

1917

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

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STEVEN HIRSCH—POLARIS

U.S./UK Troops Out Now!

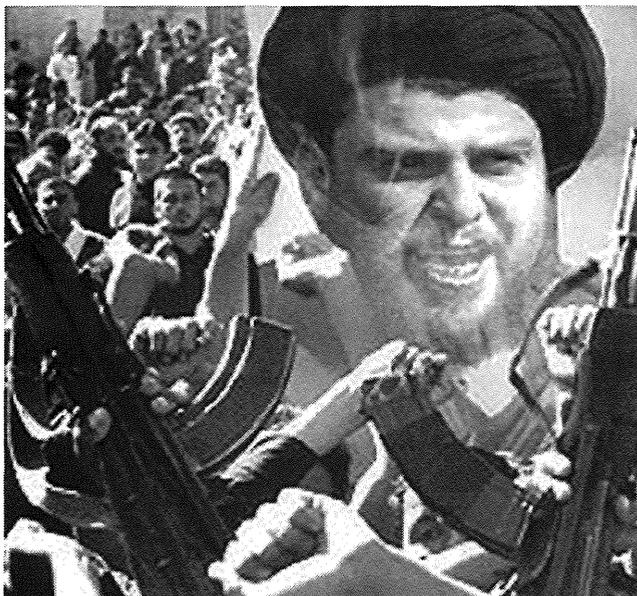
Iraq: Imperial Overreach

*"All causes shall give way: I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er."
—Macbeth, Act III Scene IV*

In this passage from Shakespeare's tragedy, Macbeth, contemplating his trail of murderous havoc, decides he is too deep in blood to go back, and that he can only extricate himself by plunging forward. The American ruling class regards its Mesopotamian misadventure similarly. The conquest of Iraq is a huge, bloody, high-stakes gamble for world supremacy that has thus far only revealed the limits

of U.S. military power, undermined its diplomatic leverage and dissipated whatever moral capital "the world's greatest democracy" had accrued as the victim of the horrific attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001. Anger at the ravages of the U.S. colossus is cutting into international sales of American brands, while in the Middle East Osama has suddenly become the most popular name for baby boys.

The official rationalization for the unprovoked attack on Iraq has morphed from preemptive self-defense against non-existent Iraqi "weapons of mass destruction" into a



BAHRAIN TRIBUNE

Sadr supporters rally in Najaf, August 2004

burning desire to “liberate” benighted Iraqis and bring peace and democracy to all the peoples of the Middle East. But the real reason has always been obvious: Iraq is to be the linchpin in a system of “democratic” vassal states through which Washington hopes to control the oil riches of the Middle East, thereby cementing U.S. hegemony over all potential rivals in a “New American Century.” The U.S. is constructing a chain of permanent military bases across Iraq and plans to employ 3,000 people in its Iraqi embassy, which is projected to be the largest overseas American diplomatic installation anywhere.

Everything went well...at first. The rapid, low-cost victory scored by the U.S. military over Saddam Hussein’s army, coming only a year-and-a-half after its earlier success toppling Afghanistan’s Taliban regime, made a major impression internationally. This was of course all part of the plan—the devastation of Iraq was intended to “shock and awe” the rulers of other neo-colonies who might be tempted to defy their patron. Muammar Gaddafi, the populist Libyan leader once demonized as the “mad dog of the Middle East,” is today a poster boy for Washington’s “War on Terror.” As soon as sanctions were lifted, Royal Dutch Shell rushed to sign a \$200 million exploration deal with Libya, while U.S. oil majors, including Occidental Petroleum and ConocoPhillips, are also planning a return to the Libyan oil fields they once controlled.

But since toppling Saddam Hussein’s regime, little has gone right for the “liberators.” The grotesque lies about the supposedly imminent danger posed to the U.S. by Iraq had to be officially repudiated along with the ludicrous claims of a link between the Ba’athist regime and Al Qaeda. The notion that Iraqi resistance to U.S. occupation somehow itself provides justification for the occupation has not proved particularly persuasive outside the U.S. Bible belt. Support for Bush Jr.’s “war of choice” is falling as it continues to drag on. Most Americans who support the president’s policy do so out of ignorance. The 8 November 2004 *New York Times* reported that a University of Maryland poll revealed that more than two-thirds of Bush voters believed there was “clear evidence” of Saddam Hussein’s collaboration with Osama bin Laden. In fact, their only connection was that

both were nurtured and equipped by the U.S.

It is significant that, at the outset, there was more opposition to the attack on Iraq than any previous military action in U.S. history. Tens of millions of Americans saw the “war” for what it was: a brutal colonial rape. The continuing stream of casualties belies the preposterous insistence by the Bush administration that everything remains on track. Domestic opposition to the entire criminal enterprise seems likely to grow as time goes on.

In the 1991 UN-backed war on Iraq, the 1999 assault on Yugoslavia and the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the rulers of France and Germany calculated that they had more to gain by following America’s lead than by opposing it. But this time they drew the opposite conclusion. The U.S. remains far more powerful than its rivals, particularly in military terms, but its economic position is declining. This is reflected in a trade deficit currently running at \$600 billion a year and the Bush administration’s reckless policy of spending some \$400 billion a year more than it takes in. This points to serious trouble on the horizon, especially if the bid for direct control of the energy resources of the Middle East fails. If it succeeds, the American bourgeoisie will recoup its investment many times over—but if the U.S. proves unable to subdue Iraq and consolidate control of the region, its decline relative to its imperialist rivals will dramatically accelerate.

The imperialist world order today increasingly resembles that of pre-1914 Europe, when rivalries between major powers gradually escalated until they eventually exploded in a savage conflagration that killed more than 20 million people. In the midst of that hellish bloodbath, Vladimir Lenin, leader of the October 1917 Russian Revolution, observed:

“Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which

continued on page 7

Contents

Iraq: Imperial Overreach	1
No to the <i>Hijab</i> Ban!	3
Anti-Fascist Protest in Wellington	15
‘Bolivarian’ vs. Proletarian Revolution	16
ICL & the Russian Question	18
No to ‘Lesser Evilism’	27
Canadian Federal Election	30
On Combating Religion & Social Backwardness	34
Capitalism & Terrorism	40

1917

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For the Separation of Religion & State: No to the *Hijab* Ban!

When French schools reopened in September 2004 after summer vacation, a new law took effect prohibiting students from wearing the *hijab* (female Islamic headscarf). Under the pretense of defending the secular character of public education, the law banned the "conspicuous" display of any religious symbol, including large Christian crosses, Jewish yarmulkes and Sikh turbans. Despite the legislation's formal evenhandedness, its real aim is to curb the growing influence of Islam among France's Arab minority.

French school administrators have been waging an intermittent campaign against the *hijab* for years. In October 1989, three Muslim junior high school students in Creil were suspended for wearing headscarves. They were subsequently reinstated after the *Conseil d'Etat* (Council of State—an institution the French government consults on legal issues) ruled that wearing the *hijab* in school did not in itself contradict the secular character of public education so long as it was neither "ostentatious" nor an act of "pressure, provocation, proselytism or propaganda."

The current ban grew out of a controversy that erupted in October 2003 when two sisters, Alma and Lila Lévy, were suspended from their high school (*lycée*) in Aubervilliers for wearing the *hijab*. Their father, Laurent, a Jewish atheist who acts as a lawyer for an anti-racist group, opposes the veil, but believes his daughters (whose mother, though born to a Muslim family, never practiced Islam) should have the right to wear the *hijab* to school. The Lévy sisters claim to have learned about Islam from their maternal grandparents, and made it clear that they donned the headscarf to protest anti-Muslim racism. They also said they "would never wear it in a country where it's obligatory" (*Libération*, 22 September 2003).

According to Education Minister François Fillon, at least 48 students have been expelled since the new law came into effect (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 20 January). On 6 November 2004, BBC News reported that three Sikh boys had been suspended for wearing turbans. There have been no reports of the legislation being used against Christian or Jewish students.

The ban on the *hijab* comes at a time of rising xenophobia in Western Europe as immigrants, asylum-seekers and visible minorities are increasingly scapegoated for the effects of capitalist irrationality. People of Middle Eastern origin are particularly at risk due to the global imperialist "anti-terror" scare. In the Belgian city of Antwerp, police have dusted off an archaic law banning carnival-goers from wearing masks in order to harass Muslim women who cover their faces in public. "If you put on a Mickey Mouse mask and you start walking around in Antwerp," asserted police commissioner François Vermeulen, "you will be stopped by the police. It's that simple. It's not only women in a burka [a full-length body covering] or a headscarf and a veil" (BBC News, 31 January). But in fact this measure, like the French ban, is aimed at persecuting Muslims, who are seen by the racist guardians of capitalist law and order as enemies within the gates of "Fortress Europe."

State-sponsored anti-immigrant hysteria and Islamophobia



PASCAL ROSSIGNOL—REUTERS

Lille, January 2004: Muslim youth protests *hijab* ban

are fueling the growth of dangerous far-right organizations across Europe. In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the fascist National Front, placed second in the preliminary round of the 2002 presidential election, and won the right to square off against conservative Jacques Chirac in the final round.

The French government is currently pursuing a vicious campaign to deport *sans papiers* (workers without official papers). Under the guise of "counter-terrorism," immigrants in France (particularly non-white ones) are increasingly subject to arbitrary "security checks," arrests and deportations under the racist *Vigipirate* plan. For people of color in France, the promise of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" made by the French Revolution remains a bitter joke.

The ban on the headscarf in schools has had the predictable effect of promoting anti-Muslim bigotry. One physician in Paris, professing concern for "human and women's rights," announced he would no longer accept patients wearing the *hijab* because "extremism has led to many crises the world over" (IslamOnline.net, 24 January 2004). On 21 December 2004, five women wearing headscarves were refused entry to an official ceremony in the Seine-Saint-Denis prefecture at which three of them were to receive their natu-



The Lévy sisters

ralization decrees (*Le Monde*, 18 January).

Jérôme Rivièrè, a deputy from the governing conservative *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP), claiming to be concerned about France's secular character, cynically commented: "We don't have a problem with religion in France. We have a problem with the political use by a minority of religion" (BBC News, 11 February 2004). Yet professed commitment to secularism has not prevented the UMP government, like its predecessors, from lavishly funding private religious schools:

"Despite France's insistence that secularism must govern French schools, there are exceptions. France spends billions of dollars a year to finance private religious schools, most of them Catholic and mostly to pay teachers' salaries, for example. Private religious schools that receive state financing are required to follow the national curriculum strictly, but policing by the state is not universal. For example, at the Merkaz Hatorah School for Orthodox Jews in the Paris suburb of Gagny, which receives state money and was vandalized in an arson attack last November, evolution is taught as a theory, not as fact."

—*International Herald Tribune*, 11 February 2004

France is home to five million Muslims, more than any other country in Europe. In the 1960s, faced with a labor shortage, the French government, which today views its Arab minority as a surplus population, encouraged citizens of its former North African colonies to seek a better life in the imperial metropolis. Forty years later these immigrants, as well as their children and grandchildren, are still largely unassimilated in French society—chiefly because of official and unofficial racism. Living in substandard housing, con-

centrated in suburban ghettos, France's Arab minority faces discrimination in employment and education, and is constantly harassed by racists in and out of uniform. In some areas their rate of unemployment is as high as 40 percent.

Historically, France's largely secular North African minority tended to support the parties of the reformist left. But the appalling record of anti-immigrant chauvinism of both the Socialist and Communist parties has taken its toll. In one of the most infamous cases, the Communist mayor of Vitry-sur-Seine, Paul Mercieca, had an immigrant hostel bulldozed in December 1980. The growth of radical Islam among France's Arab population, although exaggerated by racist politicians, is real, and can largely be attributed to the repeated betrayals of social democrats and Stalinists.

The Left and the Hijab

Revolutionary socialists oppose all discrimination. We defend the right of anyone to wear *hijabs*, turbans, skullcaps, crosses or whatever else they wish. While Marxists are atheists, we uphold the right of people to practice the religion of their choice, just as we support the right of gays and lesbians to exchange wedding vows without endorsing the institution of bourgeois marriage. Socialists do not pretend there is anything progressive about religious obscurantism—whether Islamic, Judaic, Christian or Zoroastrian.

