, shattering every building block of society in the Occupied Territories and posing the very real possibility of mass expulsion of the Palestinian people. It is the U.S.-led war on Iraq that would provide the “cover” for Sharon’s genocidal plans. Turkey fears that the destruction of the Saddam Hussein regime could incite struggle by the oppressed Kurdish people in Iraq—and Turkey—for their national rights. The Near East is a patchwork of artificial states whose borders were literally drawn by the imperialists to suit their colonial appetites, including control of vital oil reserves.

Imperialist domination has *reinforced* social backwardness and the brutal repression of women, of homosexuals, of national, ethnic and religious minorities in the Near East. Not least, it was U.S. imperialism’s anti-Soviet “holy war” in



UPI

20 September 1982: A Palestinian woman weeps over the bodies of her relatives in the Palestinian refugee camp of Sabra in West Beirut. Hundreds were massacred. This was preceded by disarming of PLO fighters by UN intervention force.

Novosti



May Day demonstration in Petrograd, 1917. One banner reads: "For the Arming of the People—Long Live the International." October Revolution pulled Russia out of carnage of World War I, inspired exploited and oppressed around the world.

Afghanistan in the 1980s which, along with the bankruptcy of Arab nationalism and the nationalist betrayals of the Stalinist Communist parties, helped fuel the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Near East. Where much of the rest of the left marched in lockstep behind the imperialists and against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, uniquely we took a side *with the Red Army* against the CIA-backed Islamic reactionaries. The Soviet presence brought the hope of liberation to the Afghan peoples, especially the women enslaved by Islamic law and the veil. We proclaimed: Hail Red Army! Extend social gains of October Revolution to Afghan peoples! We opposed Gorbachev's treacherous withdrawal from Afghanistan and presciently warned of the impulse it would give to counterrevolution, noting "It's better to fight in Afghanistan than in Moscow."

In urban centers throughout the Near East, there is a modern industrial proletariat which has the social power and class interest to transcend ethnic and religious division and sweep away the capitalist order. The task is to render the proletariat conscious of its interests, combatting all variants of nationalism, including the "progressive" nationalism of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and all manner of religious fundamentalism. The key is forging a revolutionary leadership based on Trotsky's program of permanent revolution, which teaches: "With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy and national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leaders of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses" (*The Permanent Revolution*, 1929).

Trotsky stressed that "the subsequent fate of the [proletarian] dictatorship and socialism depends in the last analysis not only and not so much upon the national productive forces as upon the development of the international socialist revolution." Today in the Near East, the struggle against imperialist war and domination and against oppressive capitalist rule by the despotic sheiks, colonels and Zionist rulers cannot be resolved within the confines of a single country. Justice for

the Palestinian people, national emancipation for the Kurds, freedom from the veil and *sharia* (Islamic law) for women, require sweeping away the medieval fundamentalists in Iran and Sudan, the bloody butchers in Syria and Iraq, the reactionary monarchies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and the kill-crazy Zionist rulers of Israel. *U.S./NATO and all imperialist forces out of the Near East! Israel out of the Occupied Territories! Defend the Palestinian people! For a Socialist Republic of United Kurdistan! For a socialist federation of the Near East!*

These struggles must be linked to the fight for socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe, North America and Japan. Throughout the imperialist centers, immigrant workers and their children represent a living bridge linking class struggle between the metropolis and the former colonies and linking racially oppressed immigrants to the power of the proletariat as a whole. A struggle against war and against national and racial oppression cannot be waged through the politics of compromise pushed by the social democrats, the ex-Stalinists and their so-called "far left" tails. The struggle against war presupposes a revolutionary instrument of struggle, an internationalist Trotskyist party. This is the task to which the International Communist League is dedicated.

The vast machinery of death in the hands of the imperialists is a measure of the enormous scientific and technological progress made possible by the Industrial Revolution. Today, science and technology are centrally deployed to advance the bourgeoisie's untrammled pursuit of profit through grinding exploitation of the overwhelming mass of the world's population and threaten the very existence of human civilization. Turning science and technology to the benefit of humanity requires wresting the means of production from the hands of the capitalist imperialist rulers and creating an international planned economy. Only in this way can the needs of the billions of toilers now consigned to dreadful and stultifying poverty begin to be met and the threat of war ended once and for all. *Only socialist revolution can end imperialist war—Reforge Trotsky's Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution!* ■

# Spartacist South Africa Comrades Address ICL Gathering

## The Anti-Apartheid Struggle and the Need for a Leninist Vanguard Party

The mass struggles beginning in the mid-late 1980s which finally brought down the official system of apartheid shaped a generation of South African workers and students. Two comrades from Spartacist South Africa presented an educational at an ICL gathering this summer, making lessons of that experience accessible to communist youth and party comrades from across the world. We reprint here in edited form the transcripts of the presentations, which drew on the comrades' participation in the two main political tendencies in the anti-apartheid movement—the Black Consciousness Movement and the Communist Party-influenced COSATU trade unions.

### Presentation by Comrade Lesiba

My talk will be centered on the Black Consciousness Movement of Steve Biko, from which I developed politically around that period. Most people know the Black Consciousness Movement as a formation which emerged in the late '60s and became prominent in the early and late '70s, especially through the 1976 Soweto student uprising. The Black Consciousness Movement overlapped with the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), with which I was also involved. Lastly, I will be touching on my trade-union activities of the late '80s leading up to the bourgeois national elections of 1994.

The SACP had been banned by the racist Nationalist Party regime through the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. This was followed in the early '60s by the political banning of what was called the national liberation movements—the African National Congress (ANC) and the PAC. From 1962 right up until the late '60s there was what was termed a political lull in South Africa. What this meant was that there wasn't any visible political movement that was seen to be fighting for national liberation. The Black Consciousness philosophy as espoused

by Steve Biko took center stage at this period. The 1976 student uprising was in protest against Bantu education, particularly the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, and for free education. The student uprisings of 1976 hit most parts of the country and this was popularly referred to as "black power." Remarkably absent in this student uprising was the social power of the working class. Following 1976 is when you see the rise of militancy in the workers organizations.

Steve Biko's movement actually came out of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). NUSAS was mainly a white liberal student organization and was concentrated in the University of Natal and Wits University. It was led by white students, some of whom considered themselves Marxists, with others, liberals and even conservatives. Just to give you a feel for what this organization was all about: they were organizing literacy educationals for the black illiterate masses in the communities nearby where the campuses were. It was a *multiracial* organization that included black students. At that time, people like Barney Pityana and Steve Biko were members of NUSAS. Because of the way apartheid was organized, it was extremely difficult, even for these white students who identified with the cause of the black working people and poor, to be able to integrate into the social life of the black people.

Faced with this situation, Steve Biko developed the Black Consciousness ideology and called for the formation of an organization that would represent the aspirations of the black masses. Black Consciousness exponents felt that their interests in NUSAS were kept in check predominantly by what they termed white liberals. This was an open rejection of multiracial organization. At that time Biko formed what they called SASO—the South African Students Organisation. It was actually more active in traditionally black universities like the University of the North and other universities in Natal, and in Cape Town. Following 1976, black people began to gain confidence that something could be done and the working class began to gain momentum in terms of organization into unions. There were a lot of wildcat strikes side by side with the repression meted out by Prime Minister John Vorster's Nationalist Party.

The labor movement was growing and the Nationalist Party came up with the Wiehahn Commission in 1979. The purpose of this commission was to try to corporatize the militant black unions, to tie them to binding arbitration, zip up their power through labor courts and conciliation. There were arguments about registration to the Wiehahn Commission—whether it would be important to register under government control boards or not. Most of the unions in the Black Consciousness Movement were divided over this issue; the same applies to the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). The Wiehahn Commission was not entirely successful in bringing the unions under complete government control. So in 1983 there was a massive strike at Baragwanath Hospital by nurses. I remember at that time, there was a white union organizer. Neil



L'Espresso

Protesters defy apartheid regime, honor Steve Biko at his funeral, 1977.

Aggett, who was killed by the repressive police of the Nationalist Party. This became a really big issue in the townships with protests against the killing of Neil Aggett.

Just to give you background, the Black Consciousness-inclined activists organized exclusively black unions. The Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU) of Drake Koka, whom I later came to know in the unions, had the policy of exclusion of whites. As you might know, the Black Consciousness Movement actually used the sweeping generalization of coloureds and Indians as “blacks.” They never said anything about the Chinese. I did not know whether they were defined as black or white.

I want to outline here how the Black Consciousness Movement had a divisive impact on the burgeoning trade-union movement. The biggest union currently in South Africa, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), was initially Black Consciousness-led. The main bureaucrats of the NUM were people like Cyril Ramaphosa, who is now an aspiring black bourgeois. And the NUM broke from what later on was the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA). CUSA (which later became the National Council of Trade Unions—NACTU) was composed of both the PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement and incorporated their policy of largely excluding whites. Later on, the National Union of Mineworkers pulled out of CUSA because of its affiliation with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). ICFTU is an anti-communist international labor federation, which supported the capitalist counterrevolution in Poland, through Solidarność. One of the unions which was associated with Drake Koka’s BAWU was called South African Allied Workers Union (SAAWU), which broke away from the Black Consciousness Movement because of its policy of excluding whites. It was mainly concentrated in the Eastern Cape. It was a big union, which led a lot of strikes.

The situation was, leading up to the formation of COSATU in 1985, you have these contesting nationalist views in the labor movement, counterposed to the prospect of uniting all the working class under the umbrella of one union federation. You have COSATU, which was aligned with the ANC and the SACP. NACTU was aligned to the PAC and the Black Consciousness Movement. The Pan Africanist movement basically excluded whites and their slogan was “one settler, one bullet.” They were really not so significant. As we know, COSATU is the biggest union federation in South Africa. Moreover, the most advanced elements of the working class were repelled by the PAC’s anti-white “one settler, one bullet” line.

Just to give you a feel as to how the Pan Africanist Congress developed: Following the 1949 Bloemfontein Convention, the youth wing of the ANC had the view that the organization had been taken over by whites *and communists*. That’s to make the point that some of the sections of the ANC youth had been openly anti-communist from 1949. With the adoption of the Freedom Charter by the ANC in 1955, some of the youth wing of the ANC broke away and later formed the PAC in 1959. People like Nelson Mandela and Govan Mbeki remained in the ANC. The PAC leadership was people like A.P. Mda and Robert Sobukwe, who modeled their ideology



Peter Magubane

**Soweto rebellion, June 1976—Over a thousand black student youth were massacred by apartheid butchers. Workers revolution will avenge martyrs of the anti-apartheid struggle.**

on the African nationalism of Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah. Following the PAC anti-pass laws protests of 1960 in Sharpeville, they formed what they called the All Congress Alliance in opposition to any protests led by the ANC. In the Eastern Cape they had what they called POQO (Um Africa POQO) or Africa Alone, an armed wing which targeted whites, African policemen and informers. The apartheid regime moved in quickly and by 1963 POQO was almost extinguished.

In 1985-86 there was a big rent boycott in the townships of Sharpeville, Sebokeng and other townships in what was formerly known as Witwatersrand. That was the first time that the South African Nationalist Party unleashed the army—something like 12,000 troops were thrown onto the streets to quell township protests. The boycotts came to my township and everything came to a standstill. At that time, this rocked the whole country and even the Cape coloured-dominated townships boycotted the rents.

But the main thing that started this whole series of events was that in 1985 P.W. Botha came in with what he called a “new constitution.” That means he wanted to form some kind of an extra parliament which would represent the coloureds and the Indians in a separate parliament termed Tricameral parliament. But that parliament wouldn’t have anything to say about education, jobs or the apparatus of the state. It would be just to deal with councilors who are nothing else but puppets of the Nationalist Party. The boycott and the protest started in the Western Cape and spread into Transvaal and other areas. In the predominantly black townships there was to be installation of councilors through the election of what was generally termed “Own Affairs” by the Nationalist Party. A lot of people who were involved in these protests were killed and injured.

We were involved as well—people I knew were hanged through the death penalty. There was also a call for a general strike at that time, a stayaway. But the stayaway that resulted from that lasted two days and then it was followed by the biggest stayaway in 1987. Later on, I joined the Black Consciousness Movement and became very active in it. There



Workers Hammer

**Spartacist League/Britain contingent in anti-apartheid protest, 2 June 1984. ICL opposed strategy of appealing for imperialist sanctions, called on unions internationally to take action in defense of South African struggle.**

came a feud between the Black Consciousness Movement and the United Democratic Front (UDF) because there was contention for political terrain and influence in the townships and even in the labor movement. The apartheid regime infiltrated that feud and set the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) and UDF against each other. And that feud really was remarkable for the way that whenever there was a national strike NACTU would boycott it because it had been called by COSATU. So that divided the working class along the lines of nationalist ideology.

During this period Ronald Reagan, then president of the U.S., said you've got to "adapt or die"—a call to the Nationalist Party to open the gates of negotiations. The Conference for a Democratic Future (CDF), which included various organizations purporting to be fighting for national liberation, gathered to discuss the negotiated settlement as proposed by the Nationalist Party. AZAPO was opposed to forums such as CDF, which included the hated bantustan organizations and white liberals of the Progressive Federal Party. AZAPO's position on any negotiated settlement was that any deal had to be cut outside the country under what they termed a "neutral convener," particularly the United Nations. PAC's position dovetailed with that of AZAPO. The ANC's position was to cut the deal *in* South Africa. That was the difference. As a result the PAC and AZAPO lost ground to the ANC-dominated UDF milieu allied to COSATU. NACTU's role became less significant. The civic groups in the townships were organized and beginning to gain momentum through street committees. We combatted police with rocks, sticks and whatever. Side by side with this was the growth of militancy in the working class, with most of the strikes basically wildcat strikes which to some extent won concessions in wages and conditions of work.

During my union activity in the late '80s and '90s, we decided no, we're not going to join COSATU unions—I've got nothing to do with COSATU, it is the ANC union. We joined a metal workers union under NACTU. My experiences there were really very telling. We would just organize a strike at the drop of a hat. We'd call out something like a

thousand workers, and it just takes a whistle to stop production. We once fought to have our union office, where we put pictures of a PAC leader and Biko, so workers would have a place to come and discuss union grievances.

At that time the company employed mostly coloureds, blacks and a little bit of Indians here and there, and some whites. So it was a really multiracial union. When I began reading Spartacist material early in the '90s, I could really see what I had lived. The militancy I'm talking about is the militancy of black, Indian, coloured and white workers in the same factory before the demise of apartheid. This was multiracial unity in the labor movement. What you can see was lacking was any *program* for the working class to take state power. The Port Elizabeth Mercedes-Benz strike rocked us as well. Like these strikers, we also wore mock AK-47s on our working uniforms in solidarity. So at that time you could see, what was lacking was a party that could lead us. Then we went

to the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (WOSA) (which the ICL gave critical support to in the 1994 elections), which ran things like a "labor commission" which had nothing to do with the defense of jobs or the proletarian seizure of state power.

I just want to read a quote which really speaks to the question of the party. It's in "South Africa Powder Keg" (*Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 12):

*"What is needed is a Bolshevik workers party capable of leading the workers movement in a socialist revolution in South Africa and extending the revolution internationally, which alone offers a progressive solution to all the national and democratic tasks. This is the heart of Trotsky's conception of permanent revolution. Only such a party can overcome the terrible poverty of the millions of black Africans living in the countryside while militantly defending the unionized, industrial working class. Only such a party can bring about a rapid improvement in the living standards of the black toilers while upholding the democratic rights of the coloureds (mixed-race) and Indians and of those whites who accept a government centrally based on the black working masses."*

## Presentation by Comrade Themba

In November 1984, we wrote that the black trade unions were key for the South African revolution. But that prospect depended on their ability to make that necessary leap from economist, trade-union consciousness to revolutionary proletarian consciousness as "the tribune of the people." The outcome of the anti-apartheid struggles—the absence of a proletarian solution and the victory of bourgeois nationalism—is a reflection of the failure of the trade unions to make that critical leap.

There were three main trade-union federations at the time, namely, the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA), the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU). CUSA consisted of trade unions that were politically aligned to Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), a wing of petty-bourgeois nationalism. SACTU was not a trade

Eric Miller



**Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) launched in Western Cape in March 1986. Power of black unions was the key to bringing down racist South African regime.**

union in the true sense of the word, but rather a front fighting for ANC influence in the trade unions. FOSATU had no political affiliation and stood for what was known as independent trade unionism, a current later referred to as “workerist.” My focus is going to be on FOSATU, whose history in South Africa is the closest one gets to the fight for *class independence of the proletariat* from bourgeois nationalism, especially for political independence from the ANC.

FOSATU was founded in 1979 by mainly white radical intellectuals including university professors, lawyers, and Bernie Fanaroff, the leader of the steel workers union who was an astrophysicist by training, and some black leaders like Moses Mayekiso and John Gomomo who rose through the trade-union ranks. The third component of FOSATU was mainly what was known as the Cape Town Municipal Workers Association (MWA), which worked very closely with Joe Foster, the second FOSATU general secretary. These white intellectuals referred to themselves as “non-racialist.” Proponents of “non-racialism” distinguished themselves from supporters of the “multiracial project,” which took racial origin into account while guaranteeing equality between the races. The “multiracial project” went along the lines of the Freedom Charter, which was later to be known as the proclamation document of the ANC. The “non-racialists” were opposed to any consideration of race. This was particularly important to distinguish FOSATU from trade unionism inspired by the BCM and meant only for black workers.

FOSATU wanted to build industrial trade unions opposed to the racially based white Trade Union Council of South Africa and its black counterparts of United Automobile Workers. Their affiliates were based in the automobile, steel, chemical and textile industries, following thorough research on the growth of industry and concentration of black labor in South Africa. Here are some of the distinguishing positions that they became known for: a) opposition to the ANC, based on a critical reading of the Freedom Charter, which they characterized as a “nationalist” document that did not identify the diverging interests of social classes within the liberation struggle; b) opposition to relations with white liberals, such as the Progressive Federal Party [of Alan Paton and Helen Suzman], which is the racist Democratic Alliance of today, and the mainly white students association, the National Union of

South African Students; c) stressing the central role, even exclusive role, of the working class in the struggles for liberation and to transform society, as opposed to ANC and Communist Party strategy for national and social emancipation; and d) a critique of the South African Communist Party (SACP) as a pro-Soviet, “sectarian” and “Stalinist” current.

These Stalinophobic positions of FOSATU led to their supporting and apologizing for Polish Solidarność, which they defended as not leading capitalist counterrevolution but fighting for “workers control.” Tell that to the Polish workers who are at the receiving end of the ravages of capitalist counterrevolution! Spartacist South Africa, section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) here and now reiterates our revolutionary Trotskyist position for the unconditional military defense of the deformed workers states of China, Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam against imperialist attack and internal capitalist counterrevolution. This is the Russian question of today. We have a side, like in the former Soviet Union—a degenerated workers state—where the ICL defended the gains of the October Revolution up to the last battle.

At the 1982 FOSATU congress, a report given by Foster made a lot of references to the “working-class movement going beyond pure trade-union tasks.” In an interview with the press workers union’s newspaper a few months before the congress, Foster mentioned the need for a “workers party,” which was never broached in the congress. He claimed he wanted to establish working-class hegemony among the township struggles for housing, for affordable services, the fights against the high bus fares and so forth. Their noises about the “possibility of placing the struggle against apartheid within the framework of anti-capitalist struggles” never took any form beyond words. No serious attempts were made to scrutinize the character, scope and tasks of such a “workers party,” or its attitude and relation to other anti-apartheid social forces and the bourgeois state.

The fact is, these guys were opposed to “political parties” and a “political vanguard.” They were trapped within trade-union politics, quasi-syndicalism, which can never work in countries like South Africa where the national question, amongst other things, has such an enormous and decisive weight. As Trotsky wrote in 1935: “Insofar as a victorious

revolution will radically change not only the relation between the classes, but also between the races, and will assure to the blacks that place in the state which corresponds to their numbers, insofar will the *social* revolution in South Africa also have a *national* character” (“Letter to South African Revolutionaries,” 20 April 1935).

It was FOSATU’s general *economist* political outlook that the ANC bloc exploited to the full in their fight for influence over the masses against this tendency. The opportunity presented itself in 1983, with the apartheid [P.W.] Botha government’s reform bill proclaiming three separate houses of parliament for whites, Indians and coloureds, excluding the black African majority. Parties outside of the parliament especially met this with broad opposition. The coloured and the Indian houses in parliament were not going to make important decisions. This setup was just going to help the local administration in relations with the policies of the apartheid state.

Parties that were opposed to this organized the Disorderly Bills Action Committee (DBAC), which started mainly in the Western Cape region. Unions only participated as observers. But DBAC did not last long, mainly because of the tensions between the ANC current and what was known as the Trotskyist Left.

The Trotskyist movement started in South Africa in the early-to-middle 1930s. Those are the guys who wrote a letter to Trotsky, and Trotsky’s reply to them is published in our pamphlet *Polemics on the South African Left* [April 1997]. They split, and the split was over the centrality of the proletariat vs. the peasants and the rural oppressed. And they worked as two separate groupings until the beginning of World War II.

At the end of the war they founded the New Unity Movement, which was basically a nationalist organization, at a convention in Bloemfontein. So this “Trotskyist Left” is those Trotskyists that had in fact liquidated into the nationalist group known as the New Unity Movement. Shortly after the split, AZAPO, Black Consciousness and the Trotskyist Left founded the National Forum Committee, while the ANC founded the UDF. FOSATU declined the invitation to participate in the UDF, citing it as “a front of civics under the umbrella of the ANC and progressive churches.”

On October 15 and 16 in 1983, the FOSATU central committee formally decided not to join the UDF. Its resolution argued that “unity had to [be] created inside workers’ own organisations, on the basis of their own class interests.” “The UDF,” it continued, “was an organisation representing a variety of class interests and with no clear structure...and workers’ interests were at risk inside it” (Claude Joaquin, “The Trade Union Left and the Birth of a New South Africa,” *Notebooks for Study and Research* [pamphlet] No. 26, 1999). Furthermore David Lewis, general secretary of the General Workers Union, another workerist affiliate, underlined the importance of preserving the independence of the workers movement, while characterizing the UDF as a “multiclass” organization. FOSATU rejected SACP’s thesis of “colonisation of a special type” and contended that apartheid was capitalism. The SACP uses this thesis of “colonisation of a special type” to justify the subordination of independent proletarian interests to those of ANC black nationalism. By its nature, nationalism seeks to *conceal* divergent *class* interests amongst the oppressed—like today, the fat cats on the ANC gravy train and the toiling masses. The nationalists’ “unity”-mongering is in the service of this concealment.

The “workerists” opposed the divestment [disinvestment]

campaign, arguing that companies being asked to pull out were part of the country’s economy. The International Communist League solidarized with the sentiments motivating those across the world to support the anti-racist struggle in South Africa, but we opposed the schemes for divestment, which were essentially appeals for a strike of capital by the imperialists. It is ABC to understand that proletarian power presupposes the existence of industry and an industrial proletariat. The ICL stood for the expropriation of capitalism by the majority-black proletariat.

It is an awful waste that all the correct analyses of the class character of the ANC/UDF led to an outright opportunist conclusion to limit the struggle to economism. And this came decades after Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* was already published. I believe that those who didn’t see it are those that didn’t want to see it. It was not some kind of mistaken policy; it was pure trade-union opportunism. The workerists’ maximum slogan was for maximum unity of the working class within the framework of strong democratic trade unions. But this is not enough. It requires a Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party and revolutionary consciousness to transcend the system based on wage slavery. While unions fight for an extra slice of bread, the Trotskyist party fights for the ownership of the bakery and the proletarian-controlled distribution of bread in society as a consequence of the revolutionary overthrow of private ownership of property.

The more politically homogeneous and better-organized ANC current under the UDF, SACTU and SACP had regular newspapers for each wing, namely *Sechaba* (a Sotho name for “nation”), *South African Labour Bulletin* published by UDF supporters, SACTU’s *Workers Unity* and the SACP’s *South African Communist*. All of these papers took the political offensive against the workerists. They denounced the workerists’ refusal to join the UDF as an expression of “simplistic economism.” And going further and fraudulently employing more Marxist phrasemongering in several *Workers Unity* articles, they lectured the workerists about “revolutionary theory.” An open letter to David Lewis declared: “An organiser of the working class must play a leading role in the struggle, thus have to be concerned not only with winning the working class, but also other sections of the people” (Claude Joaquin, “The Trade Union Left and the Birth of a New South Africa”).

In the 1984 SACTU document they preached, “Trade unions are not and cannot replace a political party of the working class.... Political misconceptions relating to the history of our struggle have developed in some sections of the democratic trade union movement.... It is both vital and urgent that these inaccuracies are corrected as they can potentially divide not only the unions, but the overall liberation movement.... The concept of political alliance which exists between SACTU and the ANC has been distorted. This is racist propaganda” (*ibid.*).

It is disgusting that the ANC—self-professed opponents of racism—used the race card, when it suited them, to attack the proletarian fighters, however misguided, of FOSATU, which had a majority-white leadership. Equally disgusting is the fact that the “workerists”—spineless pretenders to the proletarian fight against class oppression—gave in. They are now government ministers (Alec Erwin) and “black empowerment” lapdogs (Moses Mayekiso), the biggest accomplices in capitalist crimes against the working class they once claimed to champion.

Overall, though, the “workerists” had a consistently left-wing and generally accurate analysis of the class nature of the





Afrapix

**Mineworkers union's 1987 congress was held under the slogan, "Socialism Means Freedom!" But masses' aspirations for socialism were betrayed by reformist leadership whose program was to install ANC in power as black front men for white capitalist rulers.**

ANC. When the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 after clashes between what were then the two Boer republics of Transvaal and Orange Free State and the British imperialist-ruled Cape Province and Natal, the British gave the right to vote to the black elite in the Cape Province. Black people there who owned property and had some kind of minimum educational qualifications could vote. Less than two years later, the ANC (as the African National Native Congress) was founded on the program of a fight for the extension of voting rights to the black elite throughout the other provinces. That was to remain their focus until the white minority government that came into power in 1936 scrapped these rights in the Cape Province as well. It became clear to the black elite that the only remaining route to power was on the backs of the poor masses. For the first time, they incorporated universal franchise into their program. So as to the class nature of the ANC, there is no doubt about it. Some other people want to paint the ANC as having been some kind of socialists. But their founding program is very clearly for black elite nationalism. As nationalists they do not want foreigners to oppress their people and think they should have the capacity to do it themselves.

The main weakness of the "workerists" is that they had no program and understanding of the kind of party necessary to lead the struggle for the national emancipation of the non-white majority. They had their heads buried in the trade-union sandbox. Because the revolutionary potential of the anti-apartheid struggle of the proletariat and oppressed masses was squandered, today the ANC is administering and enforce-

ing neo-apartheid capitalism, which means that though apartheid restrictive laws have been removed from the statutes, the economic and social basis of apartheid remains intact.

Writing in the same period, this is what our comrades from the Spartacist League/U.S. had warned about. "In a longer historic term, apolitical bread-and-butter unionism cannot prevail in South Africa. The white racist oppression of the black masses is too deep, too brutal, too all-sided, too obvious. That most black workers have their families and relatives on the bantustans in itself goes against a narrow trade-unionist consciousness" ("The Struggle for Independent Black Unions in South Africa," *Workers Vanguard* No. 248, 25 January 1980).

Four years later, in a critical assessment of FOSATU's "workerism," we wrote:

"Foster's assertion of the need for independent working-class organization and his warning about the potentially treacherous character of petty-bourgeois nationalism—in themselves entirely valid statements—are used here to justify trade-union economism. Foster defines the task of trade unions as defending the sectoral interests of workers within the framework of apartheid capitalism. He assigns to the nationalist-populist ANC the herculean task of liberating enslaved black people from white colonial rule with perhaps incidental aid from the black union movement. But this is a task that petty-bourgeois nationalism *cannot* fulfill. The only way to ensure that national liberation movements do not turn against their worker supporters is for the workers movement to place *itself* at the head of the oppressed black people, to combat every manifestation of white racist rule."

—"South African Revolution: Black Unions the Key," *Workers Vanguard* No. 366, 9 November 1984

The founding of COSATU in 1985 saw the progressive weakening of the independent trade-union view under the pressure of ANC currents. In 1987, COSATU adopted the Freedom Charter. The "workerists" surrendered and the victory for the ANC-dominated Charterists meant that hope for a possible proletarian contender for power was lost, despite the fact that it was the powerful, combative South African working class that shook the roots of apartheid capitalism. It was these heroic struggles of the working people that forced the ruling class, including their masters in Wall Street and the City of London, to change strategy: to negotiations and transfer of power to the ANC/SACP/COSATU black front men for the white capitalist class.

As anyone with eyes could see, the ANC's armed struggle was suicidal for the black majority. We wrote at the time: "South Africa appears to be rumbling down the tracks to a bloody confrontation. The system of apartheid—a bogus partition in which the whites give up nothing—is coming apart. Blacks have made it clear they are not taking this oppressive situation any more. And the white population is armed to the teeth, determined to defend what they've got. The coasts are secure, there is a belt of cowed black African states to the north, and the struggle is along white-vs.-black national lines. So long as the national principle predominates, in a military confrontation, now and for the next period the whites will win hands down" ("South Africa: Razor's Edge," *Workers Vanguard* No. 376, 5 April 1985).

### **Black Masses Fight Back**

The initial wave of protests in the 1980s was dominated by township civic groups and student youth, the base of the UDF. In 1984 the racist apartheid regime declared a state of emergency and there was a big crackdown, mainly on the UDF. That crackdown opened the stage for the working class to come into play. It was then that the proletariat took the



South African Labour Bulletin

**East London, 1990—Mercedes-Benz auto workers rally in support of strike, oppose National Bargaining Forum. Top leaders of Communist Party intervened to isolate militants, demobilize plant occupation, push through sellout deal.**

offensive against the apartheid regime. The strikes spread like wildfire. At the beginning of 1987, there was a wave of intense strike activity. Railway and postal workers went on strike, and retail workers led by Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Unions of South Africa struck OK-Bazaars. Workers and cops died in the Johannesburg Doornfontein station fight. Basically, what happened is when they were on strike in Germiston, east of Johannesburg, some railway workers were killed by the cops. The workers were meeting at the COSATU head office and with sticks and axes they went out to confront the cops in the Doornfontein station. The COSATU leadership, still led by Jay Naidoo, tried to stop the workers but the workers wouldn't listen to them. They went into the Doornfontein station and a big confrontation ensued with the cops. There were fatalities on both sides.

Still in 1987, workers from 28 gold mines and 18 coal mines, totaling more than 340,000 workers, went on strike under the leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers. The NUM's 1987 congress was held under the theme "Socialism Means Freedom." That was true then and still is now! Down with ANC/SACP/COSATU neo-apartheid capitalism! Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party! For the class independence of the proletariat from all bourgeois parties and the state!