Revolutionaries champion the complete social equality of women and recognize that the *hijab* (like other forms of the veil) is a symbol of female subjugation. (The term "*hijab*" is derived from the Arabic word "*hajaba*," meaning "to hide from view.") The Islamic reactionaries who forcibly impose the veil on women regard females as little more than chattel slaves who should be excluded from full participation in social life. While the veil is an emblem of misogynist reaction, banning the *hijab* can only reinforce the impression among Muslim youth in France that radical Islam is the only viable alternative to the racist status quo.

This elementary fact is denied by various self-proclaimed Marxist organizations, including the Worker-communist Party of Iran (WCPI), an émigré group whose cadres were viciously persecuted by Iran's reactionary theocrats. The WCPI insists that its support for the ban "has nothing to do with supporting the French government and everything to do with defending progressive human values," and claims:

"The ban is pro-secularism not a restriction of religious freedoms and beliefs: a ban on conspicuous religious symbols in state schools and institutions is but one step toward secularism or the separation of state and religion."

—"Unveiling the Debate on Secularism and Rights,"
19 January 2004 (*WPI Briefing* No. 129)

The French bourgeoisie's imposition of a dress code on youth is not a step toward "the separation of state and religion," but just the opposite. The *hijab* ban is a serious infringement of religious freedom. In supporting the ban, the WCPI lends credence to the cynical professions of concern about "democracy" and "human rights" by the racist rulers.

In embracing the notion that the imperialist state can be wielded as an instrument for social progress, the WCPI treads the well-worn path of "evolutionary socialism" pioneered by Eduard Bernstein in the 1890s. The fact that

many of their cadres were tortured and murdered by the Islamic Republic of Iran is no excuse for supporting the French imperialists' ban, but it at least explains the WCPI's subjective motivation. The same cannot be said of *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO), the largest ostensibly Trotskyist group in France, whose supporters scandalously demanded immediate sanctions against the Lévy sisters (*Le Monde*, 9 October 2003). LO claims that:

"To ban the veil at school is to allow young women who do not want to wear it to resist family pressures, pressures from fundamentalists and chauvinists and aid their struggle."

—*Lutte Ouvrière*, 6 February 2004).

In reality, schoolgirls denied a public education because their families compel them to wear a *hijab* will only be able to continue their studies through "home-schooling" or in an Islamic institution.

The position of the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (LCR—leading section of the moribund United Secretariat) on this question has been, if anything, even more contemptible than that of LO. While advancing the slogan "neither the law nor the veil" in *Rouge*, their weekly newspaper, an LCR member who teaches at the Lévy sisters' school explained that, while it would be preferable to find a way to avoid expelling them:

"We also don't want to exclude sanctions if a dialogue isn't possible. The problem is that these two students are going much further than the dozen other cases we have at this establishment. They're pursuing a militant course of action."

—*Le Monde*, 9 October 2003

To their credit, members of the LCR's youth group, the *Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires* (JCR) seem somewhat less averse to "militant action." The JCR helped organize a rally in support of the Lévy sisters at their school. One JCR member, Xavier Chiarelli, commented:

"We think that it's necessary to fight alongside veiled girls. We don't approve of the oppression of which they are the victims, but we think the main enemy is the dominant class. In the long run, we hope to convince them that the headscarf is not a means of emancipation."

—*Ibid.*

The LCR's gross hypocrisy on the *hijab* ban undoubtedly involves petty organizational calculations concerning its unity maneuvers with LO. Benoît Hubert, an LCR candidate on a joint LO-LCR electoral list for the 2004 regional elections, was forced to step down because of his participation in a Marseilles demonstration against the ban (*Le Monde*, 7 February 2004).

The British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which has "unity" notions of its own for the LCR, has come out flatly against the ban. Like the LCR, the SWP's policy is crassly tailored to fit its opportunist appetites, which on this issue happen to run in exactly the opposite direction. Instead of adapting to Islamophobic prejudices in France, the SWP is angling for political support from Muslim clerics in Britain for "RESPECT," a multi-class electoral project that the supposed revolutionaries of the SWP leadership hope will somehow provide them with an entrée into big-time parliamentary reformism. In an attempt to square this circle, the SWP has taken to floating the notion that Islam is a potentially progressive social force. This is spelled out in an article on the *hijab* controversy in a recent issue of *International Socialism Journal* (Spring 2004, No. 102). The author, Antoine Boulangé, who along with other French SWP sup-



RALF BRAUM

Islamic school in Frankfurt

porters currently makes his political home inside the LCR, proposes that:

"Islam is not the threat many would have us believe. What characterises any religion is its ambiguity. It is a tool of domination for those who run the system. But it can be a tool of resistance for the oppressed."

While conceding the possibility that "young women who wear the headscarf are oppressed," Boulangé suggests:

"Young women can use the headscarf as a means of liberation despite being in other respects dominated. This is not to idealise the role played by religion but to show that religion, for all its being a tool of domination, can play a role in forging an identity—it can be a means of resistance in a racist society where immigrants and Muslims are oppressed."

Some young Muslims in France undoubtedly wear the headscarf to protest against racist oppression, like the Lévy sisters. But it hardly follows that, by embracing this symbol of misogyny and reaction, they take a step toward liberation.

Sharia Courts in Canada

Many of the issues involved in the *hijab* ban are posed, from a different angle, in Ontario, Canada's most populous province. The Ontario government recently decided to give *sharia* tribunals the same rights that Christian and Orthodox Jewish religious bodies were granted under the 1991 Arbitration Act, and permit them to make legally-binding rulings on questions of divorce, inheritance and other dis-



Nigerian *sharia* court sentenced Amina Lawal to death by stoning for 'adultery.' Her conviction was subsequently quashed in September 2003

putes normally adjudicated in family courts.

Sharia law, the product of more than a thousand years of Muslim canonical law, is derived from the *Qu'ran* (the Islamic scripture) and the *Hadith* (practices of the prophet Mohammed). The various denominations of Islam have differing interpretations of *sharia*, ranging from relatively liberal to extremely reactionary. But what they all have in common is a belief that women are innately inferior to men.

While the use of clerical courts in mediation requires the agreement of both parties to the dispute, the reality is that women in devoutly religious communities are subject to enormous social pressure from friends and family to put their faith in their spiritual patriarchs. This is particularly true of immigrants—a category that includes most Muslim women in Ontario—many of whom are already extremely socially isolated.

The introduction of *sharia* courts is hailed by assorted liberals and social democrats as an example of the tolerance and generosity of the Canadian bourgeoisie's policy of "multiculturalism." In reality, clerical courts are a tool for reinforcing the isolation of ethnic/religious communities and strengthening the influence of traditionalist religious authorities within them. Charles Demers observed:

"The move towards introducing Islamic courts in Canada, though regressive, is not backward-looking, but the most sinister kind of forward thinking: in a social and legal context in which Muslims have been not only pushed out of the Canadian legal system but held to be its main antagonists, a new umbrella must be set up under which to administer their needs. As legal aid funds disappear,

and legal services once offered to refugees are no longer available, and as Canadian law continues to be practiced along lines which define Muslim communities as exceptions to the rule of law (such as the case of Maher Arar [a Canadian victim of the Islamophobic terror scare who was shipped to Syria to be tortured]), there must be a flip-side to that ghettoization and marginalization. Shariah courts mark the 'opportunity' for some layers of the Muslim community in the face of the 'crises' of a general democratic breakdown and campaign of scapegoating."

—ZNet, 15 September 2004

The various "community" leaders are valued by the Canadian ruling class for their role in maintaining order in their respective bailiwicks, while their ability to deliver a bloc vote at election time ensures that their concerns are listened to carefully by the government of the day.

Some radical-liberal muddleheads worry that opposition to *sharia* courts may in itself amount to a capitulation to Islamophobia and "war on terrorism" bigotry. While true of anyone who would deny Islamic authorities the same rights as Jewish or Christian obscurantists, it is not true of Marxists, who oppose all clerical courts and stand for the complete separation of state functions from all religious entanglements. We are equally opposed to state funding for Catholic, Jewish, Islamic or Scientology schools.

Socialism & Religion

The socialist position on religious freedom was spelled out a century ago by V.I. Lenin:

"Discrimination among citizens on account of their religious convictions is wholly intolerable... Complete separation of Church and State is what the socialist proletariat demands of the modern state and the modern church."

—*Socialism and Religion* (1905)

Religion is strictly a matter of individual conscience—while defending the right of everyone to adhere to any superstition, or none, we adamantly oppose state subsidies, tax exemptions and all other forms of special treatment for religious institutions. In 1844, Karl Marx observed:

"The basis of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion, religion does not make man...*The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly a fight against *the world of which religion is the spiritual aroma.*

"*Religious* distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people."

—"Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction"

Religion, like other forms of false consciousness, can only be eradicated through the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed to transform the hellish conditions of life in class society that predispose so many to seek solace in fantasies of an afterlife, divine retribution, reincarnation and similar nonsense. Only through the expropriation of the means of production and the creation of a new, egalitarian social order on a global scale will it be possible to eliminate all forms of social oppression and the reactionary ideologies they give rise to. The role of Marxists is to organize resistance to capitalist exploitation and all derivative forms of injustice, and to consistently hold high the banner of the communist future—a future without want, without hatred and without fear. ■

Iraq...

continued from page 2

the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed."

—*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*

Lenin rejected the idea that imperialism was merely a "bad policy," and insisted that competition for the redivision of spheres of influence, access to markets, raw materials and cheap labor is an inevitable and necessary product of capitalist development. The various transnational institutions created after the second inter-imperialist world war (the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and World Bank) do not stand above nation-states—they are only operational to the extent that the interests of the big imperialist powers coincide. Capitalist corporations operate around the globe, but virtually without exception they remain nationally headquartered and ultimately dependent on their own capitalist states (in which they are major shareholders) to defend their interests when necessary with tariffs, protectionism, trade wars and, ultimately, shooting wars.

The American seizure of Iraq, while congruent with Israeli interests, was not foisted on the born-again faux-cowboy in the White House by an evil cabal of Zionistneo-conservatives. However poorly executed, Bush's predatory war reflected a longstanding bi-partisan ruling-class policy. It was Bill Clinton's Democratic administration that, in 1998, made "regime change" in Baghdad official U.S. policy. The fear and anger generated domestically in the U.S. by the September 2001 attacks provided a golden opportunity to implement this strategy.

The dozen U.S. military installations now under construction in Iraq are intended to give the Pentagon complete operational autonomy in the region. This is a critical element in a major shift of U.S. military resources from Western Europe to a string of bases stretching from the Middle East to Southeast Asia designed to secure U.S. control of major oil deposits while tightening the encirclement of the Chinese deformed workers' state.

The U.S. used the assault on Afghanistan in 2001 as a pretext for establishing military bases in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. While most American forces have been withdrawn from Saudi Arabia, a long-time Middle Eastern client that is looking increasingly unstable, the U.S. retains bases in Bahrain and Qatar. American zeal for "democracy" does not seem to apply to any of these autocratic regimes, nor to that of Pakistan's General Pervez Musharraf, a critical regional ally who seized power by ousting an elected government. In fact, the U.S. has a long record of working to overthrow democratically-elected governments whose policies displease it—from Iran's Mossadeq in 1953 to Venezuela's Chavez in 2002.

'The Iraqis hate us. They want to kill us.'

In July 2003, a few months after his premature proclamation of "mission accomplished," Bush confidently predicted that his soldiers would make short work of any Iraqi "dead-enders" who dared challenge American control. "Bring them on!" he declared. He got his wish, but it soon became apparent that there is widespread resistance to the U.S. occupation throughout Iraq (except in the Kurdish north, where there is no significant American presence).

In 1991 George Bush the elder, under the auspices of the



COLORADO CAMPAIGN FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Victim of imperialist 'precision' strikes

United Nations, easily defeated Saddam Hussein's vastly inferior Iraqi army, and then proceeded to brutally massacre tens of thousands of defenseless draftees. Bush Sr., seeking to avoid the costly overhead of occupation his son so eagerly assumed, opted to leave the Ba'athist regime in power—confident that Hussein could soon be replaced with someone more pliable.

But despite imperialist bullying, several CIA-organized coup attempts and a decade of UN sanctions (which killed over a million Iraqis, many of them children) Hussein hung on to power. An unintended effect of the UN embargo was to place Iraqi oil beyond Washington's grasp, leaving French and Russian oil companies to sign lucrative contracts with the Ba'athists. George Bush Jr. came to office intending to correct his father's apparent miscalculation by establishing direct control of Iraq.

While claiming to be winning "hearts and minds" and "liberating" Iraqis from the regime the imperialists had backed for decades, American policy, from the initial "shock and awe" whiz-bang bombardment of Baghdad that announced the invasion, has been aimed at terrorizing Iraqis into submission. The stark photographic evidence of U.S. crimes emerging from Abu Ghraib prison created a public-relations nightmare for the White House. Such horrors should not have been surprising, given that the U.S. had renounced the Geneva Conventions and "legalized" the torture of anyone deemed an "unlawful combatant." Seymour Hersh, the American journalist who broke the Abu Ghraib story, reported:

"The roots of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal lie not in the criminal inclinations of a few Army reservists but in a decision, approved last year by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld...

"...the Pentagon's operation, known inside the intelligence community by several code words, including Copper Green, encouraged physical coercion and sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners in an effort to generate more intelligence about the growing insurgency in Iraq."

—*New Yorker*, 24 May 2004

A U.S. soldier in Baghdad summed up what he learned at Fort Hood, Texas prior to deployment: "Cultural training takes 10 seconds. The Iraqis hate us. They want to kill us.



PATRICK BAZ—AFP

U.S. Crusader in Iraq

That's all you need to know" (*Toronto Star*, 26 June 2004). The reasons the "liberators" are hated are obvious. Two decades of war and brutal imperialist sanctions have destroyed most of Iraq's social and economic infrastructure and pauperized its people:

"In much of the countryside, the long-term agrarian crisis—salination, pump failure, silted canals—is worsening as agribusiness imports increase. Rising rural unemployment has swollen the slum populations of Basra and Baghdad. In most towns outside the North, small businesses have been hit by a combination of cheap foreign goods and the breakdown of law and order. Much of Iraq's shrunken 70s-era industrial sector—already skewed towards arms production during the Iran-Iraq war, then targeted by Western bombs in the 1990s—faces not privatization but closure, putting a once-skilled workforce on the street. Two-thirds of the pre-invasion workforce may now be unemployed. As for the future, promotional literature for the country as a regional trade hub—a giant Dubai, handling freight operations for the Greater Middle East—offers Iraqis little more than a distant prospect of integration into the global economy as baggage handlers and warehousemen. A deepening social crisis is concealed behind the daily military communiqués, and the tangible Occupation presence provides a ready target for its frustrations."

—*New Left Review*, July/August 2004

Britain's foremost medical journal, *The Lancet*, reported that at least 100,000 Iraqis perished in the first year-and-a-half since the March 2003 invasion—mostly as a result of coalition air strikes. The risk of violent death for Iraqi civilians is now 58 times higher than it was under Hussein (*Guardian Weekly*, 5 November 2004).

After devastating Iraq with sanctions, bombing and war, the U.S. pledged to "reconstruct" it, with a \$19 billion "Development Fund for Iraq" derived from Iraqi oil revenues and \$24 billion from the U.S. Congress. While most of these funds were allocated to foreign (chiefly American) contractors, by October 2004 only a minuscule percentage had been spent on water, sanitation, health, bridges and roads (*Guardian Weekly*, 22 October 2004).

Most of the money is being spent on the construction of foreign military bases. After "security," the top priority of the occupation authorities has been to rebuild the country's oil pipelines. The failure to restore electrical power, sewage systems and drinking water to what they were prior to the invasion has turned the promises of "reconstruction" into a bitter joke.

Defying the American Leviathan

After parroting the government's repeated projections of imminent victory and announcements of "decisive turning points," the U.S. corporate media has gradually become skeptical about Iraq being subdued any time soon. Predictions that the back of the resistance was broken by Saddam's capture in December 2003 proved wildly inaccurate, as did anticipations that armed opposition would die down after "sovereignty" was formally handed over to longtime CIA asset Ayad Allawi in June 2004. The January election of a new interim Iraqi puppet "government," without the participation of the restive Sunni minority, could also change nothing fundamental.

The sophistication and intensity of resistance to the American occupation has steadily raised the price of the adventure, and this time, unlike in 1991, the U.S. has been unable to offload the costs onto its rivals and vassals. Initially the Pentagon envisaged a swift American victory, followed by the rapid restructuring of the Iraqi economy to maximize profitable investment opportunities for the "liberators." Only when it became clear that there would be no loot to parcel out in the foreseeable future did the U.S. begin to express an interest in a multilateral cost-sharing arrangement with other powers:

"For months, European countries like France, Germany and Russia have vocally opposed American occupation and pushed for a strong, independent U.N. role. But they have inexplicably failed to provide the troops and bodyguards needed for this special force, which will initially require fewer than 1,000 heavily armed soldiers and 60 or more lightly armed bodyguards."

—*New York Times*, 20 July 2004

The unwillingness of other major powers to underwrite Washington's attempts to seize control of the Middle East oil fields is hardly "inexplicable." By voiding contracts signed by Hussein's regime, the U.S. deprived French and Russian companies of access to billions of barrels of oil. Yet, while pleased to see the America humbled, its capitalist rivals also have an interest in preserving some semblance of order in the global economy and fear that an outright U.S. defeat could be dangerously destabilizing.

The Iraqi puppet governments have upheld the occupation authorities' decree granting "coalition" forces, contractors and foreign mercenaries blanket immunity from prosecution. But they have not been immune from the resistance. In April 2004, when insurgents in Falluja killed four American Blackwater Security mercenaries and then displayed their corpses to the media, the imperialist ideologues frothed about the fiendish treatment of these "civilians." Yet when the U.S. military responded by attacking Falluja and killing 600 residents there were no similar expressions of outrage in the American media. However, the televised images of the invaders' wonton brutality, broadcast throughout the Arab world, sparked a wave of revulsion and an upsurge of resistance by both Sunnis and Shi'ites in Iraq.

Alarmed at the growth of dissent among Iraq's Shi'ite majority, U.S. authorities clumsily attempted to silence Moqtada al-Sadr, a prominent opponent of the occupation. After the puppet authorities closed his newspaper and issued a warrant for his arrest, Sadr's "Mahdi army" launched armed resistance, seizing control of the Shi'ite holy city of Najaf and "Sadr City," Baghdad's teeming Shi'ite slum. In some cases Sadr's forces fought alongside the Sunni resistance:

"...during the broad uprising across Iraq in April, a rare confluence of Sunni Muslim and Shi'ite Muslim insurgents took place in Baquba, as the Shi'ite followers of Mr. Sadr tried overrunning government buildings while Sunni fighters battled American forces."

—*New York Times*, 28 June 2004

Popular resentment toward the April 2004 U.S. assaults on Najaf and Falluja ran so deep that even the hand-picked imperialist lackeys on the Governing Council felt compelled to criticize their masters. In the face of a potentially massive explosion of popular revolt, the U.S. pulled back, effectively ceding control of both cities to the insurgents. In a significant indication of Shi'ite resentment toward the occupation, Sadr's popularity soared after his confrontation with the U.S. military:

"A few months ago, only about 1 per cent of Iraqis supported [Sadr]. The latest opinion poll, conducted in late April by the Iraqi Centre for Research and Strategic Studies, found that 32 per cent of Iraqis strongly support him and 35 per cent somewhat support him."

—*Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 1 June 2004

In August 2004, after a bloody assault by U.S. forces in Najaf, Sadr's fighters negotiated an agreement to pull out of the city.

After Najaf, the next U.S. target was the Sunni stronghold of Falluja. Months of devastating air attacks (cynically described as "precision strikes") had forced most of Falluja's residents to flee their homes by mid-October. A few weeks later, immediately after the American presidential election, U.S. troops launched operation "Phantom Fury," a ground assault on the city. Advertised as a decisive blow to the resistance, the real objective was to punish the population for opposing the occupation, and to demonstrate the terrible price of defying the American Leviathan:

"We need to demonstrate that the United States military cannot be deterred or defeated. If that means widespread destruction, we must accept the price. Most of Fallujah's residents—those who wish to live in peace—have already fled. Those who remain have made their choice. We need to pursue the terrorists remorselessly.

"That means killing...We don't need more complaints about our treatment of prisoners from the global forces of appeasement. We need terrorists dead in the dust. And the world needs to see their corpses.

"Even if Fallujah has to go the way of Carthage, reduced to shards, the price will be worth it. We need to demonstrate our strength of will to the world, to show that there is only one possible result when madmen take on America."

—*New York Post*, 4 November 2004

Ralph Peters, the psychotic jingoist who wrote these words, considered that any resident of this city of 300,000 who remained behind (mostly people too old or sick to travel, along with those who stayed to care for them) deserved to die. Most of the American media was not quite so blunt, but the bottomline was the same. In 1999, when tens



Iraqis protest U.S. killers in Falluja, April 2003

of thousands of ethnic Albanians fled Kosovo prior to NATO's air assault, it was presented as evidence that Slobodan Milosevic's policy of "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide." But when the U.S. turned most of Falluja's residents into refugees, it was described as a demonstration of the "humanitarianism" of the U.S. war machine.

The first objective of the U.S. military was to seize or destroy Falluja's hospitals and medical facilities in order to prevent pictures of civilian casualties circulating as they had in April 2004. The fact that this vastly increased the number of civilian fatalities was a matter of indifference for the U.S. war criminals. The Americans flattened much of Falluja but, like the Russians who destroyed Grozny (the Chechen capital), they were unable to score a decisive victory. Most of the resistance fighters had left before the assault. Those who remained behind gave a good account of themselves, killing more than 70 invaders and severely wounding another 300 within a couple of weeks.

The hatred of the occupation among both Sunnis and the long-oppressed Shi'ite majority has prevented the imperialist coalition from cohering even marginally effective police and military auxiliaries. Most recruits to the quivering security apparatus are penniless, unemployed men desperate to feed their families, with little enthusiasm for the occupation or fighting the insurgency. Many of the Iraqi enlistees sent to attack Falluja in April 2004 joined the insurgents, and a significant number also defected in November. It is clear that both the police and military are riddled with resistance sympathizers. At one point, Allawi suggested that as many as five percent of the Iraqi government's troops could be working with the insurgents. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the population wants to be rid of the occupation makes it relatively easy for the resistance to identify and deal with collaborators—during the last four months of 2004 some 1,300 puppet police were killed according to Allawi's interior ministry.

The man charged with subduing Iraq is U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte, who as Reagan's envoy to Honduras in the 1980s played a central role in organizing the contra's murderous campaign against Nicaragua's left-nationalist Sandinista government. Through a combination of terror, brutal repression and economic pressure the U.S. was ultimately successful in removing the Sandinistas from power

and quelling a large-scale leftist insurrection in El Salvador. But Central America in the 1980s differed from Iraq today in one critical way—the Salvadoran and Nicaraguan bourgeoisies were eager participants in Washington's war against the left, whereas today no significant section of Iraqi society, whether Sunni or Shi'ite, has any desire to help the U.S. seize Iraq's oil wealth.

'No Good Options'

The U.S. neo-conservative think-tankers who brain-trusted Bush's Iraq adventure hoped to legitimate permanent military domination behind a democratic facade by playing Kurds, Shi'ites and Sunnis off against each other. But the entire project has proved far more difficult than the "regime change" chicken hawks imagined. The Sunni minority is currently the most hostile to the occupation, but the U.S. is suspicious of Kurdish ambitions to detach their enclave from Baghdad's control, and is also concerned about the growth of Iranian influence among the Shi'ite majority.

President Bush succinctly encapsulated the wishful thinking that guides his Iraq policy with the claim that the January elections would "destroy the myth that the terrorists are fighting a foreign occupation and make clear that what the terrorists are really fighting is the will of the Iraqi people" (*New York Times*, 8 December 2004). The "will of the Iraqi people" is clearly to be rid of foreign occupiers, and the only myth that has been destroyed is that of American military invincibility. Today much of Iraq is effectively controlled by groups hostile to the U.S. Casualties on overland routes are so high ("about 100 deaths and injuries a month," according to the *New York Times*, 15 December 2004) that in many areas essential supplies for the occupation forces, including water, have to be flown in.