As the struggle developed, new organizational measures came about in the commuter trains, mainly from black townships. It was in the trains that new strikes and updates on existing strikes were announced, solidarity collections and plans to deal with scabs were discussed and organized. It is here that solidarity for workers involved in factory occupations would be put together. What was basically happening was—if a particular company was on strike, the word was going around the trains that such and such company was on strike, and when they delivered to another company, the members of COSATU would refuse to touch the goods or work with them. When members of COSATU died, including workers who were not official union leaders or employed by the unions, tens of thousands of workers would go to the members' memorial services, bringing along donations.

I remember at one stage we were going to the service of a guy I worked with from Orlando West in Soweto. There were about 10,000 workers and it was during the state of emergency—such congregations were not allowed. The cops were pursuing us from all sides. The donations amounted to more than ten thousand rand. The workers were burying their comrades and taking responsibility for their comrades. This kind of organization was very widespread.

And it didn't end with the trains. The higher expression of this organization was the area committees, sometimes com-

prising up to 20 companies. The task of the area committee was coordinating struggles in a particular neighborhood, with weekly meetings, speaking to issues like which companies were on strike and assistance to deal with the scabs. It also included the question of organizing those from the same areas that were not organized.

There were regular membership meetings, not only of COSATU but also of NACTU. Such meetings never limited themselves to trade-union issues only, but addressed other community and student struggles. Something like soviets in their embryonic form. The political basis was very minimal, lowest common denominator, namely, opposition to apartheid. I remember, as a COSATU shop steward, burning my fingers by lashing out at the NACTU representatives for allowing their affiliate members to scab on our strike in one such meeting in Johannesburg in 1989. Notwithstanding rumblings of approval from the floor, leaders who prided themselves on being champions of "unity" quickly denounced me for being "out of order."

Deserving special mention here is the heroic sleep-in of the National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) at Mercedes-Benz of South Africa in August to early September 1990. Workers revolted against the wage cut imposed by the company and union tops through the National Bargaining Forum. About 2,000 workers occupied the company, their marshals patrolling the gates. The sleep-in strikers flew ANC and SACP flags from the company flagpole. Some local union bureaucrats were beaten up trying to persuade workers to leave company premises. Joe Slovo and Steve Tshwete were flown in to intervene. These workers were isolated with NUMSA mobilizing against them. The *South African Labour Bulletin* put it better: "They had no allies—the company, the union, and the media opposed their action" (Volume 15, No. 4, November 1990).

Unofficial holidays like March 21, anniversary of the 1960 Sharpeville massacre; May Day, the workers holiday; and June 16, anniversary of the 1976 Soweto student massacres, were "illegally" observed. The night before such a holiday, people would start putting big rocks in the middle of the streets. The railways were dislocated in the early hours of the morning. Workers would wake up the night before—I'm talking about three or four o'clock in the morning. Most train stations, taxi and bus ranks would be patrolled to stop those trying to scab—which in most cases ended up with fights against cops trying to "protect" such places. The cops fired tear gas and sometimes live ammunition and a lot of workers were getting arrested in the process. As the repression by the state increased, the workers started to learn about new organizational measures, which

were the stayaways, which basically meant that you were not going to go to work. The big stayaway was in 1987, on the 6th, 7th and 8th of May. It was mainly against the Labour Relations Act being proposed by the apartheid regime. The workers stayed at home and again similar measures were applied to make sure that no one went to work.

On the other hand, in the townships, there was total boycott of rent and services payments. The police houses and those of the bantustan councilors were being torched, forcing these puppets to flee the black townships and seek refuge in the white areas. This was the context of the ANC's call to "make the townships ungovernable"—a pressure tactic to get the white minority to agree to a negotiated deal. Today, the ANC are the ones demanding paybacks for such debt and cutting off electricity and water supplies to those who had heeded their call by withholding payments.

This state of affairs basically continued until the un-banning of the ANC and other organizations, but soon the racist apartheid state, ably assisted by Gatsha Buthelezi's Zulu tribalist Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), started a widespread state terror campaign against the oppressed masses. Bands of dozens of vigilantes attacked neighborhoods, killing everyone in sight, including kids, the disabled and the elderly. Gangs of faceless murderers ambushed neighborhoods, sometimes while people were asleep: the Boipatong massacre, for example. Activists were found dead on their way to and from work, meetings and homes, or they simply disappeared without a trace.

In Johannesburg, the attacks started in the trains, where faceless gunmen would burst into the train and, without uttering a word, begin shooting randomly. Unknown hitmen killed shop stewards. Striking COSATU workers were confronted by IFP vigilantes armed with automatic rifles and other weapons. The masses' demands for weapons to protect themselves were never answered. All the unions' demands for the formation of community-based self-defense units were met with empty promises by the ANC. Since they looked toward a deal with the white minority government, the ANC claimed to accept the fiction that a "third force" was responsible for the killings being perpetrated by the apartheid state. The ANC was already complaining about the "crisis of expectations" because they knew they had no will nor capacity to meet the revolutionary aspirations of the black masses.

Unions were not happy about the way the ANC was leading the negotiations. Tensions soared, especially around the demand for a constituent assembly, which the unions put forward as the most democratic way to draw up the new constitution. Although the ANC agreed to the idea of the constituent assembly, most of their leaders thought it was unattainable and therefore was not worth putting forward. They started unilaterally, without consulting alliance partners, to float the idea of an all-party congress, later known as the Congress for a Democratic South Africa, as a first negotiating structure. This angered the unions, who accused the ANC of being undemocratic, weak in its negotiating strategy and lacking a program of action to mobilize the masses.

Some unionists were starting to be more anxious about the untrustworthy ways of the ANC in June 1991. A COSATU leader, the Transvaal regional secretary of the Food and

Allied Workers Union, said: "I'm not optimistic that the ANC will protect the interests of the workers and that it will be in favor of socialism when it is in government." The Paper, Printing, Wood and Allied Workers' Union's Sipho Kubheka said: "Some of the actions of the ANC make a mockery of the alliance. You meet in the alliance and decide on strategy and tactics. While you are reporting to your members the next day you read a different thing in the newspapers."

These misgivings resulted in unions demanding more independent representation in negotiations with the apartheid regime, which culminated in an agreement to form a sort of political bureau of the tripartite alliance, composed of seven members from each alliance partner. Many union leaders were concerned about "overlapping leadership." For example, John Copelyn, the secretary of the textile workers union, wrote about "the issue of COSATU leadership turning out to be at the same time the leadership of the ANC and SACP.... To other union leadership this is incorrect. They feel strongly that wearing two hats represents a fundamental surrender of the independence of the union." Copelyn noted: "The issue we must address is: what will happen after apartheid is gone?... It is possible, if we go on blindly with the present rhetoric, that the union movement will simply degenerate into being the labour wing of government" (*South African Labour Bulletin* Volume 15, No. 6, March 1991).

**For a Leninist-Trotskyist Vanguard Party!**

In the above you had all but one of the pre-revolutionary conditions, and that was the subjective factor. Blacks had already decided that they were not going to be ruled in the same old way by the apartheid rulers. The ruling class could not continue ruling in the same old way. This was one reason why the top business people, led by Anglo American's Gavin Relly, went all the way to Lusaka, Zambia to talk to the more willing servants of the ANC to save capitalism. The only missing ingredient for the proletarian seizure of state power was the Trotskyist-Leninist vanguard party fighting for the program of permanent revolution. Without the party, workers always lose. For Spartacist South Africa, like the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky, the dictatorship of the proletariat remains the touchstone for all revolutionaries. This is the only program for the national and social emancipation of the black African majority and all the oppressed. ■

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## Prometheus Research Library Book

# Dog Days

## James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933



CLA contingent in May Day demonstration, New York City, 1934.

Tamiment Library

The Prometheus Research Library (PRL), archive and central library of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League, is proud to announce the publication of its third book, *Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933*. This 752-page volume, available in both paperback and hardcover, includes 118 documents that chronicle a factional polarization which rent the American section of Leon Trotsky's International Left Opposition (ILO) from 1931 to 1933. This was a period of stagnation that Cannon later aptly called the "dog days of the movement." Pitting supporters of James P. Cannon against the generally younger followers of Max Shachtman, who were less experienced as workers' leaders, the fight in the Communist League (CLA) presaged the defining split in American Trotskyism which occurred in 1939-40. Yet the 1931-33 struggle has never before been well documented.

The PRL's new volume, which includes an exhaustive introduction that situates the CLA fight in the context of the political sorting out that occurred in the early ILO, sheds new light on the history of the Trotskyist movement. It also provides a lively picture of the membership and work of the Trotskyists during this early period, documenting the political and organizational growth of a small, fighting propaganda group which went on to lead one of the decisive

American class battles of 1934—the great Minneapolis Teamsters strikes.

In the book's Editorial Note, the genesis of the volume is explained: "In the political youth of James Robertson, co-editor of this compilation, the subject matter of this book had a somewhat mystical and mythical quality, wherein might be found the origins of the profound 1940 scission in the Trotskyist (i.e., the authentic communist) movement." In 1939-40, Max Shachtman and his supporters departed decisively from a revolutionary proletarian and internationalist perspective, abandoning the unconditional military defense of the world's first workers state, the Soviet Union. Cannon and Trotsky led a six-month-long struggle against Shachtman's petty-bourgeois opposition, which composed some 40 percent of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP)—then the U.S. Trotskyist organization—and its youth organization.

The fight coincided with the outbreak of World War II, and many of the European Trotskyist organizations were functioning in conditions of illegality. The fight in the SWP "became in effect a discussion for the entire Fourth International and was followed with passionate interest by the members of all sections" (*Fourth International*, May 1940). Trotsky's writings from the struggle were collected in *In Defense of Marxism*; Cannon's were published in

### *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party.*

Shachtman and some of his supporters went on to establish the Workers Party, developing the view that the USSR was a new form of class society, "bureaucratic collectivist." For a period, Shachtman's organization claimed to adhere to the Fourth International (FI) and acted as a rival to the SWP, the FI section in the U.S. But under the impact of the Cold War, the Workers Party moved rapidly to the right and changed its name to the Independent Socialist League (ISL) in 1949. In 1958 the ISL liquidated into the pathetic dregs of American social democracy. By the 1960s, Shachtman was supporting the CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba and U.S. imperialism's bloody war against the Vietnamese national and social revolution. His path of renegacy has been well chronicled by the Spartacist tendency, most recently in "The Bankruptcy of 'New Class' Theories—Tony Cliff and Max Shachtman: Pro-Imperialist Accomplices of Counter-revolution" (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 55, Autumn 1999).

Cannon remained National Secretary of the Socialist Workers Party until he retired in 1953. He was then SWP National Chairman until his death in 1974. But by the late 1950s, the party began to succumb to the consequences of the Cold War anti-Communist witchhunt, including lack of recruitment and an aging cadre. By 1960, the party had given up on the struggle for revolutionary proletarian leadership, hailing Fidel Castro as an "unconscious Trotskyist" and tailing the liberal-pacifist leadership of the civil rights movement. The Revolutionary Tendency, forerunner of the Spartacist League, fought the party's degeneration and was expelled from the SWP in 1963. The SL today stands on the heritage of Cannon's revolutionary SWP, which has less than nothing to do with the increasingly quirky reformist sect around Jack Barnes that today calls itself the Socialist Workers Party.

The material published in *Dog Days* documents that there was a deepgoing polarization between supporters of Shachtman and those of Cannon already in the CLA, posing the possibility of a split in early 1933. But unlike in 1939-40, there was no decisive principled or programmatic difference. Trotsky intervened sharply in the spring of 1933, warning that the two sides "anticipate a lot by sharpening the organizational struggle between the groups and the members without any connection with the development of political work and the questions it raises." He sought to get the two factions to dissolve so that their members could direct their energy into expanding the League's mass work. Trotsky's intervention coincided with an upturn in the class struggle in 1933-34,

which provided the objective basis for the CLA to break out of the impasse and go forward.

### **Prelude to 1939-40 Faction Fight**

In his *History of American Trotskyism* (1944), Cannon correctly called the CLA dispute "the premature rehearsal of the great, definitive struggle of 1939-40." At the same time, he described only a "sea of petty troubles, jealousies, clique formations and internal fights." The extent of the polarization was later downplayed or dismissed by many of the leading participants interviewed by the PRL in the 1970s and 1990s. Some of the old-timers were embarrassed by their positions in the early fight. (For example, Carl Cowl, later a follower of the ultraleftist Hugo Oehler, supported Shachtman in the CLA, a fact which he never mentioned when the PRL interviewed him.)

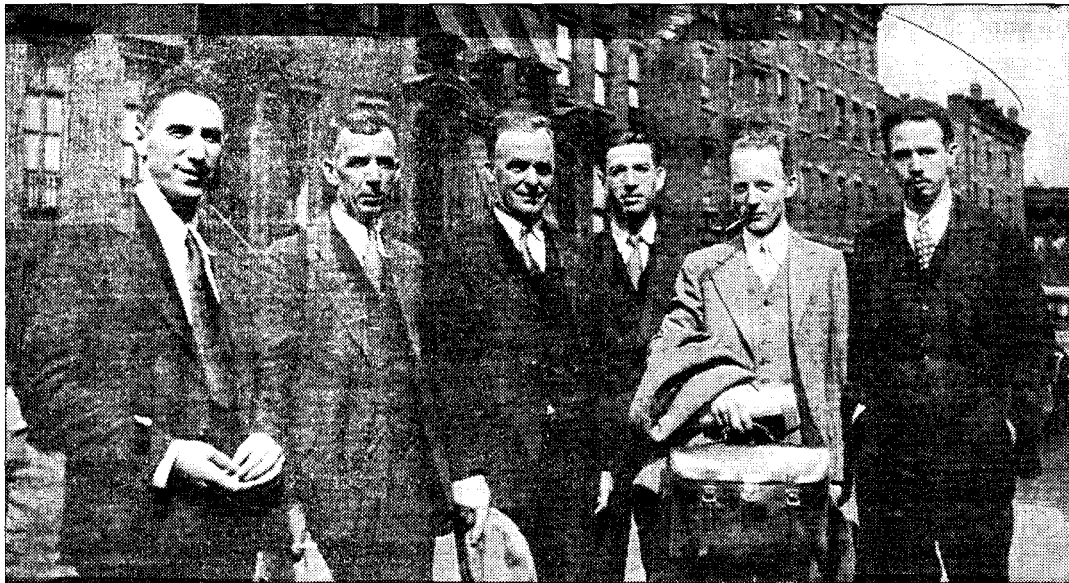
The exception was Albert Glotzer, a key leader of the Shachtman group, whose memory was fueled by anti-Cannon passions which burned as hot in later decades as they had in the early 1930s. By the time the PRL interviewed him in the early 1990s, Glotzer was a confirmed "State Department socialist" with ties to the imperialist secret services. (Richard Valcourt, editor of the *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, spoke at his 1999 memorial meeting.) Yet Glotzer obscenely continued to insist that Cannon had never been a true Bolshevik! The PRL introduction to *Dog Days* makes use of the PRL's interviews with former CLAers, as well as of interviews with Cannon and Shachtman conducted by others in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1939-40, the factional lineup among SWP National Committee members who had been part of the early CLA was almost identical to that of 1931-33. Shachtman, Martin Abern and Glotzer were pitted against Cannon, Vincent Dunne and Carl Skoglund. (The one exception was Morris Lewit—later known as Morris Stein—who supported Shachtman in the early fight but became a key collaborator of Cannon's in 1934 and a stalwart of the Soviet defensists in 1939-40.) The magnum opus of the Shachtman side, the lengthy June 1932 "The Situation in the American Opposition: Prospect and Retrospect" (referred to hereafter as "Prospect and Retrospect"), harps on the same organizational themes of Cannon's so-called "bureaucratic conservatism" that dominated the petty-bourgeois opposition in 1939-40. When Cannon sent his *Struggle for a Proletarian Party* to Trotsky in 1940, he noted, "Its length must be excused on the ground that the dam of ten years patience has been broken down."



**Left: James P. Cannon and Red Army soldiers at time of Comintern Sixth Congress, 1928. Max Shachtman, Berlin, 1930.**





Tamiment Library

**From left: Martin Abern, Vincent R. Dunne, Carl Skoglund, Maurice Spector, Arne Swabeck, Max Shachtman, all full members of 1931-34 CLA National Committee. Full members not pictured: James P. Cannon, Albert Glotzer, Hugo Oehler.**

“Prospect and Retrospect,” signed by Shachtman, Abern and Glotzer, is the source of all subsequent accounts of Cannon as an unreformed Zinovievist and bureaucrat with little interest in Marxist theory or international questions. Submitted just before a June 1932 plenum of the CLA’s National Committee (NC), “Prospect and Retrospect” was withdrawn by its authors at the plenum and then resubmitted a month later. Carbon copies of the document circulated extensively in the CLA through private factional channels, but “Prospect and Retrospect” never appeared in the *CLA Internal Bulletin* because Cannon never completed the reply he was mandated to write by the National Committee majority. In *Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933*, “Prospect and Retrospect” is published for the first time.

The new volume draws together representative documents, motions and correspondence from both sides of the factional divide, as well as all of Trotsky’s correspondence and interventions into the CLA fight. But it does not reproduce Cannon’s major documents and factional correspondence, most of which were published by Pathfinder Press in 1985 as part of Cannon’s *Writings and Speeches: The Communist League of America 1932-34*. That volume includes Cannon’s partial, draft reply to “Prospect and Retrospect” as well as “Internal Problems of the CLA,” which Cannon co-authored with Arne Swabeck in March 1932. Cannon’s 1932-34 *Writings and Speeches* is an essential companion to the PRL’s new book; Pathfinder’s earlier volume, Cannon’s *Writings and Speeches: The Left Opposition in the U.S. 1928-31*, also provides important background information and context. *Dog Days* includes eight Cannon pieces not in the Pathfinder collection, all of which circulated in the minutes of the CLA’s leading committee resident in New York and in *Internal Bulletins*.

Most of Trotsky’s written interventions into the CLA fight were published in English as part of Pathfinder’s *Writings of Leon Trotsky* series. But they are spread over several volumes, and the bulk of them appears only in the *Writings Supplement 1929-33*. *Dog Days* gathers them together in

one book for the first time, putting them in the context of the CLA’s internal disputes so that their full import is clear. The new volume also includes seven never-before-published letters by Trotsky, most of them from the section of the Trotsky papers at Harvard University covering his period in exile. This section was opened to the public only in 1980, after Pathfinder’s *Trotsky Writings* series was compiled. Trotsky had no English-speaking secretary at the time of the CLA dispute, so most of his letters were written in German, and a few in French and Russian. The PRL prepared new translations for *Dog Days*.

*Dog Days* includes letters and documents by many other CLA cadres, including Arne Swabeck, Carl Skoglund, Albert Glotzer, Martin Abern and Maurice Spector. PRL researchers searched the papers of leading CLAs in archives around the United States, unearthing in all some 600 items relating to the CLA dispute and the preceding organizational tensions and disputes on international questions. The 118 documents selected for the book give a representative picture of the faction fight as it unfolded. Short introductions by the editors give necessary background material. Extensive footnotes provide additional information and a 40-page glossary identifies people, institutions and publications that might be unfamiliar to the reader. There are 16 pages of photos—many never before published—of leading CLAs and the class-struggle events in which the Trotskyists participated, as well as reproductions of the organization’s publications. The volume contains an extensive index, and the paperback as well as the hardcover have durable Smyth-sewn bindings.

The documents in *Dog Days* reveal just how profoundly Cannon was shaped by the CLA’s early factional struggle and especially Trotsky’s intervention, which completed Cannon’s education as a Leninist. Destroying the Shachtmanite myth that Cannon was simply a “hand-raiser for Trotsky,” this volume illustrates that the relationship between Trotsky and Cannon was forged over time—not least in fights against Shachtman. *Dog Days* is a kind of manual of the dos and don’ts of Leninist internal party

struggle. As the PRL introduction notes:

"The documents reveal the myriad tensions that can tear apart a small communist propaganda nucleus. How the CLA overcame the 'dog days' to become one of the strongest sections of the Fourth International is an important lesson in the struggle to forge a revolutionary party and its cadre. The Prometheus Research Library, central reference archive of the Central Committee of the Spartacist League, U.S. section of the International Communist League, is unique in understanding the importance of the CLA fight and making its history accessible to our own and future generations. The ICL, like the ILO, is a fighting communist propaganda group with the goal of forging parties of the proletarian vanguard to lead to victory new October Revolutions internationally."

It is not a propitious time to bring out a specialized and detailed volume of communist history such as this. Interest in the history of revolutionary Marxism is currently at a low ebb as bourgeois ideologues continue to peddle "death of communism" triumphalism born out of the demise of the Soviet Union. But it was Stalinism that died when Stalin's epigones gave the USSR back to the capitalist world economy in 1991-92, not communism. A crystallizing bureaucratic caste under Stalin usurped political power from the Soviet working class in early 1924. In the aftermath, the Stalinist propaganda machine at the top of the world's first workers state perverted Marxism. To justify its policies, which oscillated between abject conciliation of imperialism and stupid adventurism, the Stalinist caste insisted that it was possible to build "socialism in one country" and to peacefully "co-exist" with imperialism. These dogmas belong on the garbage heap of history; they have nothing to do with genuine Marxism, i.e., Trotskyism.

Whatever the fads and fancies of bourgeois social sciences, the dynamic of the class struggle is built into the nature of the capitalist economy. The working class has the power and the interest to overthrow this decaying social order and to replace it with an internationally planned economy. The leap in development that comes with a planned economy—even a bureaucratically deformed and nationally limited one—has been made patently obvious by the devastation of infrastructure, industry, education and health that have accompanied capitalist counterrevolution in the old Soviet Union and East Europe. Future generations of proletarian revolutionaries will need to assimilate the indispensable legacy of the Russian Revolution. They will find much to instruct them in the pages of the PRL's new volume. It is unfortunate that this book presently appears only in English.

### The Impasse of the CLA

The American Trotskyist movement was founded in October 1928 when Cannon, Abern and Shachtman were expelled from the Communist Party (CP) for attempting to organize support for Leon Trotsky's Left Opposition. Born in struggle against the Stalinist bureaucratic caste, the Left Opposition fought, in both the Soviet party and the Communist International (CI) as a whole, to continue Lenin's fight for international working-class revolution, against Stalin's revisionist insistence on building "socialism in one country." Cannon was won to the Left Opposition in 1928 while attending the Communist International's Sixth Congress in Moscow, where he read the two parts of Trotsky's Critique of the Comintern's draft program that were distributed to members of the Program Commission. (The whole of the Critique, which consists of three parts, was later published as *The Third International After Lenin*.) Cannon and Canadian Communist Party leader Maurice Spector, also a member of the Program

Commission, smuggled a copy of Trotsky's manuscript out of the Soviet Union and began organizing support for the Left Opposition in their respective parties.

Working of necessity in great secrecy, Cannon managed to win over only a very few of his compatriots—centrally his companion, Rose Karsner, as well as Shachtman and Abern—before being expelled from the CP. However, the fledgling Trotskyist group immediately began publishing a newspaper, the *Militant*, to propagate its views. The group quickly won adherents. Cannon had been the co-leader, along with William F. (Bill) Dunne, of the smallest of the three major groups that vied for leadership in the factional wars that dominated the Communist Party in the 1920s. Cannon had a great deal of authority as a founding Communist with a history in the pre-communist workers movement, going back to his days as an itinerant organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World in the 1910s. He was elected chairman of the Workers Party when it was founded in December 1921 as a legal organization parallel to the underground Communist Party. While many members of the CP's Cannon faction—including Bill Dunne—went along with Cannon's expulsion, many others opposed or at least questioned it. These questioners, too, were unceremoniously expelled by the CP leadership, which was at the time in the hands of an opportunist faction led by the unprincipled, ambition-crazed adventurer Jay Lovestone (who later evolved into an imperialist secret service operative). After reading Trotsky's Critique, the majority of the expellees declared for the Left Opposition and began distributing the *Militant*. The ILO considered itself an expelled faction of the Communist Party, fighting to return the Communist International to the program embodied in its first four congresses.

The Communist League of America, which initially included the Canadian comrades in a Toronto branch, had some 100 members at its founding convention in May 1929. The former Cannon faction members were joined by a handful of former adherents of the third CP faction, which was led by William Z. Foster. At the time the Trotskyists were expelled, the Cannon and Foster factions were in a bloc against the opportunist Lovestone leadership. Disgusted by the continued and sharpening rightward course of the CP under Lovestone, disaffected Fosterites gave the fledgling Trotskyists a hearing and some were recruited. But this source of new members was soon cut off, as the *Dog Days* introduction recounts. Lovestone, failing to accurately judge the winds blowing from Moscow, did not break early enough with his main Moscow sponsor, Nikolai Bukharin. He was expelled from the CP the same month the CLA was founded. Lovestone took his closest supporters with him, but Stalin had managed to isolate him from the vast majority of his faction, which remained in the party.

The expulsion of Lovestone was part of a wholesale left turn in the policies of CI parties decreed by Moscow in 1927-28. Stalin moved against the Soviet party right wing, led by Bukharin, which had advocated a series of economic concessions that were made to the well-off peasants who could hire labor (the kulaks) from 1925-28. Stalin and Bukharin had stood together in the fight against the Left Opposition, but the concessions made to the peasantry proved a horrible disaster (as the Left Opposition had predicted). By 1927 the kulaks were hoarding grain, threatening to starve the Soviet cities. In an abrupt about-face, Stalin moved to brutally and forcibly collectivize the peasantry



CLA publishing program included (clockwise from bottom left): Greek journal *Communistes*, Yiddish journal *Unser Kampf*, youth press *Young Spartacus* and key works by Trotsky.

demoralization, absenting himself from the CLA office for weeks at a time. The personal frictions and organizational grievances born in this period fueled the later faction fight and dominate Shachtman, Abern and Glotzer's "Prospect and Retrospect."

### The Cannon Faction in the CP

The PRL introduction to *Dog Days* deals extensively with the 1929-30 frictions. Some of the tension grew out of the fact that Cannon recognized early on that the Third Period had shut off the CLA's possibilities for immediate substantial growth. Shachtman and Abern resisted this conclusion, insisting on taking the *Militant* weekly in late 1929. Other tensions arose as the American Trotskyists avidly assimilated Trotsky's writings, realizing the depth of the political deficiencies of the old Cannon faction in the Communist Party. Cannon explained in a 1974

and implement a planned, but adventurous, rate of industrialization. At the same time, the Comintern declared that a new "Third Period" of post-World War I political life had opened up in which revolution was just around the corner. Bukharin and most of the leaders of the right in the Soviet party soon capitulated to Stalin, but internationally Bukharin's supporters were expelled from most communist parties. The Bukharinites congealed into an international Right Opposition which included the Lovestone group in the U.S.

The international turn toward "Third Period" ultraleft rhetoric—which was often combined with adventurist actions—assuaged many communists previously disaffected with the Comintern's growing opportunism. The new policy further undercut the LO's appeal by seeming to co-opt its call for a more rapid pace of Soviet industrialization. In Cannon's words, the Third Period was "a devastating blow." In the early '60s, Shachtman recounted:

"We could no longer speak of the Party going further and further to the right. We could no longer speak of the Lovestoneites ruining the Party. We could no longer speak of the Fosterites having illusions that they would get the leadership of the Party. If anything resulted from that, it was a counteroffensive by the Fosterites—in the ranks, to be sure, unofficially, to be sure—to get us to return to the Party. They didn't succeed in convincing a single one of our people, but not even the possibility of success existed any longer for us in recruiting dissident Fosterites."

Just a few months after Lovestone's expulsion, the stock market crash inaugurated the Great Depression. The CLA sank into the dog days. Not only were the Trotskyists cut off from the vast majority of class-conscious American workers organized in the Communist Party, but the CLA's already meager financial resources all but disappeared as its members were laid off or forced to work for reduced wages. Class struggle in the country was at a low ebb. Moreover Cannon, whose first wife died just before the CLA was founded, leaving him responsible for their two children, had to get a job outside the organization. He underwent a period of evident

interview referenced in *Dog Days*:

"As we began to get the writings of Trotsky, it opened up a whole new world for us. And they [Abern and Shachtman] discovered, this is my assumption, that while they had always taken what I said for gospel, they discovered there were a lot of things I didn't know. That I was just beginning to learn from Trotsky. What they didn't know was that I was learning as well as they were. Shachtman at least, I think, had the idea that he had outgrown me."

Shachtman, Abern and Glotzer took great exception to Cannon's 1930 statement that the CLA's cadre had been "prepared by the past' for our place under the banner of the International Left Opposition" (*Militant*, 10 May 1930). Labeling Cannon's assertion a "theory of gestation," they disparaged the record of the Cannon faction in the CP, insisting that their being won over to the Left Opposition was some kind of historical accident.

The PRL's first book, *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920-1928*, which was published in 1992, covered Cannon's years as CP leader, documenting the political evolution of the Cannon faction. The Cannon faction was motivated largely by national concerns and did not break fundamentally with the Stalinist dogma of "socialism in one country." At the same time, the faction's record proves that there was much in their worldview that led them to the ILO's door. As the PRL noted in the introduction to *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*:

"When, in 1932, Shachtman and Abern led a rebellion against Cannon's leadership of the Communist League of America, they were only interested in telling one side of the story. The material presented here also tells another, one that predisposed a deliberate and considered workers' leader like Cannon to turn away from high office within the American party in favor of remaining true to the revolutionism that had animated his youth and continued to animate the program of the Left Opposition."

The introduction to *Dog Days* notes that in particular Shachtman et al. underplayed the importance of Cannon's history of hard opposition to the opportunism of Lovestone, the



American version of the Right Opposition. Trotsky fought many battles in the early ILO against those, like Spanish Opposition leader Andrés Nin, who sought to merge banners with the Right Opposition. It was a particular strength of the American League that its members, in general, were not disposed to make common cause with the Right Opposition.

The CLA's extensive publishing program was key to the assimilation of its cadre into the international Trotskyist movement. Besides the weekly *Militant*, which often included articles by Trotsky, the CLA published an array of Trotsky pamphlets, including his major articles on the rise of fascism in Germany and on the unfolding revolutionary situation in Spain. They also published in book form a selection of Trotsky's writings on the lost opportunity for proletarian revolution in China from 1925 to 1927, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*. In letters included in *Dog Days*, Trotsky praised the quality of the CLA's translations and publishing efforts, and he sought to get the North American Trotskyists to produce a theoretical journal (which they began only in 1934).