While the Bush gang remains officially upbeat, U.S. intelligence estimates about the prospects have been uniformly pessimistic for some time. In September 2004, former Clinton adviser Sidney Blumenthal reported:

"Retired general William Odom, former head of the National Security Agency, told me: 'Bush hasn't found the

WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. Al-Qaida, it's worse, he's lost on that front. That he's going to achieve a democracy there? That goal is lost, too. It's lost.' He adds: 'Right now, the course we're on, we're achieving Bin Laden's ends.'

"Retired general Joseph Hoare, the former marine commandant and head of US Central Command, told me: 'The idea that this is going to go the way these guys planned is ludicrous. There are no good options...'

"Jeffrey Record, professor of strategy at the Air War College, said: 'I see no ray of light on the horizon at all. The worst case has become true. There's no analogy whatsoever between the situation in Iraq and the advantages we had after the second world war in Germany and Japan.'"

—*Guardian*, 16 September 2004

On 22 November 2004, the *New York Times* editorial page complained that after the inconclusive attack on Falluja, "last year's 'mission accomplished' started to look like 'mission impossible.'" Yet the U.S. bourgeoisie has invested so much in the conquest of Iraq, and is so fearful of the consequences of failure, that no major faction has yet begun to call for pulling out.

Strains in the U.S. Military

Unable to create an Iraqi military able or willing to battle the insurgents, and with its "coalition of the willing" auxiliaries melting away, the Pentagon has few options except to intensify pressure on its overstretched forces. Thousands of soldiers in the U.S. "volunteer military" are no longer serving voluntarily. Some soldiers nearing discharge are being forced to choose between re-enlistment and immediate deployment to Iraq, while others are issued "stop-loss" orders extending their tours of duty. As one sergeant complained, "the Army is moving the goal posts on me" (*New York Times*, 1 October 2004).

At the same time, the Pentagon has been reaching deeply into the ranks of the part-time soldiers of National Guard and Reserves, who comprise 40 percent of the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. These are not career military people. They signed up for extra cash and a chance to play soldier in the backwoods on the odd weekend—not to get killed or maimed in a far-off land. Many of them have been sent to Iraq or Afghanistan for a year or more. The facile and cynical blather offered by the Bush administration about spreading "liberty" to heathens provides little compensation for those whose careers and marriages are destroyed, even if they are lucky enough to return home in one piece.

In keeping with its free-market ideology, the Bush administration has gone to the private sector to relieve some of the pressure. Twenty-seven of the 37 interrogators at Abu Ghraib prison were employees of CACI International, a private contractor. The 20,000 employees of the "privatized military firms" in Iraq who earn several times as much as regular troops are not paid by the Defense Department, but rather from the Iraqi "reconstruction" budget.

Marxists recognize that the racial and class inequalities of capitalist society are reproduced and intensified within the imperialist military. For many working-class, black and hispanic youth in de-industrialized "middle America," the armed forces provide the only chance to go to college and escape a lifetime of low-paid McJobs. The forcibly-extended tours of duty, low pay and high risks faced by U.S. troops in Iraq, as well as the ugly reality of waging war on civilians, have lowered morale, sharply reduced enlistments and led

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'Coalition' air strikes have killed tens of thousands of Iraqis and destroyed thousands of homes

to isolated incidents of insubordination. The most publicized instance was the refusal by 18 members of the 343rd Quartermaster Company in October 2004 to carry out a "suicide mission" delivering jet fuel to a U.S. base in the "Sunni Triangle." Confronted by a major social crisis the U.S. volunteer army could begin to disintegrate along class lines, as the draft army of the 1970s did toward the end of the Vietnam War.

Iraq remains a "war of choice" for the U.S. If the costs get too high the American bourgeoisie could decide to throw in the towel. But that would represent a major humiliation for the "world's only superpower." In October 1983, when suicide truck bombers from a group calling itself "Islamic Jihad" blew up the Beirut barracks of both the U.S. Marines and French paratroopers, killing almost 300 colonial gendarmes, the imperialists decided to withdraw. This setback, and a similar one a decade later in Somalia, resonate to this day. During the 2004 election campaign, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney:

"blamed the Clinton and Reagan administrations for teaching terrorists that 'they could strike us with relative impunity' and that 'if they hit us hard enough, they could change our policy.' Mr. Cheney cited the attack on United States Marines barracks in Beirut in 1983, in the first Reagan term, along with the 1993 killings of American soldiers in Somalia..."

—*New York Times*, 7 September 2004

A defeat for the rapacious imperialist predators in Iraq would weaken the Bush administration and the vicious, union-busting social parasites it represents, making it eas-

ier for American workers to defend their pensions, living standards and democratic rights. Revolutionaries call for the immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops from Iraq, and defend all blows struck against the occupiers and their hirelings by the resistance.

While class-conscious workers in Britain, the U.S. and other imperialist countries have a duty to militarily support the Iraqi resistance, Marxists give absolutely no political support to the disparate mélange of reactionaries that comprise the core of the insurgency. The Ba'athist fighters aspire to resurrect a blood-drenched regime that murdered thousands of political dissidents and trade unionists, and savagely oppressed Kurds and Shi'ites. Islamic fundamentalists, both Sunni and Shi'ite, are, if anything, even more unsavory. In Falluja, Najaf, Sadr City and other areas under their control, they have torched movie theaters, beauty parlors and CD stores, and administered public whippings for "crimes" such as selling alcohol. The Islamists have forced women outside of the Kurdish region to don the veil, and in the areas they control there has been an upsurge of misogynist "honor killings" as well as a wave of vicious attacks on Christians and other minorities:

"The gypsies across the Diyala Bridge south of Baghdad have much to fear from the turbulent Shia cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr. Their homestead is one of the few his militiamen have yet to smite. Elsewhere in Baghdad and in southern Iraq, their raiding parties with pickaxes have routed gypsy families by the hundreds, stolen their cars and cash savings in the name of the Shia's religious authority, the



PATRICK BAZ—AFP

U.S. war crimes at Abu Ghraib prison

Hawza, and reduced their homes to rubble. His Shia God-squads have grabbed their girls and shaven their heads."

—*Economist*, 24 July 2004

Class Politics and Anti-Imperialism

In the run-up to the March 2003 invasion, when a revolutionary intervention demanded the defense of Iraq against the impending imperialist attack, most of the world's ostensibly Marxist organizations sought to create "broad-church" coalitions on an explicitly liberal/pacifist basis. In Britain, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) set up the "Stop the War Coalition" (StWC) which sponsored massive demonstrations for clerics, union bureaucrats and an assortment of petty-bourgeois reformists to expound their views. To maintain "broad unity," the SWP, which formally claims to be a revolutionary organization, deliberately enforced a policy of limiting the politics at StWC events to those acceptable to the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie. The main demand of the StWC today is "Bring the Troops Home." Revolutionaries certainly favor the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of all imperialist troops from Iraq. But for the supposedly Marxist SWP, the call to withdraw the troops is the alpha and omega; they are never so gauche as to suggest that the dreams of their pacifist allies of a world without war can only be realized through the pursuit of class struggle and the overthrow of the social system that produces war in the first place.

Most of the supposedly revolutionary left in the U.S. also organized its anti-war activity on a liberal/pacifist basis, with an orientation toward pressuring the Democratic Party to steer U.S. imperialist foreign policy in a more "progressive" direction. However, it is common knowledge that there is no substantive difference between the twin parties of racism and imperialist war concerning Iraq and the control of Middle Eastern oil.

Members of "Marxist" groups that pitch their appeals to the liberal "mainstream" imperialists (i.e., the Democrats) have to develop a high tolerance for absurdity. A case in point is the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), which denounces the "seductive and mis-

leading" logic of lesser-evilism:

"People have, unfortunately, tried this logic many times before. And the results, it must be said, have been uniformly bad. The 'more reasonable' section of rulers may have some concerns, but in the end they share the same class interests and corresponding strategic objectives as the hardcore, and so they ride the thing out...until it runs into too much resistance. Then, and only then, do they fall out. Think Vietnam. Or—again—Nazi Germany."

—*Revolutionary Worker*, 29 August 2004

Yet in the same issue, the RCP assures its readers that voting for Democratic politicians is a minor tactical issue: "Go ahead and vote for Kerry if you feel you really have to, but put your efforts toward recasting this polarization." For these "revolutionary communists," the movement is everything, the class line nothing.

The RCP's anti-war coalition ("Not In Our Name") routinely invites anti-war Democrats like Dennis Kucinich to speak at its rallies. In promoting its "Million Globes Campaign," the RCP made its appetite for a connection with liberal patriots explicit: "We want to build this campaign broadly. It needs to include people who want to 'cleanse the U.S. flag' as well as those who would never under any circumstances fly the U.S. flag." When working the "peace is patriotic" crowd, the RCP is careful to conceal its supposedly revolutionary principles.

As soon as Bush was re-elected, the RCP began pushing "greater evilism," with the panicked announcement that "Bush and his people aren't just ordinary Republicans...They are Christian Fascists..." A fascist takeover of the American state would normally spell big trouble, but *Revolutionary Worker* assures its readers that fortunately, "there IS a leader, the likes of which this country has never seen before, that can lead a mighty struggle to make revolution and remake society. That leader is Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party." The RCP suggests, apparently seriously, that the major issue posed today is: "which vision will prevail: that of George W. Bush? Or Bob Avakian?" A coalition of Bob Avakian acolytes and U.S. flag-cleansers might be a marvelous thing to behold, but at this point it seems a rather unlikely vehicle for solving the fundamental problems of humanity.

The International Socialist Organization (ISO, erstwhile U.S. affiliate of the British SWP) combines adaptation to the Democrats and "revolutionary" phrase-mongering in a slightly different fashion. The ISO demanded, "Kerry Take A Stand: Bring the Troops Home Now!," while, at the same time, proclaiming: "these Islamic movements [in Iraq] need the unconditional support of the U.S. antiwar movement, which must reject any hair-splitting regarding the nature or character of this resistance" (*International Socialist Review*, July/August 2004).

For the ISO, criticism of the anti-working class character of the Ba'athists or the misogynist Islamist fanatics may be "hair-splitting," but revolutionaries have a different attitude—we want to see a government of and by the workers and oppressed, and we are opposed to the restoration of Ba'athist rule or the imposition of an Islamic theocracy. We state openly that the class interests of working people are antithetical to those of petty-bourgeois nationalists, bourgeois "democrats" and mullahs. The ISO's blank check for the Iraqi resistance parallels the political capitulation of their mentors in Tony Cliff's International Socialist Tendency to Ayatollah Khomeini's "Islamic Revolution" in Iran a quarter of a century ago. Offering political support to

the reactionary leadership of the Iraqi insurgency can only disarm the working class, and set the stage for a repetition of the bloody disaster in Iran where, after consolidating power, Khomeini jailed and murdered his former leftist cheerleaders.

The professional confusionists of the British Workers Power (WP) group, who make a habit of embracing mutually exclusive political positions, are running true to form on Iraq. With a representative on the leadership of the SWP's Stop the War Coalition, WP shares political responsibility for the pacifist politics that have dominated anti-war protests in Britain, despite attempts to strike a more leftist pose in its press. In a similar vein, Workers Power talks about the independent political mobilization of Iraqi workers while simultaneously presenting the existing Islamist/Ba'athist resistance as the embodiment of "the Iraqi revolution":

"The US and British media describe Fallujah as a stronghold of Saddam supporters, Islamic fundamentalists or 'foreign' fighters from Al Qa'ida. This is a lie. What has been going on in Fallujah is a popular resistance struggle against the US-dominated occupation forces. It is part of a national liberation struggle—the Iraqi revolution."
—"Imperialist Butchery in Fallujah," 9 November 2004

Although there is mass participation in the resistance, the political leadership of the struggle against the imperialist occupation is dominated by Ba'athists and Islamic fundamentalists. The "Iraqi revolution," if it is to be a genuine social revolution, will require the independent intervention of the working class in a struggle for power. The illusion that a military bloc of Ba'athists and Islamist reactionaries can somehow constitute an agency for carrying out "the Iraqi revolution" is dangerously disorienting.

Throughout the Middle East there is enormous anger at the imperialist predators. In order to channel this sentiment in a revolutionary direction, it is necessary to crystalize a political vanguard rooted in the working class that can link the fight against the occupation to the struggle for an egalitarian social order in which those who labor rule. There is no such party in Iraq today, nor even the embryo of one. Yet the Iraqi working class, traditionally the most militant and best organized in the Arab world, remains a potent factor. Despite being decimated by massive unemployment and the difficulties of operating in the midst of a raging guerrilla war, a number of workers' struggles have taken place under the occupation, including three general strikes in Basra. While most of this activity has been ignored by the corporate media, an article in the *Nation* (28 June 2004) reported that a January 2004 strike by oil workers in southern Iraq successfully beat back an attempt by the Coalition Provisional Authority to lower wages, and forced Halliburton Inc. to abandon plans for replacing Iraqis with foreign workers. In August 2004, according to the *Guardian* (30 September 2004) employees of the Southern Oil Company briefly halted oil exports to protest the American assault on Najaf. These actions, significant in themselves, point to the ability of the Iraqi working class to decisively shape the outcome of the struggle.

The wretched Stalinists of the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), who constituted the historic leadership of the Iraqi workers' movement, have eagerly collaborated with the occupation from the beginning. Its members sat on the U.S.-appointed Governing Council and its successor, the so-called interim assembly created after the farcical June 2004 "transfer of sovereignty." There is a certain



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Protest by the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions and the Union of the Unemployed

bitter irony in the fact that the ICP was savagely persecuted by Saddam Hussein's brutal regime; the Stalinists, acting on Moscow's instructions, played a key role in derailing a potential workers' revolution in 1958, thus paving the way for the Ba'athist dictatorship in the first place (see 1917 No. 26).

The Worker-communist Party of Iraq (WCPI), unlike the ICP quislings, opposes the occupation and denounces collaborators. WCPI cadres have been instrumental in building the Union of the Unemployed in Iraq (UUI), which claims a membership of 150,000. The UUI has organized scores of protests, sit-downs and strike-support actions, and dozens of WCPI organizers have been imprisoned. Yet despite its important contributions, the WCPI's activity is fundamentally flawed by its insistence on equating Islamist insurgents with the imperialist crusaders:

"Groups of political Islam are one pole of the international terrorism. They are fighting against the other pole of terrorism for their share in power. They are one of the two poles of the unfolding dark scenario in Iraq whose first chapters were written by the USA war on the masses of Iraq."

—"Communiqué of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq on: The transgressions of groups of Islamic terrorism against people of Iraq," 26 October 2004

This neutrality in the military conflict between the insurgency and imperialist occupation parallels the WCPI's earlier refusal to defend Iraq against the British and American invasion on the grounds that Hussein's regime was also reactionary.

It is necessary to connect the struggle against colonial occupation to the necessity of expropriating both foreign and domestic capital in order to liberate the peoples of the Middle East from imperialist bondage. A Leninist vanguard party would actively participate in the struggle to drive the imperialist troops out, and would militarily defend all insurgents, regardless of their political stripe, against the occupiers. By championing the rights of Iraq's oppressed ethnic and religious minorities (in particular, the right of the oppressed Kurdish minority to separate) while fighting for equal rights for women and the strict separa-



Toronto, November 2004: IBT contingent in demonstration against U.S. attack on Falluja

tion of mosque and state, a revolutionary party would seek to inspire the millions of Iraqis who burn with anger at the depredations of the murderous imperial crusaders with a vision of a far better future than that offered by an autarkic theocracy.

Imperialism: 'Mortal Enemy of the Proletariat'

The chief lesson the U.S. ruling class has drawn from Iraq so far seems to be that it is necessary to expand its war machine. Recruiting more cannon fodder will mean substantially increasing salaries and benefits, as the political risks of reintroducing conscription are too great. Bush's open-ended "war on terror," which has thus far provided a convenient political pretext for both foreign military adventures and the expansion of police repression at home, is to be paid for by "reforming" Social Security and Medicare and squeezing what little remains of other federally-funded social programs. At the same time, under the banner of defending "freedom," the architects of the new American security state are busy shredding *habeas corpus* and other democratic rights and expanding government surveillance and control over the lives of ordinary Americans.

Capitalism, in its imperialist form, is a social system dripping in blood and filth. The future of the vast majority of the people of the Middle East under imperialism will be an endless series of predatory wars, and desperate, hopeless poverty. The devastation of Iraq is a portent of the future, as each of the major capitalist powers, sanctimoniously deploring "violence" and "terror," undertakes to equip itself with horrendous weapons of incalculable destructive power, and maneuvers for advantage against each other in a prelude to a third inter-imperialist war.

Every setback suffered by the U.S. and British imperialists' attempt to re-impose direct colonial control over Iraq is to be welcomed by class-conscious workers everywhere. But the fundamental problems facing humanity cannot be solved by simply opposing colonialism. The riches of the Middle East will only be used to better the lives of the people of the region, instead of the international oil cartels and their local middlemen, with the revolutionary expropria-

tion of the indigenous Arab rulers and their imperialist godfathers by the exploited and oppressed.

The creation of a revolutionary new social order, committed to the defense of the interests of the vast majority of society, was an immediately realizable prospect in Iraq in 1958. What was missing was a Leninist-Trotskyist combat party, armed with the Bolshevik program of irreconcilable class struggle, capable of politically defeating the Stalinist misleaders and leading the masses in a successful seizure of power.

The world-historic mission of the international working class is to overthrow the tyranny of capital and create a planned, collectivized economy on a global scale in which production is determined by human need, not private profit. Today in the Middle East, amid imperialist carnage and Islamic reaction, this may seem a distant prospect. Nonetheless, it remains the only road to a future free of poverty, hunger and oppression.

The defeat of the U.S.-led crusade to seize the natural resources of Iraq could fundamentally alter the contours of the global political order. Instead of securing America's supremacy over its imperial rivals, the Bush administration's Mesopotamian adventure would be recorded as a reckless gamble that accelerated the decline of the "world's only superpower." The U.S. is not defeated, but its inability to score more than tactical victories over the insurgency, despite its overwhelming military superiority, has revealed that for all its high-tech gadgetry and enormous capacity to inflict death and destruction, the American war machine is not omnipotent.

If the U.S./British axis fails in its bid to control the oil-fields of the Middle East, it would be a victory not only for the peoples of the region, but also for working people in the imperialist countries themselves, even if most of them are not yet politically conscious enough to recognize that, in the words of the great German revolutionary, Rosa Luxemburg:

"Imperialism, as the final phase of life and the highest stage in the development of world political domination of capital, is the common mortal enemy of the proletariat of all countries."

—"Either/Or," April 1916 ■

Smash the National Front!

Anti-Fascist Protest in Wellington

On 23 October 2004, 40 fascists from the New Zealand National Front (NF) held a rally in Wellington. These thugs, who had been responsible for a series of racist attacks on immigrant youth and the desecration of two Jewish cemeteries in the preceding months, sought to present themselves as defenders of the current New Zealand flag and opponents of crime.

A counter-demonstration organized by Multi-Cultural Aotearoa (MCA), an ad hoc anti-fascist bloc, drew more than 2,000 participants. The New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, leftist, Maori and minority organizations as well as prominent actors, artists and other public figures endorsed the protest.

Some elements of the MCA were anxious to avoid confronting the NF, but many protesters felt differently. When the fascists began their provocation, they were surrounded by "scary fairies" who threw insults and glitter in their faces. Somewhat later, the fascists were routed by more traditional means. One of those who did not manage to escape sustained a cut on his forehead and was escorted by the police through a crowd of mocking leftists. Many of the anti-fascists took up the chant initiated by our comrades: "Arab, Asian, Maori, White—Workers of the World Unite!"

The following remarks were made at the MCA rally on behalf of the International Bolshevik Tendency by comrade Adaire Hannah:

Today has been a victory. We have shown the National Front that it has no place here and that no matter how it tries to downplay its true politics, no matter how many little old ladies and men it offers to protect, its members are scum who must be prevented from spreading its filth about race, homosexuality, trade unions and communists.

Right now the National Front is presenting a dual face. On the one hand, flexing its muscle by attacking migrants, and on the other hand, standing for local and national government by trying to disguise its true programme. This dual face is giving the NF some grief as it finds it is difficult to explain away the symbols and programme of fascism. It is vital that we—workers, ethnic communities, communists and gays—remain vigilant and not be lulled into thinking that the National Front is too small or irrelevant or that it is not currently targeting the particular community



KEVIN LIST & ALASTAIR THOMPSON—SCOOP

Thousands protest National Front in Wellington

to which we, as individuals, belong.

We must remember Martin Niemöller's words in 1945:

"First they came for the Communists,

"And I didn't speak up

"Because I wasn't a Communist

"Then they came for me

"And by that time there was no one

"Left to speak up for me."

But we must also remember that fascism has a role to play in capitalist society. When, at some point in the future, the Labour Party and trade-union bureaucrats are no longer able to restrain the working class, no longer able to assist the capitalists to extract even greater profits, then the capitalists will turn to the fascist scum to smash the organisations of the working class. So it is vital that workers today staunchly defend communities from attacks by the National Front, forming defence squads as necessary.

The weaker the National Front is made today, the smaller and less effective it will be as a tool of the capitalist class in the future. It is also necessary for workers to fight for demands such as stopping racist immigration laws, and for a workers' government that will lay the foundations of a society without profit, sexism, racism or poverty. ■

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August Thalheimer and German Communism

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Letter to Fire This Time

'Bolivarian' or Proletarian Revolution?



Chavez addresses Caracas rally, June 2004

The following letter was sent to Fire This Time Movement for Social Justice

27 November 2004
Dear Comrades,

In your recent article, "Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Venezuela" (*Fire This Time* [FTT] September/October [2004]), Hugo Chavez is described as a "revolutionary" leading "the battle for working class democracy and self-determination." We think that you have considerably overdrawn the threat posed by the Venezuelan president and his "Bolivarian revolution" to the capitalist social order.

Venezuelans of course have the right to decide their own fate without interference from Washington or Ottawa. The imperialists have demonstrated time and again that their commitment to democracy in neo-colonies only extends to pliant regimes that do what they are told. The reactionary U.S.-backed coup against Chavez in April 2002 was a perfect example of this.

Important segments of the North American bourgeoisie are hostile to Chavez because they see his government as a danger to the supremacy of the tiny layer of capitalists and landlords who ensure Venezuela's continued subordination to global imperialism. Since coming to office in 1998, Chavez has implemented a modest land reform (transferring some unused and abandoned land from *haciendas* to landless peasants) and has funded an expansion of social programs with revenue from Venezuela's oil industry. As a result of these measures millions of Venezuelans view their "negro e indio" president as a champion of the underdog.

The recognition that capitalist society is characterized by two fundamentally antagonistic social classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, must be the starting point for a Marxist analysis of the situation in Venezuela. Chavez is supported by the "have-nots"—the peasants, the urban poor and important layers of the working class. He also clearly has a base within the armed forces. But Chavez does not pretend that his Bolivarian movement has an anti-capitalist character. He is a petty-bourgeois nationalist who seeks to strengthen the position of Venezuelan capital vis-à-vis U.S. imperialism, while reducing domestic social tensions through easing the plight of the dispossessed. While his populist appeals have alienated the privileged and their hangers-on, his reform program is, in the final analysis, aimed at *rationalizing*, rather than eliminating, the system of capitalist exploitation. Chavez thus stands in the tradition of an earlier generation of left-talking Third World nationalists like Argentina's Peron and Egypt's Nasser.

In the U.S., Ralph Nader can make radical sounding criticisms of the exploiters and their imperial foreign policy, but, as you observed in the same issue of FTT: "Although Nader often denounces the behavior of corporations, he never addresses the root of these problems. He attributes them to everything but the capitalist system itself." Chavez's denunciations of social injustice have a similar character, a fact that has not escaped the notice of more far-sighted members of the corporate elite, as you also pointed out:

"The other factor though is that a group of international corporations who have been doing business with Venezuela for years even before Chavez, in spite of many 'extreme' measures taken by Chavez, prefer to do business with his government. The reason is that they see Chavez government [as a] stable government [that] guarantees the possibilities of investment and making very reasonable profit, while a Venezuela without Chavez would be in chaos without perceivable future, which puts everything in risk."