In late 1930, leading CLA member Arne Swaback moved from Chicago to New York to help overcome the tensions in the CLA national office. Cannon was again fully politically engaged by this point, and he and Swaback began an axis of collaboration which was key to the stabilization of the CLA and the expansion of its publishing program throughout 1931. In late 1931, the CLA began publishing a monthly youth press, *Young Spartacus*, as well as an episodic publication in Greek and a somewhat more regular publication in Yiddish. As the *Dog Days* introduction notes, Shachtman, Abern and Glotzer objected far more to Cannon's revival than they had to his absence. Shachtman in particular had grown used to treating the CLA's relations with Trotsky and other ILO parties as his personal fiefdom. He bridled at Cannon's attempts to get the National Committee as a whole to take responsibility for international work. This was the issue that precipitated the factional polarization. In documenting the key role that international questions played in the CLA fight, *Dog Days* breaks new ground.

### The International Questions

Shachtman was the first CLA leader to go to Prinkipo, Turkey, to meet with Trotsky in exile, after which he went to Europe and took part in the first ILO international gathering in April 1930. He was subsequently co-opted onto the ILO's leading body, the International Bureau. In Europe he developed close relations with Kurt Landau, a leader of the ILO's German section, and with Pierre Naville of the French Ligue Communiste. Trotsky subsequently waged sharp political fights against both men.

Shachtman treated his correspondence with Trotsky about the political struggles in Europe as "personal." Moreover, he did not seek to get the CLA to take positions on the questions at issue. After a series of skirmishes in 1931, this issue finally broke out into the open in early 1932, when Cannon sought—over Shachtman's opposition—to put the CLA on record in support of Trotsky's positions in the internal ILO struggles involving Landau, Naville and others. The PRL introduction explains the basis for the ILO's many political disputes:

"Many dissident Communist elements who sought to regroup under the ILO's banner did not fully grasp the significance of the struggle in the Russian party. All were attracted to the Left Opposition's struggle against bureaucratism in the Soviet party and state. But many saw this as a simple 'democratic' issue, misunderstanding or disagreeing with the underlying program-



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**Trotsky (right) with (from left) Jan Frankel, son Leon Sedov, wife Natalya Sedova and Czechoslovakian Trotskyist Jiri Kopp in Prinkipo, Turkey, 1930.**

matic basis—the fight to forge the politically homogenous revolutionary proletarian vanguard in opposition to all varieties of centrism and reformism. Political softness toward the Right Opposition was common.... Trotsky's primary task was the systematic education of the ILO cadre and the weeding out of opportunist, sectarian, accidental, and dilettantish elements. This entailed almost constant internal political struggle."

The PRL introduction sketches out Trotsky's arguments with Alfred Rosmer and Pierre Naville on the trade-union question in the French section, his fight against the cliquism of Kurt Landau, and his struggle against Andrés Nin's centrist orientation toward unity with Joaquín Maurín's Workers and Peasants Bloc in Spain. All these issues figure in the documents published in the volume.

*Dog Days* is divided into three sections—"Shachtman in the International," "The Fight" and "The International Intervenes"—with documents presented chronologically within each section. The first section consists mostly of Trotsky and Shachtman's correspondence on problems in the European ILO sections from 1930 to '31. Those who know the ICL and its work will be struck by the familiarity of Trotsky's concerns, especially his struggle to create a centralized political and administrative apparatus for the ILO. Trotsky's aim was to forge a politically homogenous democratic-centralist tendency, even if it consisted at first of small propaganda groups. This aim, carried forward today by the ICL, separates us from all manner of fakers who (used to/sort of) pretend to be the continuators of the Left Opposition.

Trotsky fought against the Bordigists and others who wanted the ILO center to be simply a political clearing house for nationally delimited (and therefore necessarily centrist) parties. He fought for an early delegated international conference to establish an elected leadership, and he condemned the leadership of the Spanish section in particular for not paying enough attention to international questions and for not translating the ILO discussion bulletins for its membership. The CLA, it should be noted, took the responsibility early on for publishing the ILO discussion bulletin in English. Thus the North American membership was able to follow the disputes in the international movement.

The Trotsky-Shachtman correspondence illustrates Trotsky's growing impatience with Shachtman's refusal to make

programmatic considerations primary, starting with Shachtman's first foray into Europe in the spring of 1930, when (despite explicit instructions from Trotsky) he failed to ensure that the ILO's first conference issue a political manifesto. Shachtman attempted to blunt the fight against Landau's disastrous leadership of the German section, and he encouraged Nin in Spain and Naville in France. After Shachtman made a second trip to Europe in the fall of 1931, Trotsky was so alarmed that he wrote to the CLA National Committee to inquire if Shachtman represented the views of the CLA leadership as a whole. These documents expose Shachtman's lying assertion, made later in the CLA fight, that he had never had significant differences with Trotsky. They also (in the words of the PRL introduction) "explode the image of Shachtman as Trotsky's happy international commissar, a myth spread by Shachtman and his supporters in later years and more recently purveyed by Peter Drucker in his biography of Shachtman [*Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the "American Century,"* Humanities Press, 1994]. In fact, Trotsky's opponents in Europe invoked Shachtman's name in defense of their own actions."

**The Fight**

After returning from his second trip to Europe, Shachtman refused to vote for Cannon's 1931 draft NC statement supporting Trotsky's positions in Europe. He resigned his post as *Militant* editor and attempted to deflect the discussion from the international questions by making an issue of Swaback and Cannon's supposed harshness toward a supercilious and scholastic group of petty-bourgeois youth in the New York local (the "Carter group"). Abern and Glotzer, who claimed to disagree with Shachtman on the debates in Europe, aided and abetted Shachtman in deflecting the discussion, cosigning "Prospect and Retrospect" and submitting it on the eve of the June 1932 NC plenum. The documents reveal that Spector and Glotzer privately prevailed on Shachtman to capitulate on the international question, which he did at the plenum. The two sides also managed to work out a joint motion on the New York local and the "Carter group." Under pressure from Cannon and his supporters, who promised a reply if "Prospect and Retrospect" remained in the record, Shachtman et al. withdrew their document.

Yet the "unity" thus achieved exploded just a few weeks after the plenum. Over the next year, the two groups fought

over a myriad of organizational issues, from the co-optations to the National Committee proposed by Cannon, to Cannon's proposal to accept only working-class activists for membership in the New York local, to the date for the CLA's third national conference. Documents from both sides of these disputes are published in the section of the volume titled "The Fight," as well as representative internal factional correspondence from the Shachtman side. (Cannon's letters to his supporters were published in the Pathfinder volume of Cannon's writings from 1932-34.) As the PRL introduction notes, there is a sharp contrast between the correspondence from both sides: "Where Shachtman, Glotzer, and Abern are politically vague and gossipy, Cannon is programmatic and forward-looking. The same contrast can be drawn between Shachtman and Glotzer's lengthy letters to Trotsky and Swaback's terse, informative correspondence."

Organizational tensions were exacerbated by the League's utter financial poverty as well as by some non-Leninist organizational practices. When Trotsky received a visa to visit Copenhagen in the fall of 1932, Shachtman and his supporters refused to send Swaback—who was born and raised in Denmark—to Copenhagen immediately to take part in ILO deliberations. Although he missed the ILO gathering in Copenhagen, Swaback was able to go to Europe in early 1933 to attend an important ILO meeting. He traveled on to Prinkipo, where his discussions with Trotsky played a great role in resolving the CLA's polarization. The trip was possible only because funds were raised privately by the Cannon faction.

Cannon rightly saw the root of the problem as the petty-bourgeois basis of the Shachtman faction, concentrated in the New York local. As the *Dog Days* introduction notes, Cannon "was desperate to find an entry point into a mass proletarian movement and thus recruit a way out of the factional impasse caused by the political weight of the League's literary recruits." Cannon's younger supporters like George Clarke and Sam Gordon went out into the field as itinerant party organizers. When Skoglund and Dunne began their work organizing the coal drivers in Minneapolis, Shachtman's supporter there, Carl Cowl, branded them as "opportunists."

The cavalier attitude of the Shachtman faction toward the CLA's fragile roots in the proletariat was amply demonstrated by its periodic obstruction of the CLA's work in the

**ICL Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program**

The Declaration of Principles of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) is a concrete expression of our purpose: to build national sections of a democratic-centralist international which can lead the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution. This important document, which was adopted at the Third International Conference of the ICL in early 1998, was published in the four language editions of *Spartacist* and additionally in nine other languages.

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Minnesota Historical Society



**Minneapolis, 1934:**  
Teamsters pickets  
confront scabherding  
deputy in key strike  
battle. SWP members  
played leading role in  
organizing drive and  
militant strikes that won  
union recognition for  
Minneapolis Teamsters.

southern Illinois breakaway from the United Mine Workers, the Progressive Miners of America (PMA). For most of the period covered by the book, the CLA's best opportunity to recruit real working-class support appeared to lie with the PMA. A CLA member, Gerry Allard, was the editor of the PMA paper, *Progressive Miner*. The PRL introduction deals in detail with developments in the PMA, providing essential background for the reader. The volume includes a never-before-published letter by Cannon to Trotsky requesting advice on relations with Allard.

Throughout the period of the greatest organizational tensions, however, the two sides remained united on the League's fundamental political tasks. When Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany in January 1933, the decision to take the *Militant* from weekly to three times a week to champion the expected resistance of the German working class was not controversial. Neither did the two sides fight about the CLA's work in the unemployed movement.

The polarization began to take on an embryonic political character only in early 1933, when Shachtman and Abern objected strenuously to Cannon's raising the possibility of a role for the Soviet Red Army in a proletarian offensive to beat back Hitler's rise to power. Shachtman and Abern were at the time capitulating to the prevailing "socialism in one country" opinion in the CP milieu to which the CLA oriented. The Shachtman faction's opposition to posing the use of the Red Army outside the borders of the USSR presaged their 1939 abandonment of the defense of the USSR when the Red Army entered Finland and Poland. But in 1933 they dropped their objections after Trotsky intervened to support the thrust of Cannon's position. Trotsky's statement on this dispute, "Germany and the USSR," has long been available as part of Pathfinder's Trotsky collection, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*. But its import is much clearer when it is read along with the documents from the CLA fight.

At the time of the Red Army dispute, Shachtman and Abern labeled Cannon an opportunist because he delivered a speech to a trade-union conference in southern Illinois—in which the PMA was heavily involved—as a representative of a group of left-wing workers in New York instead of as a member of the CLA. But political groups had been banned from speaking at the conference, and the alternative would

have been to cede the field to reformist and anti-Communist PMA leaders. Trotsky's comments on the CLA's work in the PMA—centrally "Trade-Union Problems in America" (previously published in *Writings of Leon Trotsky Supplement 1929-33*)—have a much bigger impact when read in the context of documents from both sides of the CLA divide. "Trade-Union Problems in America" is published in the new volume's final section, "The International Intervenes."

### Trotsky's Role

In many ways, "The International Intervenes" is the most powerful section of the book. Trotsky's experience in internal party struggle was brought to bear, first in discussions with Swabeck in Prinkipo and later in his letters to CLA leaders on both sides of the factional divide. In addition to Trotsky's correspondence, the section includes letters written by Swabeck to Cannon reporting on further discussions in Prinkipo. Criticizing both factions for drawing harsh organizational lines in the absence of programmatic differences, Trotsky pointed out that the Cannon group, as the majority of the NC, bore central responsibility for the tenor of internal discussion. As the documents reveal, Cannon immediately took Trotsky's criticisms to heart, making substantive organizational concessions to the minority.

Under pressure from Trotsky to intervene sharply and prevent a split, the International Secretariat (I.S.) scheduled a plenum in May 1933 where the situation in the CLA would be thoroughly discussed. Swabeck was scheduled to attend on his way home from Prinkipo, and the I.S. requested that a minority representative also attend. Drawing on funds lent by Mexican muralist Diego Rivera, then a Trotskyist sympathizer, Shachtman once again went to Europe. On the boat to Europe, Shachtman wrote to Glotzer, insisting that he would not dissolve their faction. However, he quickly changed his tune. In Paris he cosigned a resolution with Swabeck calling for dissolution of the factions and he traveled on to Prinkipo for discussions with Trotsky. His letters home to Abern and Glotzer—mimeographed for distribution to his faction in the League—are included in the book. They amplify and elaborate on Trotsky's thinking about the situation in the CLA.

The CLA National Committee adopted a resolution in

June calling for the cessation of the internal struggle and for turning the League outward to take advantage of new opportunities opening up before it. The campaign for a united-front working-class offensive against Hitler in Germany had a strong impact on the CP cadre and the CLA was again recruiting from the party. It was able to intervene to great effect in conferences called by the CP of the unemployed movement and legal defense organizations.

Yet the documents reveal that tensions continued to run high over Cannon's proposal to move the CLA headquarters to Chicago. Aiming to take advantage of the proletarian nature of the city (as compared to New York) and the greater openness of CP milieus in Chicago, Cannon's proposal was eventually supported by Trotsky, who saw it as part of turning the CLA outward toward the working class. While not campaigning against the move, Shachtman and Abern quietly planned to remain in New York and produce a theoretical journal. This was a recipe for a "cold split" in the CLA, and in late 1933 Cannon wisely shelved the idea of moving the organization's center. This aspect of the fight has never before been dealt with in print.

Hard on the heels of the international attempts to mitigate the CLA struggle came Trotsky's initiative for a bold political turn for the ILO as a whole. Already in May 1933 Trotsky had noted that the German Communist Party's failure to organize any opposition to Hitler's consolidation of power meant that it was dead as a revolutionary force. He called for a new party in Germany and in July 1933, after it was clear that no organized opposition had emerged within the Communist International as a whole, he proposed that the ILO reorient itself away from acting as a faction of the CI. Trotsky advocated the call for a new, Fourth International and suggested that the Opposition attempt to regroup with subjectively revolutionary elements who were now organizing outside the CI. The new orientation was endorsed by an I.S. plenum in August 1933 and enthusiastically embraced by the entire CLA National Committee.

The turn toward functioning as the embryo of a new party formation came just as the class struggle began to heat up in the United States. In January 1934, the CLA addressed an open letter suggesting discussions with the leftward-moving centrists of A.J. Muste's American Workers Party, who advocated the formation of a new workers party in the U.S. Fusion between the CLA and the Musteites took place in December 1934 and was greatly facilitated by the CLA's leadership of three strikes in the spring and summer which won union recognition for the Minneapolis Teamsters, and by the Muste organization's leadership in a major class battle at Toledo Auto-Lite in the spring.

It was the new opportunities opening up before the American Trotskyists that laid the basis for the resolution of the CLA's internal polarization. Shachtman and Morris Lewit went on to collaborate with Cannon in turning the League toward the class struggle, while the majority of the old Shachtman faction, now organized as the Abern-Weber clique, obstructed the work. That story is told in *Prometheus Research Series* No. 5, which reprints Shachtman's 1936 document "Marxist Politics or Unprincipled Combinationism?", a devastating indictment of the unprincipled, personalist methods of Shachtman's former supporters. In this document Shachtman reveals that—despite the May 1933 agreement to dissolve the factions—the Shachtman/Abern/ Glotzer faction in New York went on meeting through January 1934. The Abern clique remained as a fault line in the

American Trotskyist movement throughout the 1930s, one that ruptured again in the 1939-40 struggle, when Shachtman rejoined it.