Unlike Fidel Castro, whose one-party state rests on collectivized (proletarian) property forms, i.e., the expropriation of the assets of the Cuban capitalist class and their imperialist godfathers, Hugo Chavez purports to be wielding the existing bourgeois state (which Marx considered a mechanism of oppression that must be smashed) as an instrument for social justice. When Tariq Ali asked Chavez to sum up his political philosophy, he replied:

"I don't believe in the dogmatic postulates of Marxist revolution. I don't accept that we are living in a period of proletarian revolutions. All that must be revised. Reality is telling us that every day. Are we aiming in Venezuela today for the abolition of private property or a classless society? I don't think so."

—*CounterPunch*, 16 August 2004

Chavez's regime can be compared to the left-talking Provisional Government that came to power in Russia after the Czar was overthrown by a mass popular revolt in February 1917. Initially the Bolshevik leaders on the spot

adopted a policy of supporting the new administration “insofar as it struggles against reaction.” Upon his return from exile, Lenin argued for a very different approach. In his controversial “April Theses” he rejected any support to the government, and advocated a position of intransigent political opposition. His third thesis was unambiguous: “No support for the Provisional Government.” Lenin’s struggle to politically rearm the Bolshevik Party with this program was an indispensable precondition for the successful workers’ revolution in October.

The attempt, in August 1917, by the ultra-reactionary General Kornilov to overthrow Alexander Kerensky, the “moderate socialist” head of the Provisional Government, was in many ways analogous to the April 2002 rightist coup against Chavez. The Bolsheviks formed a united front with Kerensky against Kornilov, but did not change their political attitude to the government:

“Even now we must not support Kerensky’s government. This is unprincipled. We may be asked: aren’t we going to fight against Kornilov? Of course we must! But this is not the same thing; there is a dividing line here, which is being stepped over by some Bolsheviks who fall into compromise and allow themselves to be *carried away* by the course of events.

“We shall fight, we are fighting against Kornilov, just as Kerensky’s troops do, but we do not support Kerensky. On the contrary, we expose his weakness. There is the difference. It is rather a subtle difference, but it is highly essential and must not be forgotten.”

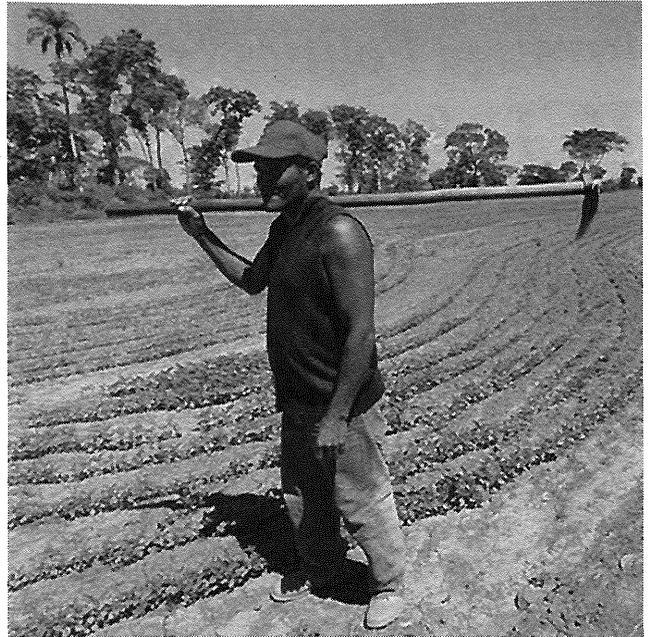
—Lenin, “To the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P.,”
30 August 1917

The distinction Lenin made between *military* and *political* support is an important one. Socialists must bloc *militarily* with Venezuela’s nationalist government against any repetition of the April 2002 coup, or any attacks by the imperialists or their stooges. But, as in Russia in 1917, no *political* support can be given to the administrators of the capitalist state. The complete political and organizational independence of the working class is the absolute prerequisite for proletarian socialist revolution.

The limited land reform implemented so far by Chavez may have angered the big landlords, but it did not significantly change the grossly inegalitarian social structure of the countryside. Three percent of the farms still have 77 percent of the arable land, and according to *Le Monde Diplomatique* (October 2003) there is growing frustration among the peasants at the slow pace of the distribution process under the *Instituto Nacional de Tierras* (INTI). Meanwhile death squads and paramilitary gangs paid for by the big landowners are already operating in the states of Zulia, Barinas, Táchira and Apure. These sinister groups are the vanguard of bloody reaction that threatens the workers’ movement and all the oppressed.

The Venezuelan workers and peasants need to create their own self-defense organizations to deal with this danger. Rather than endlessly waiting for INTI to dole out a few scraps, revolutionaries should advocate that poor peasants and agricultural proletarians elect representative councils, allied with similar formations in the urban working class, to carry out the expropriation of the *terratenientes’* estates and thus break the power of the reactionary landowners. Such a move would surely be viewed sympathetically by soldiers from the countryside.

The Chavez government sometimes refers favorably to the idea of workers’ control in the economy, yet it remains



DAVID ROCKHIND—POLARIS

A squatter on El Charcote, a British-owned cattle ranch

firmly committed to protecting capitalist property. This is an impossible contradiction, because the interests of workers and bosses are fundamentally incompatible—one can rule only at the expense of the other. Recently there have been a series of workplace occupations in Venezuela in response to plant closures and unpaid wages. The creation of democratically-elected workers’ committees in every enterprise, coordinated at the municipal and regional level, and linked to poor peasants’ councils, would create the framework for organizing production and distribution independently of the bosses.

A revolutionary socialist party would advocate the expropriation of foreign and domestic capitalists and the political rule of workers’ councils linked to the organizations of all the oppressed. Rooted in the industrial proletariat of the big cities, a Leninist vanguard party would seek to show in practice, as well as through its propaganda, that only a workers’ government can solve the fundamental problems of Venezuela’s dispossessed indigenous peoples, the urban poor and other oppressed sectors.

To fight for power, the working class needs its own political party. Such a party must be completely independent of *all* wings of the bourgeoisie, including the supposedly “progressive” elements currently backing Chavez. In preparation for its inevitable future confrontation with a resurgent bourgeoisie, the Venezuelan workers’ movement, if it is to avoid the tragic fate of the Chilean proletariat in 1973, must create its own organs of self-defense. It must also actively promote differentiation within the military along class lines and seek to neutralize as many officers as possible.

The social liberation of Venezuela’s working people and all those oppressed by capitalism requires the construction of a combat party armed with the program of intransigent class struggle elaborated by V. I. Lenin in April 1917. This is the only road to workers’ power.

Revolutionary Greetings,
International Bolshevik Tendency

Prestige Politics & Programmatic Confusion: ICL & the Russian Question

The following is excerpted from a forthcoming IBT pamphlet.

In the Spring 2004 issue of *Spartacist* (No. 58), the International Communist League (ICL) characterizes its recent political record as one of "opportunist lunges," "sectarian moralism" and an "increasingly abstract and sterile approach to politics," concluding that: "An inability to deal with the world created by the fall of the USSR, and the consequent retrogression in consciousness, is at the root of the ICL's current crisis." This is a significant admission, given that the leaders of the Spartacist League/U.S. (SL—the ICL mothership) have always claimed a special expertise on the "Russian Question." Capitalist restoration in the Soviet bloc represented a world-historic defeat for the international workers' movement, demoralizing millions of leftists. It produced enormous confusion within the ICL, eroded the self-confidence of its cadre and undermined the political authority of the leadership. But it is not the root cause of the SL/ICL's malaise.

Long-time readers of *Spartacist* may recall a similarly "candid and critical assessment" that appeared a decade earlier in the Autumn 1994 issue (No. 51) following the SL's Ninth Conference, which reported "flare-ups of philistinism," "impressionism," "sectarian posturing," "time-serving" and the "passive and propagandist (at best) or abstentionist (at worst)" appetites of the group's "office-bound leadership." We commented at the time:

"This unflattering self-portrait undoubtedly reflects the thinking of [SL founder/leader] James Robertson, who, from his vantage point of semi-retirement in the Bay Area, can look upon the organization he built with greater detachment. He is obviously not pleased with what he sees. But, precisely because the Spartacist League is his own creature, Robertson cannot provide a plausible explanation of what went wrong."

—1917 No. 15, 1995

The 1994 *Spartacist* piece also attributed the SL's morbid condition to the demise of the Soviet Union, and complained that the victory of counterrevolution "has ushered in a fundamentally new, turbulent and radically different period in world history" for which there are no "close historical precedents to guide our analysis and political line." But the ICL's admitted "inability to deal with the world created by the fall of the USSR" can hardly be explained by the absence of "historical precedents," as the essential issues were addressed by Leon Trotsky in his brilliant analysis of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union.

Unlike the Stalinist Communist Parties constructed on the basis of loyalty to the Soviet bureaucracy, the Spartacist League identified with Trotsky's view of the Stalinist ruling caste in the USSR as an unstable, parasitic and historically transitory formation that functioned as the "organ of the world bourgeoisie within the workers' state." The revolutionary SL of the 1970s combined intransigent Soviet defensism with denunciations of the crimes of the bureaucracy (see, for example, "Stop Stalinist 'Psychiatric' Torture in the USSR!," *Workers Vanguard* [WV] No. 96, 13 February 1976).

During the 1980s, however, the SL leadership began to depart from its Trotskyist program with a series of Stalinophilic gestures. The resulting confusion, combined

with the leadership's subsequent lurch in a symmetrically Stalinophobic direction, accounts for much of the ICL's ideological disarray over the Soviet collapse. Yet why would the cadres of a Trotskyist organization (which the SL was in the 1960s and 70s) swallow such deviations in the first place? The explanation lies in the incremental transformation of the SL from a revolutionary, democratic-centralist organization into a group in which the fundamental organizing principle is unquestioning obedience to the leadership in general, and founder/leader James M. Robertson in particular. The poisoned internal regime of the SL was both the initial departure from Leninism and the framework within which all subsequent deviations developed.

The transformation of the SL took place over several years, during which its internal life was dominated by repeated, and increasingly apolitical, authority fights and purges. By 1982, the predecessor of the International Bolshevik Tendency estimated that:

"the central core of the leadership of the SL is today too consciously cynical to be capable of spontaneous self-reform. The fact that the organizational abusiveness of the regime has developed largely as a means of bureaucratically short-cutting the expenditure of time, energy, cadres and opportunities which is demanded by the repetitive educational process by which a Bolshevik party retains and develops its older members while politically assimilating its newer ones, (not to mention the draining effect of a faction fight) does not make it any less destructive."

—"Declaration of an External Tendency of the iSt"
[international Spartacist tendency], October 1982

We also observed that the "hyper-centralist, paranoid and personalist characteristics" of the SL's internal regime "have reached a point where they call into question both the possibility of significantly enlarging the organization and of reproducing Trotskyist cadres within it."

By the early 1980s, the SL was an organization with an arid internal life in which petty authority fights and witchhunts (inevitably directed from the top) took the place of substantive political discussion and debate. Many cadres were forced out, others got tired and quit, but enough stayed to maintain the SL as a viable player on the American left. Yet pressures generated inside the group were increasingly manifest in the peculiar and frequently obnoxious behavior of its members in their public political activity. The problem persists to this day, despite periodic memos from the leadership instructing members to try to refrain from appearing as "pests."

Loosening the Screws

In recent years the SL leadership has become seriously concerned by difficulties in recruiting and retaining new members. Youth who uncritically accept everything they are told frequently turn out to be of limited value. In an attempt to attract and integrate higher quality individuals, the reins have been loosened somewhat and more emphasis is now being placed on education and persuasion rather than intimidation. At the same time, the leadership is trying to make the ICL's political line more coherent by repu-

diating some of the particularly absurd and outlandish positions taken in the past. While the positions to be corrected, and the parameters of permissible criticism, remain the exclusive prerogative of Robertson and his intimates, by a strange coincidence most of the errors identified happen to be ones that we and/or Jan Norden's Internationalist Group (IG) have previously noted.