## Prescient and Equivocal

Ruminating on the problems of party leadership as he was about to be sent to prison along with 17 other SWP and Minneapolis Teamsters leaders in 1943, Cannon drew a balance sheet of the CLA experience:

"At one time in the early days, the so-called Cannon-Shachtman fight, which was conducted with all the intensity of the final struggle with the petty-bourgeois opposition and even with more acrimony—in that struggle Comrade Trotsky made the comment that the two factions each anticipated too much. They fought each other not on the ground of the political merits and qualities which were fully demonstrated as of that day, but from a point of view of a generalization as to what the ultimate development of the political tendencies on each side would come to.... In such a situation, Comrade Trotsky said, the most progressive tendency is the conciliatory tendency—those who propose to make peace and test out in further common action what is the basis and merit of the accusations on each side. That advice of Comrade Trotsky was accepted in the old fight. Some people accepted it diplomatically and some honestly, but, in general, the prescription was to plunge the party into mass work, stop the faction struggle, disband the faction organizations, and test out in political action what were the tendencies of the two groups.

"And eventually we came to a solution of it in the year 1940—but the fight had begun ten years before, and if we had tried to solve it in 1933 by means of a split—which is the only way you can solve irreconcilable faction fights—there is no way the movement might have profited by it, because we would have had to explain to the workers outside the movement what the fight was about. And if we couldn't make this clear to comrades inside the party how could we make it clear to the non-party people we wanted to join? The result would have been the stagnation of the movement as was the case in England."

—Cannon, "The Situation in the New York Local,"  
23 December 1942, printed in *The Socialist Workers  
Party in World War II: Writings and Speeches 1940-43*

On questions of party organization and attitude toward workers struggle, the 1931-33 Shachtman faction embodied the same petty-bourgeois approach that Cannon exposed so eloquently in 1939-40 in *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party*. But the decisive question for a Leninist is *political program*. The petty-bourgeois orientation of Shachtman, Abern and Glotzer took on decisive programmatic coloration in 1939-40, and it was only at that point that factional struggle was mandated. Cannon learned from Trotsky's intervention into the early struggle, and he went on to prove himself a superb Leninist leader in the 1939-40 fight and beyond. He won the majority in 1940 because the American Trotskyists, having turned outward, had recruited a layer of serious, proletarian revolutionaries. The PRL introduction ends by drawing the central lesson of this experience:

"While the revolutionary character of a proletarian organization is defined by its program, which represents nothing other than the historic interests of the international working class, there is an interplay between a party's program and its social composition. Marx insisted that 'being determines consciousness,' and this applies as much to aspiring revolutionaries as to other sectors of society. A Marxist vanguard without deep roots in the working class not only lacks the means to implement its program, but is necessarily more susceptible to the social pressures of alien classes."

*Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933* is an essential reference book for any communist.

—Reprinted from *Workers Vanguard* No. 791,  
15 November 2002

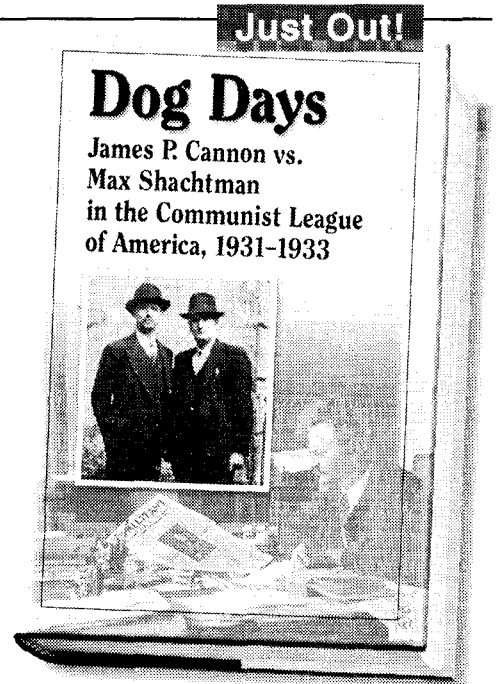
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## Women and Immigration...

(continued from page 40)

school wearing headscarves. There was an immediate explosion of sanctimonious "secularism," a cover for anti-Muslim bigotry, and these North African girls were expelled from public school and thrown back to the family hearth, with invocations of the "values of the Republic." In fact, the French state *deformed* the goals and values of the French Revolution with this attack on these Muslim girls. Under the *ancien régime* of the French king, France was known as "the eldest daughter of the Church." The principle of secularism in the French Revolution came from the need to protect the freedom to express ideas and to free society from the hands of the Catholic church. That this principle is used today by a Catholic majority to oppress a Muslim minority in French society is a cruel



AFP

**Blocked by police, young demonstrators in Lille protest against edict banning girls wearing the headscarf from attending public school, October 1994.**

irony of history. It underscores the degree to which the French bourgeoisie in the epoch of capitalist decay has degenerated from the class that led the 1789 Revolution, a historic watershed in the struggle for human emancipation.

Crucifixes are not forbidden in public school in France. This campaign against the young girls wearing the headscarf was just the beginning of the escalation of a reactionary racist campaign against "Islam in France," a campaign which especially targeted the North African-derived population in this country. Contrary to the hysterical campaign against the "importation of Algerian fundamentalism" into France, scientific surveys prove that in fact the youth of Algerian background are *less* religious than native-born French people. (Perhaps it's because the headscarf is so externally visible that many people think otherwise.) According to the 1992 survey conducted by INED (the National Institute for Demographic Studies), 30 percent of men born in France of two parents born in Algeria say that they have no religion at all. A full 60 percent of those who have only one parent born in Algeria say that they have no religion. For women, the figures are 30 percent and 58 percent, respectively. But for native-born French people, only 27 percent of men and 20 percent of women declare that they have no religion.

The weight of the Catholic church is considerable in French society. In the recent presidential elections, the

church effectively ran two candidates, Bayrou and Boutin. Not even the mayor of Paris can keep the Catholic church's hands off the public school schedule because the church insists that Wednesdays must be kept clear for catechism. So why isn't the state in an uproar in defense of the principle of secularism against intrusions by the French Catholic church? The Catholic hierarchy and Catholic religious ideology are simply too useful to the ruling class as a prop for social conservatism, sanctifying capitalist class domination. On the other hand, anti-Muslim "secularism" facilitates the rulers' aim of dividing the workers and segregating that militant layer of North African workers from their class brothers in this country. The public school in the French Republic is a key place to implant racist anti-Arab values in France some two hundred years after the Great French Revolution.

During the furor over the headscarf, the LTF wrote: "In this country rotten with chauvinism and racist terror, these expulsions could not represent anything other than an act of racial discrimination. That is why we condemn them.... It is clear that Muslim fundamentalism in this country could be only the ideology of a horribly oppressed community which has lost all hope of finding within the society in which it lives a perspective of doing away with this oppression" ("Down With the Anti-Immigrant Campaign!" *Le Bolchévique* No. 97, November-December 1989).

We have always fought for the separation of church and state, and mosque and state, in opposition to the fundamentalists who seek to regiment even the smallest details of private life through the reactionary, anti-woman Koranic strictures. But in France, where Islam can only be an ideology of the ghetto, which accepts segregation, the *main enemy* is not the Islamic fundamentalists but the French imperialist capitalist state, which is anti-worker and anti-woman and which oppresses the working masses in Algeria, Africa, and *here*.

In the same period that we defended these young veiled women in France, we hailed the Red Army in Afghanistan which intervened to defend the modernizing left-bourgeois nationalist PDPA government. The Red Army battled the fundamentalists who threw acid in the faces of unveiled women and killed schoolteachers who taught young girls to read. We denounced the withdrawal of the Soviet troops as a betrayal of Afghan women. We fought to extend the gains of the October 1917 Russian Revolution to Afghan women. Is there a contradiction between our line at that time on the headscarf in France and the veil in Afghanistan? Not at all. The question in each situation was how to defend the interests of women and the proletariat internationally. In France, the North African population suffered daily under the conditions of segregation and racist terror and they were marginalized by the chauvinist leaders of the trade unions and leftist parties. It was understandable therefore that some young women sought a refuge in religion and an illusory discovery of dignity. This is why Marx called religion "the heart of a heartless world." The Marxist struggle against religious obscurantism is inseparable from the fight to abolish the material conditions in this world which induce the need to seek refuge in divine fantasy. In other words, our struggle is inextricably linked to the fight for international socialist revolution. In Afghanistan, the intervention of the Red Army put an extension of the gains of the October Revolution on the order of the day and it was a question of life or death for the Afghan women against the *mujahedin* cutthroats.

Conversely, the French fake left refused to defend women

against imperialist-backed reaction in Afghanistan and against the racist campaigns of the French bourgeoisie at home. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and its international allies of the United Secretariat, then led by Ernest Mandel, called openly for the withdrawal of the Red Army from Afghanistan, siding with the mullahs and the CIA against the Soviet Union and Afghan women. Lutte Ouvrière (LO) was more evasive, but lined up on the same side by comparing the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan to the conduct of French and American imperialism in Vietnam. Meanwhile, with LO openly backing the French government's expulsion of the veiled girls from school, the LCR grudgingly opposed the expulsions while continuing to loyally support and sow illusions in the Mitterrand popular-front government which launched this racist campaign. And under the recent popular front—the Jospin-headed coalition government of the Socialists, Communists and Greens—LO simply said nothing in opposition to the anti-immigrant police-state measures of Vigipirate, while the LCR could not bring itself to protest this racist repression until almost the very end of Jospin's reign.

The wielding of hypocritical "secularism" against young Muslim women in France today was prefigured during the Algerian War. Historically, imperialism has had no compunction about allying itself with the most reactionary local rulers and the most backward social institutions in order to secure an orderly flow of profits from the colonies. But when the Algerian masses rose in rebellion against the colonial overlords, the French administration, which presided over an army of torturers, suddenly "discovered" the human rights of oppressed Algerian women, hoping to build a base of support for continued subjugation of the country. As we summarized in an article written in the 1970s:

"The French made use of the Islamic degradation of women to justify denying democratic rights, particularly suffrage, to Muslims. The Algerians reacted with *increased* Muslim orthodoxy, praising their women as the perpetuators of their true culture against French influence. Due to their seclusion, Algerian women were indeed less affected by French influence than were Algerian men, although the French made a special effort to reach them. During the struggle for national liberation, the French initiated public, pro-French unveilings of Muslim women and organized a Feminine Solidarity Movement which offered them medical care, legal aid, gifts and education in an attempt to draw them out of their isolation and into the service of French imperialism."

—"The Private Life of Islam: A Review," *Women and Revolution* No. 10, Winter 1975-76

In response to the racism of French imperialism's campaign "for women," which included forcibly ripping the veils off women and burning the veils in "bonfires of joy," the FLN [Front de Libération National—National Liberation Front] publicly repudiated these women as whores and raised the slogan, "For a free Algeria, not a free French woman!" Unable to present a genuinely socialist program for women—releasing them from the bondage of Islam as well as from French imperialism—the Algerian nationalists took the veil as their *symbol*! They enshrined the oppression of women on the pedestal of revolution.

The national liberation of Algeria from French imperialist rule was a victory which Marxists passionately defend. But the inability of bourgeois nationalism to truly liberate the oppressed masses of the so-called "Third World" from poverty, social backwardness and imperialist plunder is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the case of independent Algeria, where women who took up arms and fought hero-



Reuters

**In the late 1980s, thousands of Afghan militiawomen took up the gun to defend their gains against the murderous imperialist-sponsored fundamentalists. Spartan tendency hailed Soviet intervention opening the road to liberating women from feudal oppression. Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan presaged surrender of USSR itself to capitalist counterrevolution.**

ically alongside men in the Algerian War, and their daughters and granddaughters, now find themselves subjected to the official anti-woman strictures of "Islamic law" and prey to the terror of the fundamentalists who are embraced by large sections of the desperate population as the alternative to the bankrupt, brutal FLN military regime. Only thoroughgoing socialist revolutions throughout the region can open up a future for the women and men of Algeria, and would give great impetus to revolutionary struggle in the imperialist centers. Correspondingly, a working-class conquest of power here in France as well as in other imperialist countries would lead directly toward liberation of the North African countries through socialist revolution.

### Capitalist Counterrevolution and Religion

The second round in the story of the headscarf occurred in 1994 when a *hundred* girls were expelled from school. The international context is important for understanding two things: the rise of religion and the escalation of government attacks against the working class, women and immigrants. A key event was the capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and across East Europe in 1990-92—a huge defeat for the workers movement internationally—which was hailed by virtually the whole "left."

Reactionary ideas take hold and grow in reactionary periods, and especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union there has been a rise of fundamentalism of every kind: Protestant fundamentalism in America (the abortion clinic bombers, the KKK, the Bush government which wants to bury the scientific fact of evolution and teach "creationism" in public schools); Orthodox Jewish fundamentalism in Israel; an ever greater reach by the Catholic church into

civil society in Europe; and Islamic fundamentalism in the Muslim countries and in the European centers with large Muslim populations. The rise of religion is not only a result of counterrevolution; it was also a tool of the imperialists to foment reaction in and against the deformed workers states. All the variants of the "opium of the people," as Marx called religion, are freely disseminated in this period. The growth of this false consciousness is rooted in despair and the lie that class struggle and authentic communism are old hat.

The capitalist class which steals the wealth produced by the workers needs a scapegoat to derail the class struggles which continue to break out, despite the regression in political consciousness. The working class seeks to defend itself against capitalist attacks. Since the Berlin Wall came down, the Western bourgeoisies have substituted the "green menace" of Islam for the "red menace" formerly represented by the



Patrick Nussbaum

**Striking workers rally in Paris, April 2002. Six-month-long strike against the Accor hotel conglomerate involved mainly women of African immigrant origin.**

Soviet Union. The Persian Gulf War—the bombing and above all the United Nations sanctions which have starved and killed more than one and a half million Iraqis—had a large impact on the North African and Muslim population in France. The Vigipirate plan for heightened state repression of the minority population, which has become the model used by all the imperialist countries to oppress their "enemy within," was put in place in France at the time of the Gulf War.

Nationally, there were economic and political changes which terribly marginalized dark-skinned people and which also contributed to the intensification of women's oppression. A new capitalist economic crisis raised the level of unemployment and layoffs. Children whose fathers created the wealth of France in the post-World War II period no longer have the possibility of finding jobs like their fathers, who were themselves the most exploited and the least compensated layer of the proletariat. The factories where the immigrant fathers worked are now closed or are laying off. Youth of immigrant background are treated as a surplus population which the bourgeoisie has no need for. Without the opportunity to realize costs back in profits through economic exploitation of these youth, the bourgeoisie is not motivated to invest money in schools or minority neighborhoods. The

only "growth industry" there is the police and the prisons.

According to its economic needs, capitalism brings into the proletariat at its bottom new sources of cheaper labor, principally immigrants from poorer countries who are deemed disposable in times of economic contraction. This is why we in the ICL fight for the unity and integrity of the working class against chauvinism and racism. In every country where we exist, the ICL fights to expose the lie of "national unity" between workers and bosses and to rally the proletariat in class solidarity with immigrants and minorities.

The bourgeoisie's attempts to blame unemployment on immigrants and their children and to make minority youth synonymous with "delinquency" and social "insecurity" have certainly put the wind in the sails of fascist demagogues like Le Pen. But at bottom the mushrooming of racist hostility directed against immigrants is a reflection of the marginalization of these layers in a contracting economy. As we explained in a 1996 article on immigrants in Europe:

"It is common on the European left to blame the rising tide of anti-immigrant racism on the demagogy of 'extreme' right-wing groups. But the fascists are simply expressing in an open, unvarnished and violent way the *economic and political interests* of the European ruling classes at the present juncture. European capital now has no need for additional imported labor from Third World countries, while second-generation immigrant youth are economically redundant and regarded as a source of social unrest....