The *Spartacist* article reports that the ICL's 2003 conference occurred after an "intense internal discussion" was triggered by our exposure of a vulgar chauvinist reference to Kurds as "Turds" by Robertson 25 years earlier (documented in our pamphlet *Kurdistan & the Struggle for National Liberation*). The attempt by the WV editorial board to sidestep the question resulted in a "pre-conference discussion [that] was dominated by an attempt to grapple with the political drift from our revolutionary purpose that took graphic expression in the WV Editorial Board's actions." To rectify this problem, the ICL conference elected a new, more atomized, international leadership designed to be less capable of acting independently.

'Impatience and Impressionism'

The *Spartacist* account admits to some pretty serious mistakes in the past period. However, instead of a thorough examination of how these errors originated, and why they have been tenaciously defended for so many years, the article glibly ascribes all problems to a lack of political depth in the ICL cadre: "Impatience and impressionism, epitomized by the likes of Michel Pablo, are the characteristic weaknesses of cadre who have been schooled in only one historical period..."

True enough. But where exactly were the supreme leader and his clique when all these errors were being made? The SL is a very tightly disciplined organization in which all significant policy decisions are made, or at least reviewed, by the top leadership. And the SL's core cadre, who are now mostly in their 50s or 60s, have been politically active for 30 or 40 years. The political weaknesses of the SL are indisputable, but they can hardly be attributed to youthful inexperience.

Revisionism on the Russian Question— From Hailing Brezhnev's Foreign Policy...

While the SL's oft-repeated assertion that "We Are the Party of the Russian Revolution" was never taken seriously by anyone outside the group, internally the leadership's claim to special competence on the Russian question was an important element of its political authority. The SL in the early 1980s distinguished itself from its pseudo-Trotskyist competitors by backing the Soviet Army against the imperialist-sponsored Afghan *mujahedin*, and also by its forthright opposition to the capitalist-restorationist leaders of Polish *Solidarnosc*. Yet since then, the SL's record on the Russian question has been characterized by a continuing series of revisionist zig-zags.

The recent *Spartacist* article admits to some important deviations on the Russian question, but, in the interest of preserving the prestige of the leadership, makes no serious attempt to politically account for these failures or to trace their origin and development. The IG's commentary on the SL's self-criticism (*The Internationalist*, No. 19, Summer 2004) contains some insightful observations, but shrinks from any analysis of the roots of the problem, and is largely concerned with showing that prior to their own departure in



UPI/BETTMANN

Soviet Army arrives in Kabul, January 1980

1996, all was well in Jimstown. But this does not square with the facts.

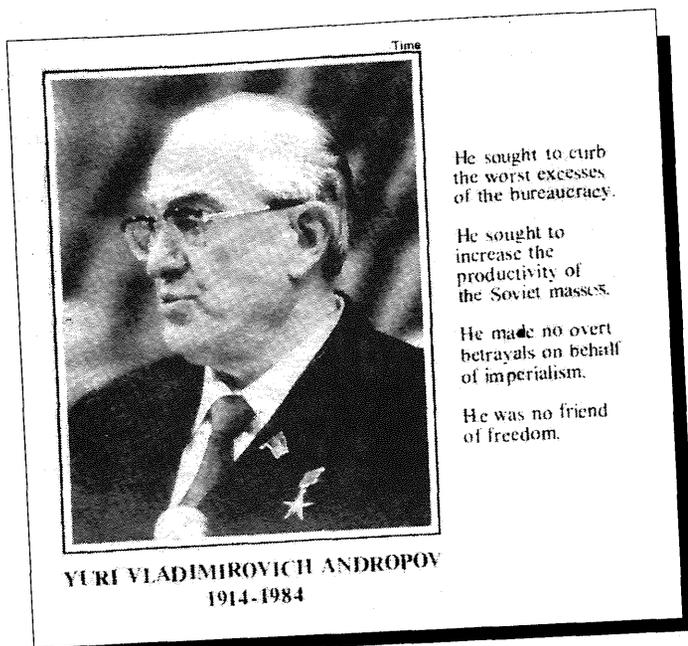
To our knowledge, the Robertson leadership's first consciously cynical revision on the Russian question occurred in September 1981 at the national conference of the Trotskyistische Liga Deutschlands (TLD) when the iSt's International Executive Committee presented a motion pledging to "take responsibility in advance for whatever idiocies and atrocities [the Polish Stalinists] may commit" in the suppression of *Solidarnosc*. We commented:

"Trotskyists give unconditional *military* support to Stalinist regimes battling internal counterrevolution (i.e., *Solidarnosc*) or external capitalist forces (i.e., Finland 1940). This is quite a different matter than extending *political* support to the Stalinists. We take *no* responsibility for the crimes of the Stalinists against the working people—whether in the course of military defense of proletarian property forms or otherwise. Military support is extended *despite* such crimes."

—*Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt* No. 1, August 1983

The ICL's Stalinophilic motion was intended as a loyalty test, and a smokescreen for purging those TLD cadres who refused to blindly endorse this blatant revisionism as Shachtmanites. Meanwhile, in its public press, the iSt maintained a formally correct posture on the question.

This episode prefigured an increasingly Stalinophilic tilt by the iSt leadership throughout the 1980s. The SL's first consequential error on the Russian question was its decision to "hail" (i.e., uncritically salute) Leonid Brezhnev's decision to send the Soviet army into Afghanistan in late 1979. This slogan went beyond extending military support to one side in a conflict, as the Trotskyists had in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s or Vietnam in the 1960s.



He sought to curb the worst excesses of the bureaucracy.

He sought to increase the productivity of the Soviet masses.

He made no overt betrayals on behalf of imperialism.

He was no friend of freedom.

YURI VLADIMIROVICH ANDROPOV
1914-1984

WV's in memoriam box for Andropov, 17 February 1984

For years we upheld the "Hail Red Army" slogan, but eventually, when a comrade who objected to it won a majority to his view, we corrected our mistake. In doing so, we tried not to exaggerate the dimensions of the SL's error:

"In fairness, it should be pointed out that the Spartacist League did warn of the possibility of a Soviet betrayal at the time it first advanced the slogan. While the supposed Moscow-loyalists of the Communist Party were wincing and looking for places to hide, the SL advanced this deliberately angular formulation in the face of a wave of anti-Sovietism which was sweeping America. Commendable as this impulse may have been, there is no getting around the fact that taken literally and by itself, the slogan amounts to a blanket political endorsement of the Soviet role in Afghanistan."

—1917 No. 5, Winter 1988-89

We also discussed the connection between this particular mistake and the SL's political trajectory:

"The degeneration of a revolutionary organization does not take place overnight. It is only under the pressure of events and in sparring with other political tendencies that revisionist appetites gradually emerge. At the outset of Reagan's anti-Soviet crusade, the Spartacist League correctly adopted a hard Soviet-defensist stance. But by this time the degeneration of the SL's internal regime was already at an advanced stage. It was only a matter of time before the SL, having lost confidence in its ability to lead the working class, began to look around for other forces to accomplish this task."

—*Ibid.*

The tendency to reduce Trotskyism to a sort of leftish Soviet patriotism, which increasingly characterized the SL's politics in the early 1980s, was, at bottom, a reflection of political demoralization:

"If an organization no longer believes in its own revolutionary capacities, why not play it safe domestically and entrust Marxism's revolutionary mission to someone else far away—like the 'Red Army' in Afghanistan."

—*Ibid.*

Our critique of the SL's decision to "hail" the Soviet military in Afghanistan anticipated a key political error that

was to characterize the ICL's subsequent intervention in the DDR (German Democratic Republic, aka "East Germany"):

"Is the SL implying that the Soviet military somehow embodies the 'progressive' side of the Stalinist bureaucracy as opposed to the civilian apparatus of the Communist Party, which represents its conservative side? On this premise alone can the slogan 'Hail Red Army!' be seen as an attempt to exploit the 'contradictions' of the Soviet ruling caste—by setting the bureaucracy's left wing (the military) against its right wing (the Politburo)."

"Could the implication of a left/right differentiation between the Soviet military and the rest of the ruling stratum suggest that the SL is giving up hope in the Soviet workers and banking on some bureaucratic faction to redeem the USSR instead?"

—*Ibid.*

...To Hailing Brezhnev's Successor

While we were slow to identify the error on Afghanistan, we immediately recognized the crude Stalinophilia of naming an SL contingent at a November 1982 anti-fascist rally the "Yuri Andropov Battalion." Our criticism drew a reply from Robertson himself who defended this Stalinophilic deviation as perfectly Trotskyist. In the course of the ensuing polemics, the SL leadership declared that our "comparison of Andropov with Stalin and Beria, the mass murderers of tens of thousands of Communists and Red Army officers, is an obscene amalgam worthy of the pages of *Commentary*" (WV No. 348, 17 February 1984). The same issue featured an *in memoriam* box for the recently deceased Andropov, giving him a 75 percent approval rating.

Andropov had been the architect of the bloody suppression of the 1956 Hungarian political revolution (see *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 1), but in the eyes of the SL leadership, he was a tough guy willing to stand up to the imperialists. In our polemic, we reminded the SL of Trotsky's observation that "Stalinism and Bolshevism are mortal enemies," and warned that Andropov and the caste he headed were ultimately unable to defend the gains of October. This was characterized by the SL leadership as virtual Third Campism. During this period the SL cadre gradually internalized the notion that defending the deformed and degenerated workers' states meant identifying with the more intransigent elements of the bureaucracy.

ICL in DDR: Bluster, Wishful Thinking & Centrist Confusion

The ICL's Stalinophilic drift reached its zenith in the winter of 1989-90 with its solicitation of the bureaucratic rulers of the DDR. The implosion of this perspective and of the DDR itself confused and demoralized the ICL membership, but this campaign is apparently still viewed by Robertson as the high point of his group's history:

"Individual Marxists will not necessarily live to see revolutionary proletarian opportunities in their lifetime. Nonetheless, many ICL cadre have lived through one such opportunity—the nascent political revolution in East Germany (German Democratic Republic—DDR) in 1989-90."

—*Spartacist* No. 58, Spring 2004

The ICL's intervention in the DDR was certainly the most significant and sustained mobilization in the group's

history. For a few weeks *Arbeiterpressekorrespondenz* (*Arprekorr*), the ICL's near-daily newsheet that was eagerly read by thousands across the DDR, was a small, but real, factor in the political life of the disintegrating deformed workers' state. Yet the ICL's activity, which the recent *Spartacist* article lauds as a "defining struggle for our party," was decisively flawed by exactly the "impatience and impressionism" that it warns against.

The ICL's political propaganda on the DDR was characterized by bluster, wishful thinking and centrist confusion. In "A Chicago College Student Sees It First-hand—The Political Revolution in East Germany" (*WV* No. 494, 26 January 1990) an SL neophyte breathlessly reported that upon arrival in East Berlin: "I found myself in the midst of the unfolding workers political revolution against Stalinist bureaucratic rule." The next issue of *WV* (No. 495, 9 February 1990) implored readers to send money because: "The fate of the unfolding German workers political revolution hangs in the balance." Many ICL supporters did send money, and a large proportion of the group's membership visited the DDR for a week or two to participate in the "revolution."

But there was no political revolution, as one of our comrades reported after touring the DDR:

"To make such assertions the TLD/SpAD [Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands] simply closes its eyes to political reality. No workers councils are contending for power. No proletarian formations posing, or even aspiring to, dual power have developed in the DDR. The soldiers' councils are either limited to simply addressing soldiers' 'work' conditions, or they represent pressure groups for professional military personnel, and are dominated by officers."

—1917 No.8, Summer 1990

The ICL's intervention was profoundly skewed from the outset by two fundamental mistakes—first, the claim that a workers' political revolution was actually underway, and second, a perspective of some sort of strategic united front with a hypothetical pro-socialist wing of the leadership of the ruling Socialist Unity Party/Party of Democratic Socialism (SED/PDS). These mutually reinforcing errors (which, in an organization where criticism flowed upwards as well as downwards, might have been corrected) disoriented the activities of ICLers on the ground. On the one hand, the ICL claimed to be in the midst of, or poised to lead, an "unfolding" workers' political revolution against the SED/PDS bureaucracy; on the other, it was simultaneously angling for a bloc with the top leaders of the crumbling Stalinist ruling party. The ICL has never explained how this contradiction could have been resolved.