"The struggle against anti-immigrant racism must be conducted not only militantly against the fascists but equally on the political plane against the reformist misleaders of the workers movement."

—"Immigration and Racist 'Fortress Europe,'" *Spartacist* [French edition] No. 29, Summer 1996, reprinted in *Workers Vanguard* No. 652 and 653, 27 September and 11 October 1996

Even prior to the current economic downturn, studies of unemployment in France have shown that there is special discrimination against young Algerian men, even as compared with other young North African males. France has never forgotten that Algeria fought French imperialism *and won*. The unemployment figure for Algerian high school graduates between the ages of 20 and 29 is 39 percent; while for Spaniards, Portuguese and French, the figure is 10 percent. That's almost *four times* as much for the young Algerian men. Young Algerian women also suffer unemployment but there is a layer which has found stable work. But in general, the work situation in France is better for young men than young women. These figures show that young Algerian men still suffer a particular discrimination and racist hatred which France has for those from its former colony which dealt France a bitter military defeat.

In general for a young woman, it is not as easy to separate from one's family as it was in the preceding two decades. Breaking with one's family implies finding work, but jobs that lead to financial independence are rare today. These material conditions are the basis for a return to religion for many young Muslim women. But this is highly contradictory. Many claim an Islamic identity and at the same time denounce in the name of Islam the traditions that throw them back to the family hearth. There are some who wear the veil as an act of defiance toward French society which treats Arab people with contempt. Moreover, it is often the case that young women who don the veil and adopt this image of modesty win the right to leave the house and go out with friends, which was previously denied them. But this bubble of "liberty," grotesquely deformed and obtained with the veil, does



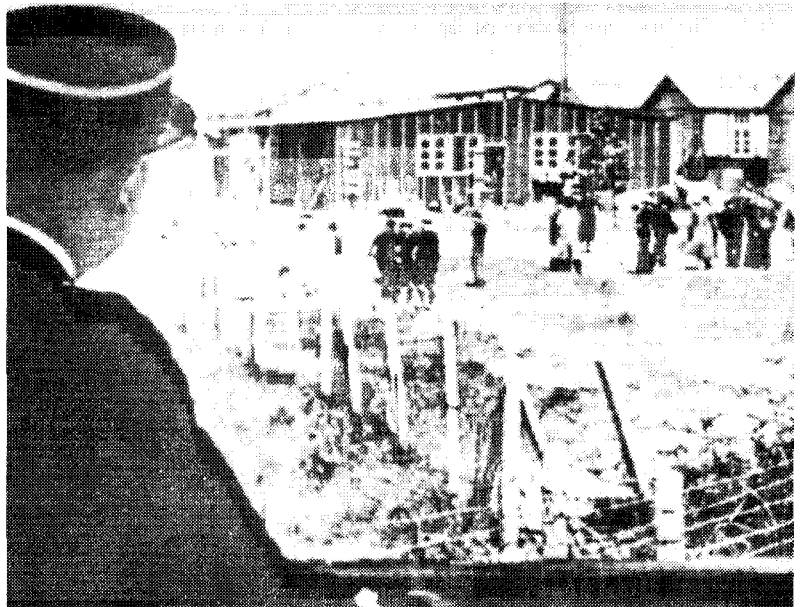
not last for long. Every young woman in an Islamic headscarf knows that her future, according to family traditions and according to religion, is inside the home. And in the meantime, Western society is not offering a future, either. Speaking at a conference of women held at the Sorbonne in January 2002, Fadela Amara noted that "In the 1980s, we older sisters had begun to win our freedom and to take the first steps toward equality, but then everything gradually collapsed in the 1990s with mass unemployment, fundamentalism, and the retreat back into the community."

Books written by these young women themselves describe a "schizophrenic" life. Some leave the house in a veil and change into a miniskirt in the restroom at McDonald's, and spend their day dodging the surveillance of older brothers who play the role of family cops, including with terrifying brutality. Often the feeling of being torn in half between French society on the one hand, which demands that they abandon their entire Arab identity, and the family on the other hand, which demands modesty, destroys them, literally. More of these young women commit suicide than other young girls in their age group. In the song, *Islamic Women*, the female rap stars from Lyautey describe the situation of a Muslim girl: if she wears the veil, it's the French who reproach her but if she takes it off, her own neighborhood wants to get rid of her.

### Anti-Immigrant Laws and Double Jeopardy for Women

For young girls, the increasingly more restrictive immigration policies have created a veritable "marriage market" *which kills young women*. To understand how these anti-immigrant laws reinforce women's oppression one must go back several decades. Already by 1974 with the world oil crisis and the economic recession, French capitalists decided that they were not going to need more North African labor (which had begun to replace immigrant labor from East Europe and Southern Europe during and after the Algerian War). In 1974, the French state slammed the door in the face of people coming from the ex-colonies exploited by French imperialism. Men who had destroyed their own bodies for the profits of French capitalists were offered 10,000 French francs and a one-way ticket back to North Africa. The French government might have wanted to totally stop immigration at this point, but the European Union exerted pressure regarding the right to family reunion. But it was quite difficult for a worker, who was often unemployed and housed in a dormitory for single men, to prove to the French state that he could provide for the needs of his own family and thus meet the legal conditions for family reunion.

These restrictions and the terrible conditions of poverty forced many families, and especially the women, into clandestinity and into the black market where, if you're lucky, you can find work which is so dirty and so poorly paid that no French person wants it. The majority of women who immigrated to France through family reunion were legally denied the right to work. Thus the French bourgeoisie with its anti-immigrant laws reinforced all the old repressive traditions and the segregation of North African women in



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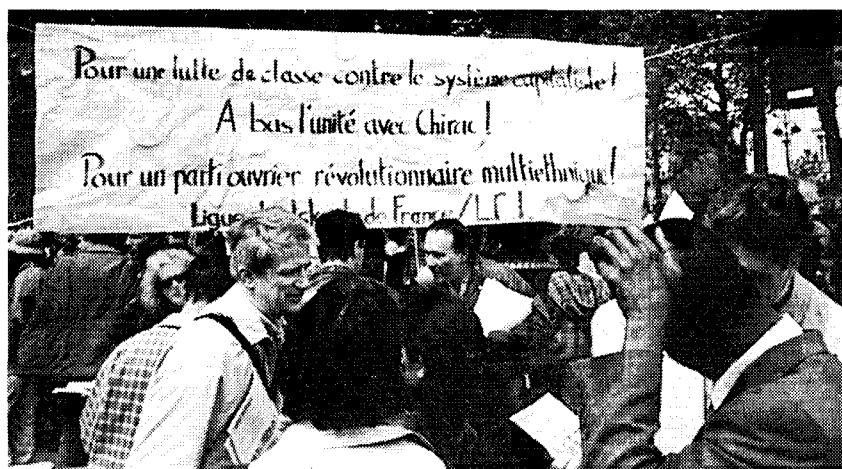
**Concentration camp for Jews in France under Nazi-ally Vichy regime. Thousands were stripped of their French citizenship and deported to their deaths.**

the family home, cut off from society.

Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Pasqua and Debré and Chevènement laws limited residency rights even further and also facilitated deportations. It should be noted that the so-called "left" governments never withdrew the anti-immigrant laws put in place by the right. On the contrary, they escalated the arsenal of legal and police repression against immigrants. It was Mitterrand who declared that France had reached "its threshold of tolerance" for immigrants to justify deportations. It was Jospin and his "security" campaign which escalated police repression against the youth in the suburbs and in so doing paved the way for Le Pen's National Front.

In 1993 there was a significant change in the nationality code with the Pasqua-Méhaignerie law. The nationality code which had automatically given French citizenship to children born in France of foreign parents was abolished. Now youth of immigrant background had to request French citizenship between the ages of 16 and 21. (The law was recently modified again and now a child born in France of foreign parents can become French at the age of 18, but only after bureaucratic procedures which are filled with administrative obstacles.) These laws created a situation such that there is now a generation of young people who were born and raised and educated in France, and who barely know the country of their parents or grandparents, and who often do not even speak their parents' language, yet are stigmatized and declared "not French."

This law had a profound impact. Rejected by two societies, that of their birth and that of their family, and without the possibility to integrate into a society which offers neither jobs nor a future, many youth sought an identity in religion. The discrimination they suffer exists even linguistically. Youth who are born in France are still called "immigrants" or "of immigrant background" or labeled the "second generation" or the "third generation." As an American I assume most everyone is "of immigrant background." And who counts how many generations there are between a Cro-Magnon and



SP-led “left government” of austerity and racism paved the way for electoral gains of fascist Le Pen. On May Day 2002, as fake socialists pushed voting for Gaullist candidate Chirac to “stop Le Pen,” LTF banner called for class struggle against capitalist system, declared “Down With Unity with Chirac.”

Le Pen? (I don't mean to offend the Cro-Magnons, but it's clear that Le Pen is some kind of throwback.) This linguistic discrimination reflects the real discrimination against a population which France *does not want to integrate*, a population which could always be *deported*, as the Jews were, despite their French citizenship. Under Vichy, some 15,154 French people, a majority of them Jews, were stripped of their citizenship to facilitate deportation to the death camps. This history should be remembered in terms of the recent changes in the nationality code.

### Women's Oppression and the Family

How do the anti-immigration laws kill young women of immigrant background who are born in France? Here is the conclusion of Michèle Tribalat's survey in her book *Faire France* [Creating France] (1995):

“The suspension of recruitment of labor has made marriage with a young girl living in France, particularly when she has French nationality, a very attractive proposition. Thus girls who are raised in France too often find themselves captives of an ‘ethnic marriage market’ in which the family itself often has either a financial or moral interest in marrying their daughter to someone seeking to emigrate.”

In other words, life is *slavery* for these girls who are treated as property in human flesh to be bought, sold, mutilated, and sometimes killed to protect the “family honor.” The “honor killing” of Fadime Sahindal, a young Kurdish student in Sweden, has spurred protest and has been widely covered in the press. Sahindal was shot dead by her father in January 2002 for the “crime” of resisting an arranged marriage and choosing her own boyfriend.

Often families take advantage of the school vacations to send their daughters back to their countries of origin: to Africa for excision, and especially to Turkey and North Africa for forced marriages. Regarding forced marriages, the Koran stipulates that Muslim women may only marry Muslim men, whereas a man can marry whomever he wants. Young women who protest this fate are often kidnapped, brutally beaten, and sometimes killed. There is no shortage of books on the subject. In one autobiography of a young woman of Algerian descent who was kidnapped and sent back to Algeria, where she was imprisoned under lock and key in the family home because she had dared to go out with a French man here, the woman extrapolates the larger social context from her direct personal experience:

“Virginity is so important in our world! Above all to preserve the honor of the parents. The entire family honor rests on the virginity of the young daughter to be married. One feels as if

one is dispossessed of one's own body in its most intimate aspects.... One is either a virgin or deprived; there is no other alternative.”

This young woman thought ceaselessly of trying to escape but she realized that the problem was much larger than her own family guardians and brothers who played the role of cops. In Algeria, she explains:

“The police are the guardians of public morality. All the other men also practice surveillance of every act and gesture of women in the street. It's as if all those men were your fathers. Very repressive fathers who collectively guarantee the morality of all the country's daughters.”

—Aïcha Benaïssa, *Née en France, Histoire d'une jeune beur* [Born in France: A Young Beur's Story] (1990)

Elsewhere in Africa, the virginity of young girls and the price they can obtain on the marriage market are assured through genital mutilation. This has nothing to do with a “cultural difference”: female genital mutilation is a barbarous act of violence. In an excision, parts of the clitoris and the *labia minora* are cut off. Infibulation is an even more drastic procedure wherein the *labia majora* are removed and the remaining flesh is stitched tightly together side to side. The vaginal opening is reconfigured as a minuscule orifice only large enough for seepage of urine and menstrual fluid. As you can imagine, this kind of mutilation results in terrible pain, infections, difficult and sometimes fatal pregnancies, not to mention of course the complete destruction of sexual pleasure for a woman. Young girls who protest against this mutilation are often threatened that their own mothers will be shipped back to their countries of origin where they will be repudiated and become public outcasts. There is a high suicide rate among mothers and daughters who seek any escape from this barbarity.

It should be emphasized that women of all social classes, even women from the ruling class, are oppressed by these practices. This shows that the main source of women's oppression in class society is the institution of the family, and that even bourgeois women are oppressed as women. But working-class women are doubly oppressed, and working-class immigrant women suffer triple oppression.

These horrifying practices of female genital mutilation, forced marriages and honor killings show that even a simple, basic democratic right such as that embodied in our fight for “*Full citizenship rights for all immigrants and their families!*” is truly *a question of life or death for women and girls*. These examples also expose the hypocrisy of the French bourgeoisie, which flatters itself as the supposed heir of the ideas of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. What

a lie! With its anti-immigrant and anti-working-class policies the French bourgeoisie reinforces and perpetuates the most savage and bloody practices in history. As Marx realized, we have to sweep away the capitalist system to give reality to the great ideas of the Enlightenment.

In this period of bourgeois attacks against immigrants, we should recall the key role that immigrant labor played in class struggle in France, such as during the Paris Commune of 1871. As Karl Marx said:

"Proclaiming its international tendencies—because the cause of the producer is everywhere the same and its enemy everywhere the same, whatever its nationality (in whatever national garb)—it proclaimed as a principle the admission of Foreigners into the Commune, it chose even a Foreign workman (a member of the International) into its Executive, it decreed the destruction of the symbol of French chauvinism—the Vendôme column."

—Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (1871)

The subjugation of women in Muslim countries is not rooted in some uniquely reactionary quality of Islam, as the imperialists pretend today. Go read any farce by Molière and you'll see that there is a long history of forced marriages in "la belle France" too. Until the power of the church over civil society was broken, at least partly, women's "choices" boiled down to either arranged marriages or being shut up in a convent for the rest of their lives. Women did not even have the formal legal right to work in France without the express written permission of their husbands until 1965! Nonetheless, unlike in the African and North African countries, in France the rise of capitalist property profoundly undermined backward feudal social relations. These were then largely swept away in the great bourgeois-democratic French Revolution, which paved the road for the development of an advanced industrial society. This revolution abolished the monarchy and aristocracy, limited the power of the church and significantly raised the status of women, although many of the legal gains were subsequently taken away as the bourgeoisie consolidated its rule. Capitalism arrived belatedly in the Muslim world, and it arrived with European colonialism which allied itself with the local feudal powers. In the colonized countries and also among the concentrations of immigrants in the imperialist metropolis, capitalism has reinforced barbarous anti-woman traditions.

The Marxist understanding of the material basis of women's oppression is laid out in Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). Engels' book shows how the origin of women's oppression lay in the initial division of society into classes. Under the

"primitive communism" of the old Stone Age, the division of labor between men and women derived from biology (women had to bear and nurse the young) and implied no subordinate social status for women. Technological advances, particularly the development of agriculture, created for the first time a social surplus, leading to the division of society into classes. With the development of classes, the institution of the family became necessary. Engels explains:

"Thus, on the one hand, in proportion as wealth increased, it made the man's position in the family more important than the woman's, and on the other hand created an impulse to exploit this strengthened position in order to overthrow, in favor of his children, the traditional order of inheritance. This, however, was impossible so long as descent was reckoned according to mother-right....

"The overthrow of mother-right was the *world historical defeat of the female sex*. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children."

Thus the origins of the family are completely tied to the inheritance of private property, and it is from this that the question of a girl's virginity and the subjugation of women derive their importance. Engels says:

"It [the family] is based on the supremacy of the man, the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because these children are later to come into their father's property as his natural heirs.... As a rule, it is now only the man who can dissolve it [the marriage tie], and put away his wife. The right of conjugal infidelity also remains secured to him, at any rate by custom (the *Code Napoléon* explicitly accords it to the husband as long as he does not bring his concubine into the house), and as social life develops he exercises his right more and more; should the wife recall the old form of sexual life and attempt to revive it, she is punished more severely than ever."

I want to underline the importance that Marx and Engels gave the woman question. Engels' magnificent book was written as a testament to Karl Marx, who studied the question of the family. Against all the suffocating values of bourgeois society, Marx and Engels studied the whole of human experience, including the history of sexual relations. With our journal *Women and Revolution*, now published as *W&R* pages in the International Communist League's journal *Spartacist*, we try to follow their example: that one must address the totality of human experience if one really wants to change the world and wipe out every instance of oppression and open the road to human freedom in all spheres.

Marx and Engels also had a sense of humor and audacity which we admire. For example, regarding the question of

This pamphlet reprints presentations given by SL Central Committee member Joseph Seymour on the origins of Marxism in the French Enlightenment and in left Hegelianism. Also included are "150 Years of the Communist Manifesto" and "Marxism and Religion."

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A Spartacist Pamphlet

## Enlightenment Rationalism AND THE Origins of Marxism

150 Years of the Communist Manifesto ..... 35  
Marxism and Religion ..... 48

### Marxism and Religion



promiscuity and the bourgeoisie's shame and hypocrisy. Engels wrote:

"And if strict monogamy is the height of all virtue, then the palm must go to the tapeworm, which has a complete set of male and female sexual organs in each of its 50-200 proglottides, or sections, and spends its whole life copulating in all its sections with itself."

Better to be a tapeworm than a young woman finding herself in a forced marriage!

### For Women's Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!

Several organizations have been formed in response to the urgent need to help young women. We spoke with a Turkish group which receives *three to four phone calls per day* from young women who end up in a forced marriage or are threatened with one. I spoke with a group called GAMS (Women's Group for the Abolition of Sexual Mutilation) which was founded to combat the genital mutilation of women but now also does a lot of work to rescue young women from forced marriages. These organizations carry out urgent and sometimes heroic work, but they are weakened by nationalism and sectoralism. Each group is organized on the basis of nationality and sexuality: GAMS for African women, Elélé for Turkish women, the Nanas Beurs for North African women, etc. This national isolation is created by the indifference to these questions on the part of the major left parties and trade unions. While the Communist Party in particular engages in a certain amount of face-

saving social work in municipalities it runs, sometimes assisting desperate individuals, they no less than the Socialists are on the wrong side of the fight to mobilize the whole of the powerful workers movement to act in defense of immigrants and in defense of women. The political abdication of a "leadership" that won't fight on behalf of the specially oppressed means weak unions that don't defend the interests of any of their members and a political climate dominated by racist arguments in the mouths of both the right and the "left."

The isolation of the oppressed and the hopelessness in this society which exists today is the bitter fruit of the left's betrayals. In the 1980s, the youth who composed what was then called the "*beur* movement" (the word "*beur*" itself is slang for "Arab") and their parents had tremendous hope invested in the Mitterrand government. The youth of the *beur* movement marched across the country on foot, from Lyon to the presidential palace in Paris (L'Elysée) to proclaim "We are here!" and to demand equality. There was not one religious slogan in the movement at this time. But the Mitterrand government, which was a capitalist government installed with the support of every left group, except of course our party, the LTF, did not deliver equality to the youth of immigrant background. On the contrary, the Mitterrand government pursued a policy of deportations, restricted the right to family reunion, and launched an augmentation of police repression in the suburbs as the spearhead of an attack against the working class as a whole.

The results of the increase in racist segregation and the betrayals of the left are described by Ahmed Boubeker in *Libération-Lyon* at the very birthplace of the movement for equal rights for youth of immigrant descent:

"Those who knew the *beur* capital between 1981 and 1983 would not recognize the place anymore.... At number 10 Gaston-Monmousseau Street, at the very place where the 'S.O.S. Avenir Minguettes' group which was the initiator of the first *beur* march was located, today one finds a prayer room.... Former militants of the *beur* movement have high hopes...for unity of immigrant youth through faith: 'The next chapter of the history of young Arabs in France will be Muslim or it will not be at all! Don't talk to me anymore about the Beurs, what good was this history, aside from making a few Catholics cry and allowing the Jews to sell a few buttons? The truth is that unhappiness comes from living a Western lifestyle, while Islam is the heritage which makes us invincible!'"

—cited in Gilles Kepel, *Les banlieues de l'Islam* [Islam's Neighborhoods] (1987)

The French bourgeoisie plays the classic game of "divide and conquer" by using anti-Arab racism. Especially since 11 September 2001, we have been bombarded by the media with tales of "Islamic terror networks" in France. First of all, it's necessary to recognize that the real "terror network" is NATO, the United Nations, the American and French imperialist governments. Who tortured civilians in Algeria? Who destroyed and bombed the former Yugoslavia? Who oppresses the working-class neighborhoods and suburbs with an army of police? Who lays off workers and destroys their livelihoods? It's the French bourgeoisie, not a handful of Islamic fundamentalists!

Moreover, the French bourgeoisie has a lot of nerve because they are the ones who deliberately imported Islam into France as a means to police immigrant workers and obstruct Arab-French unity within the working class. The French bourgeoisie used Islam as a bulwark against communism, internationally and also domestically in the factories and immigrant neighborhoods in France. During the 1980s,

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immigrant workers played a leading role in powerful strikes, particularly in the auto industry. The bosses with their yellow company "unions" such as the CSL (Confederation of Free Trade Unions) deliberately utilized religion to segregate and control militants in the factories. The demand for prayer rooms was *never* a demand raised by the union movement in North Africa. But here in France the bosses—through the CSL—pushed this demand. Gilles Kepel, in *Les banlieues de l'Islam*, explains:

"Putting in place an Islamic structure inside the factories presented several advantages for management, whose short-term perspective was to maintain social peace and productivity until these workers could be replaced by robots. It strengthened the adherence of Muslim workers to the company spirit; they recognized that the company allowed them to practice their religion. This created a new kind of intermediary between management and workers, which undermined the monopoly of trade-union representatives.... The demands to open prayer rooms could therefore be satisfied because they were perceived as a means to advance 'company spirit,' a social consensus between labor and management."

While with one hand the French bosses pushed Islam in the factories, with the other hand the bosses' media denounced North African strikers in the big strikes in the early 1980s at Citroën, Talbot and Renault as "ayatollahs in the factories." The policies of the left and the trade-union leaderships were equally gross. Instead of organizing working-class unity in struggle against the bosses and the Mitterrand government, the rotten left capitulated to the government they had brought to power and left the immigrant workers isolated. Indeed, "Socialist" prime minister Pierre Mauroy denounced a strike at Renault as the work of "*mujahedin*"!

This indifference to racial oppression stems directly from a perspective of *class collaboration*. The French left and the trade-union leadership look for allies in the French bourgeoisie (this year they even looked to and voted for Chirac!) instead of organizing the most oppressed workers here in France as a key proletarian sector and best ally of the French workers themselves. One comrade told me of a recent strike in the post office for workers from the French colonies and overseas territories. Since she wanted to defend the interests of her co-workers, of course she went on strike too, but the next morning her trade-union leadership told her that she did not have the right to go on strike and would not be protected by the union because that strike was *only* for the workers from the colonies and overseas territories! And so the trade-union tops bring the divide-and-conquer racist politics of the bosses into the workers movement itself.

In the industries where immigrant workers are exploited and manipulated as a reserve army of labor, such as the construction trades, what's needed is a campaign to organize these immigrant workers and include them in the class struggles in defense of all the workers who fight against the same capitalist state and the same bosses. An undocumented worker (*sans-papiers*) would find himself much more capable of fighting in his own interests and refusing to be manipulated as a strikebreaker if he had a CGT card, behind which stands the power of tens of thousands in the French workers' movement. Genuine solidarity with the *sans-papiers* is not



L'Humanité

**March of striking Citroën auto workers, May 1982. North African immigrant workers took the lead in militant strikes throughout auto industry but were sold out by class collaborationist union misleaders in the service of Mitterrand government.**

an annual demonstration with movie stars, but the real equality and solidarity which comes from unity in class struggle.

The treacherous leadership of the French workers movement capitulated in the face of Islamic reaction, which particularly targets the most militant North African workers—to say nothing of what it means for a woman worker to have mullahs in her workplace! In the 1980s, the CGT and the Maoists brought out leaflets where each accused the other of being bad Muslims and eating during Ramadan! The CSL was not denounced for being the bosses' union and outside the workers movement but because it was "controlled by the Zionists"! And at the same time that the CGT and the French Communist Party capitulated to Islam and anti-Semitism imported by the bosses into factories in France, their sister party in Iran, the Tudeh, gave its full support to the Khomeini government. There, the French CP and Tudeh applauded the repression against the leftist Fedayeen, just two years before Tudeh was in its turn eliminated by Islamic reaction!

The problem is that the organizations which lead the French workers movement aim to administer capitalism, not destroy it. That is why they continue to capitulate to and justify racism, because racial oppression is a fundamental aspect of French capitalist rule. The strikes which were in their majority composed of immigrant workers were isolated and so more easily broken by the capitalists, as in the Flins auto strike in March 1995. On the other hand, public sector strikes (such as the enormous strike wave in December 1995) were not extended to the private sector with its powerful layer of immigrant workers.

Despite unemployment and layoffs, immigrant workers and their children still occupy a central position in French production. They are also a living link with workers in Africa and Asia. Far from being merely "oppressed victims," these immigrant workers possess social power which is key to making a revolution. What's necessary is a revolutionary leadership, a tribune of the people, which fights against the daily racist terror in the suburbs, which fights for jobs for all,



Harlinque-Violet

**Adult literacy class in the USSR, early 1920s. Bolshevik Revolution opened the road to literacy, emancipation from social backwardness, integration into political and economic life for women in the early Soviet Union.**

especially for the youth of immigrant background, which fights for women's rights, including against forced marriages, against excision, and for the right of free abortion on demand. We are dedicated to the construction of a revolutionary party and our beacon is the experience of the Bolshevik Party and the Russian Revolution of October 1917.

### Women and the Russian Revolution

How do we get out of this situation? Returning to Engels' *Origin of the Family*, we find:

"We can already see from this that to emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labor and restricted to private domestic labor. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time. And only now has that become possible through modern large-scale industry, which does not merely permit of the employment of female labor over a wide range, but positively demands it, while it also tends towards ending private domestic labor by changing it more and more into a public industry."

Envisioning the socialist revolution, Engels writes:

"With the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, the single family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public affair; society looks after all children alike, whether they are legitimate or not."

The Russian Revolution fought to put these ideas into practice. Women were given immediately the right to vote (a right which American women were granted in 1918 in response to the Soviet example, and which French women did not get until 1944!). All laws against homosexuals were abolished. The power of the church to control marriages, legitimize births, etc. was abolished. The very conception of "illegitimacy" was abolished. Recognizing that the family cannot simply be abolished, but must be replaced by collective social institutions, the Bolsheviks implemented measures to begin this work immediately, insofar as they were able under the conditions of poverty, inherited social backwardness and civil war in the early Soviet Union.

Women's liberation is not something that can be accomplished simply by passing new laws. It was necessary to change the material conditions of life and to find the resources

to do so. Lenin was very conscious of this, above all for the work in the Soviet East where women were veiled and oppressed by Muslim traditions. These traditions themselves were rooted in material conditions. In the old society, water and land rights were linked to marriage, for example. A man who possessed more wives therefore possessed more land too. "Land to the tiller" was a means of liberating women from polygamy and forced marriages, yet these were not changes that could be accomplished by decree or overnight.

Many Bolshevik women, under the direction of the Zhenotdel (Department of Working Women and Peasant Women) donned the veil themselves to go among the women of Soviet Central Asia, to educate and liberate them. It was extremely dangerous work and many Bolshevik women organizers were murdered. That was the reason why the new workers state reinstated the death penalty, explicitly against "anti-feminist murders," which were declared "counterrevolutionary crimes." The creation of a planned, collectivized economy permitted the workers state to invest the surplus from the more advanced west in the more backward east and thereby begin to lay the basis for the equality of peoples in the Soviet Union. This is clearly seen when one looks at the vital statistics in the republics of the former Soviet Union on one side of the border and compares them with Afghanistan on the other side of the border. On the Soviet side, women were no longer imprisoned in the veil, they were literate; on the Afghan side of the border they were largely illiterate and the statistics for infant mortality and life expectancy were dramatically different on the two sides of the frontier. Of course with capitalist counterrevolution, all the old crap is returning to the former Soviet republics, where women are the first and foremost victims of the economic devastation and political reaction which accompany capitalist rollback.

As Trotsky said in a 1924 speech at the Communist University for the Toilers of the East at the time when the Bolshevik power was bringing the perspective of women's liberation to Central Asia: "There will be no better comrade in the East and no better champion of the ideas of revolution and communism than the awakened workingwoman." We say that there will be no better fighters for the class struggle and the socialist future, here and on the other side of the sea, than immigrant women. ■

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# Women and Revolution



## Racism, Sexism, Religion and Anti-Muslim Bigotry

# Women and Immigration in France

*This article is edited and expanded from a talk by comrade Alison Spencer presented at a public educational of the Ligue Trotskyste de France on 16 May 2002. Also presented at the educational was a talk on "Trotskyism, What It Is and What It Is Not" (published in Le Bolchévik No. 160, Summer 2002) which, taking off from the French presidential elections, traced the history of the struggle for authentic Trotskyism against revisionism and class collaboration. Comrade Spencer's talk was reprinted in Le Bolchévik No. 161, Fall 2002.*

The French utopian socialist Charles Fourier explained that the condition of women in society is a very precise means of evaluating to what degree a society has been purged of social oppression in general. Right now in France, some 70,000 young women are threatened with arranged marriages. Some 35,000 young women suffer female genital mutilation or are at risk of being mutilated. These figures were released in January 2002. To give an idea of the escalation of women's oppression, as a measure of the general level of oppression in this society: ten years ago figures showed that some 10,000 young women were threatened with female genital mutilation—that's an increase of 250 percent in ten years. By Charles Fourier's index, these figures show an alarming regression and a real intensification of social oppression in this country.

This society which dons the robes of "liberty and equality" is a real hell for young girls and women of immigrant backgrounds above all. Female genital mutilation and forced marriages are not overtly apparent. These are the terrors and mortal threats which occur inside the family home. But one can easily observe the escalation of women's oppression and the growth of religious influence with the increasingly common appearance of the veil. There are no figures on this but



AP  
French state's racist Vigipirate campaign in action: cops storm Paris church, drag away immigrants for deportation, August 1996.

one sees the veil commonly on the streets, and more and more one sees the Islamic *chador* (rather than just the headscarf) which symbolizes the total segregation of women from society and their subjugation in the family.

We say that democratic rights are indivisible and that an injury to one is an injury to all. I will explain how this aggravation of women's oppression is directly related to the anti-working-class, anti-immigrant policies of the French state, which for years has been run by a so-called "left government." But first of all we have to look at the roots of the expansion of religious influence and anti-woman practices.

### The Headscarf and the Republic

In 1989, in the midst of celebrations of the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, three girls turned up at high

*continued on page 30*