In a special January 1990 German language edition of *1917*, we observed that "the confused program for a non-existent 'third way' [between capitalism and socialism] through 'social market economy' of the SED/PDS reformers" would "lead sooner or later to a capitalist counterrevolution," and warned: "Workers in the DDR cannot for long defend themselves against capitalist restorationist forces and/or Stalinism without their own Leninist internationalist party." In contrast to the ICL's claim that a workers' political revolution against (or with!) the decomposing Stalinist apparatus was underway, we noted:

"At this moment there exists a political vacuum in the DDR. Unless workers councils are organized and establish their own organs of administration this vacuum will

shortly be filled to the disadvantage of the working class..."

"The urgent task of this moment is to prevent the capitalist reunification through workers soviets to fill the power vacuum in the DDR."

We also warned against illusions in the SED/PDS bureaucrats:

"Gorbachev, Modrow..and Co. are organically incapable of trusting the working class or of implementing real working class internationalism. Nowhere has even the most 'reform' of the Stalinists called for or supported workers' councils as the basis of state power as Lenin did in 1917. This is no accident. The creation of such bodies can come about only through the destruction of all wings of the bureaucracy."

None of this was particularly original—it was merely the application of the program of workers' political revolution that Trotsky and the Left Opposition had elaborated over half a century earlier. That is why it contrasted so sharply with the approach taken by the ICL, which, in true centrist fashion, abandoned the Trotskyist program which they ostensibly upheld in an attempt to find a shortcut by nudging the Stalinists to the left.

In October 1989 when Mikhail Gorbachev pulled the rug out from under Erich Honecker, the Stalinist SED was thrown into disarray. A few weeks later, on the eve of a special emergency conference called by the SED for 8 December 1989, the ICL wrote to the Stalinists requesting to address the participants:

"We believe that a new Communist Party of Germany is urgently required, a new party that stands for socialism and is opposed to the crimes and lies of Stalinism, and is against imperialist capitalism, and which has to be forged in the spirit of the founders of the Communist Party of Germany, comrades Luxemburg and Liebknecht and comrade Lenin of the Communist International.

"We believe that many comrades of the SED share these views. Because of this, we would like to present our brief greetings to your extremely important conference."

—quoted in *Arprekorr* No. 8, 18 December 1989

On 8 December the SED conference met briefly, apologized to the people for leading the DDR into a "crisis of existence" and suspended proceedings. On 16 December, when the conference reconvened, it decided to change the party's name to SED/PDS (Socialist Unity Party/Party of Democratic Socialism), elected Gregor Gysi as its new leader, and declared that unification with West Germany would turn the DDR into "an underdeveloped *Bundesland* with an uncertain social future for its citizens." The ICL's 16 December greetings to the reconvened congress denounced socialism in one country as a "cruel swindle," but couched its criticism of Stalinism in terms echoing those of the SED/PDS leadership:

"They [the workers of the DDR] are rightly outraged about the spectacle of corruption, which has been committed by those who pretended to rule in their name. Without real workers' democracy the economy cannot survive."

—*Arprekorr* No. 8

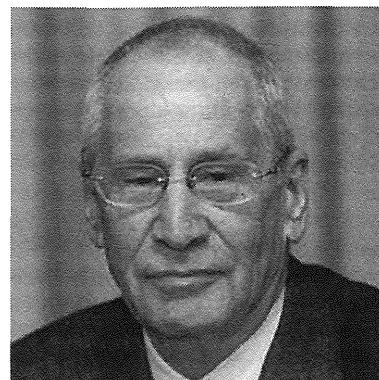
In a declaration to the SED conference the following day, the ICL's International Secretariat addressed the economic situation in the DDR, and particularly the issue of workers' strikes. The ICL's approach to the question implicitly adopted the standpoint of the SED leadership rather than



Gregor Gysi



General B. V. Snetkov



Markus Wolf

DPA FEATURES

the disgruntled ranks:

"The 'right to strike' of the Soviet miners during the last summer was more than justified. Every strike, especially in the DDR, has to be justified on the basis of its impact on the whole population and the workers."

—*Arprekorr* No. 9, 19 December 1989

While making it clear that they supported any workers' strikes against fascist provocations, the ICL leadership avoided commenting on the economic strikes actually breaking out across the DDR at the time. This was at least an improvement from an earlier declaration by the TLD's New York-appointed leader, Max Schütz, who at an 18 November 1989 public forum in West Berlin, had declared simply that DDR workers should not strike against themselves! The issue was a difficult one for the ICL to finesse—strikes were likely to be among the first symptoms of a developing workers' political revolution, yet if the TLD were seen supporting actions that the Stalinists were desperate to squelch, they risked aborting their "unity" maneuver with the SED/PDS. So the ICL leadership, in its wisdom, opted to deal with the issue by restricting itself to ambiguous abstractions.

The thrust of the ICL's intervention in the DDR was not aimed at splitting away dissident leftist elements from the SED's proletarian base, but rather was designed to encourage a wing of the Stalinist apparat to move to the left. In "What the Spartacists Want" the ICL denounced "the corrupt parasitic Stalinist bureaucracies" in the abstract, and called for "forging a Leninist-egalitarian party," but they failed to make the essential point that *all* wings of the SED/PDS leadership shared responsibility for the impasse. Instead, the ICL proclaimed:

"We stand with those members and recent ex-members of the Stalinist SED, as well as numerous others seeking to build a socialist world, who vow that the heirs of Hitler must not expropriate that which, by the workers' toil, has arisen out of the ruins."

—"What the Spartacists Want" printed in every issue of *Arprekorr*, reprinted in *WV* No. 492, 29 December 1989

The complaint, in the same document, that "the communist program and ideals of the Bolshevik Revolution...have for decades been perverted and betrayed by Stalinism" did not prevent the ICL leadership from making flattering overtures to the commander of Soviet forces in the DDR, General B.V. Snetkov. In a 28 December 1989 letter (reprinted in *WV* No. 494, 26 January 1990) concerning "the

peaceful development of the political revolution unfolding in the DDR," the ICL respectfully suggested to Snetkov that: "We internationalists must combat nationalist chauvinism..."

Treptow Demo: High Tide for the ICL

Shortly after the wall came down in Berlin, ICL members met Gunther M., a leftist SED cadre from an East Berlin factory, in front of a West Berlin public meeting of the Bund Sozialistischer Arbeiter (BSA), an ostensibly Trotskyist rival of the TLD. A few weeks later, by a fortuitous circumstance, Gunther (still only a contact at the time) was able to get the SED/PDS to endorse the ICL's idea of a mass protest against the fascist desecration of a Soviet war memorial in Treptow Park. Gunther obtained the Stalinist party's agreement on New Year's Eve, when a lower-ranking apparatchik he happened to know was left in charge of the headquarters (the senior leaders had gone off to drown their sorrows).

The official announcement of the demonstration in *Neues Deutschlands* (the DDR's leading daily) was enthusiastically received by the SED/PDS ranks, and on 3 January 1990 a surprisingly large crowd of 250,000 turned out. The size and leftist character of the mobilization alarmed both the imperialists and the Kremlin. While the Robertsonites subsequently exaggerated their role in mobilizing the masses—pretending that their agitation had forced the SED/PDS leadership to endorse the event, when in fact the TLD's call for the demonstration was not issued until after the Stalinists had agreed to sponsor it—the protest would certainly never have occurred without the ICL's initiative.

The TLD/Spartakist Gruppen announcement of the demonstration called for "Workers and soldiers councils to power," and denounced social democracy as "the Trojan horse of counterrevolution," proclaiming: "Throttling the hydra-headed fascist monster now is to blunt this Social Democratic penetration" (*WV* No. 493, 12 January 1990). Yet, while vigorously attacking the social democrats:

"In the TLD's call for the demonstration there was *absolutely no criticism of the SED-PDS's course of capitulation, and not one word about Modrow bowing to BRD imperialism and German nationalism. But it was these politics that had initially emboldened the Nazis who had carried out the attacks [at the war memorial]."*

—1917 No.10, Third Quarter 1991

The presence of an ICL speaker on the platform alongside the various Stalinist officials at the huge Treptow mo-

bilization was as close as the Robertsonites were to come to "unity" with the SED/PDS. The speech delivered at the event by TLD spokesperson Renate Dahlhaus (reprinted in *WV* No. 493, 12 January 1990) had been written in New York and faxed to Berlin. It was carefully formulated to avoid offending the ICL's hoped-for partners:

"In her speech at the Treptow demonstration, TLD/SpAD comrade Dahlhaus laid out the 'SED-Unity' line in full: 'Our [!] economy is suffering from waste and obsolescence. The SED party dictatorship has shown that it is incompetent [!] to fight this.' (*Arprekorr* No. 15, 4 January 1990). This statement, along with 'the SED's monopoly on power has been broken' was all that was said about the politics of the Stalinists (*Ibid.*). In Dahlhaus' speech only Honecker's SED, which the demonstrators wanted nothing more to do with anyway, was mentioned. But the actual illusions in the 'reformed' SED-PDS were not attacked."

—1917 No.10, Third Quarter 1991

Instead of pointing out that the SED/PDS's capitulatory course was encouraging the growth of rightist sentiments, Dahlhaus' speech concentrated on attacking the social democrats for "selling out the DDR."

From SED-Unity Fantasies to Fake Mass Posturing

The success of the Treptow demonstration led Robertson to imagine that he had a direct pipeline to the top of the SED/PDS. He demanded that Gunther arrange meetings for him with three top Stalinists: DDR masterspy Markus Wolf, Soviet General Snetkov and SED/PDS leader Gregor Gysi. When all of these bureaucrats passed up their chance to be brain trusted by a small-fry American megalomaniac, and Gorbachev gave the green light for the absorption of the DDR by German imperialism, the ICL was finally compelled to abandon the fantasy of "unity" with the Stalinists. Instead of frankly acknowledging that a fundamental strategic mistake had been made, the whole unity gambit was blamed on incompetent underlings who had supposedly misinterpreted "Jim's" instructions. In the ICL, as in Pyongyang, nothing can be permitted to put Dear Leader in a bad light.

Without wasting any time, the ICL leadership decreed an abrupt, 180 degree course correction, and announced that the moment was ripe for the direct conquest of the masses. The handful of ICL supporters of the TLD/Spartakist Gruppen were declared to be a new, independent workers' "party"—the Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SpAD). When the DDR news agency picked up the SpAD's press release announcing its creation, the ICL leadership was so pleased that it reprinted the entire dispatch in *Workers Vanguard* No. 495, 9 February 1990. And, just for good measure, they quoted the following particularly juicy bit on the front page of the same issue: "The party, founded on January 21 in the DDR, considers itself a vanguard party that will represent the interests of the working class..."

The hope was that the SpAD could somehow galvanize the masses through running a few candidates in the March 1990 elections. In its new guise as a revolutionary mass workers' party competing directly with the Stalinists, the SpAD's propaganda was naturally less conciliatory to the SED/PDS than it had been when the watchword was "unity." For fund-raising purposes, *WV* ludicrously exaggerated the SpAD's role in the situation:

"...our comrades of the Spartakist Workers Party stand out uniquely as the conscious Leninist vanguard, the one party defending the workers of East Germany against this [capitalist restorationist] onslaught..."

"The fate of the German political revolution hangs in the balance, and there is little time."

—*WV* No. 497, 9 March 1990

While the ICL's publications were widely disseminated and eagerly read by thousands of workers in the DDR, and its members worked as hard as humanly possible, the SpAD never had more than a couple of dozen active supporters. The pretense that it was capable of defending the workers' interests, and even of shaping the outcome of a non-existent "political revolution," was, as we remarked in a 15 December 1996 letter to the Internationalist Group, "a notion worthy of a Posadas or a Healy."

The Bubble Bursts

In our March 1990 election statement giving critical support to the SpAD we reaffirmed our desire to see the DDR workers take the road of proletarian political revolution, but warned:

"While the SED-PDS is in disarray, it is unfortunately not the case that, as yet, the working class is actively engaged in a revolutionary struggle to wrest political power from the discredited Stalinist bureaucrats and the parties promoting capitalist reunification which are already filling the power vacuum. A workers political revolution can open the road toward genuine socialism through instituting proletarian democracy and the rule of workers councils. We urgently hope that the workers of the DDR take the road of proletarian political revolution—but it does no good to mistake our subjective desires for reality."

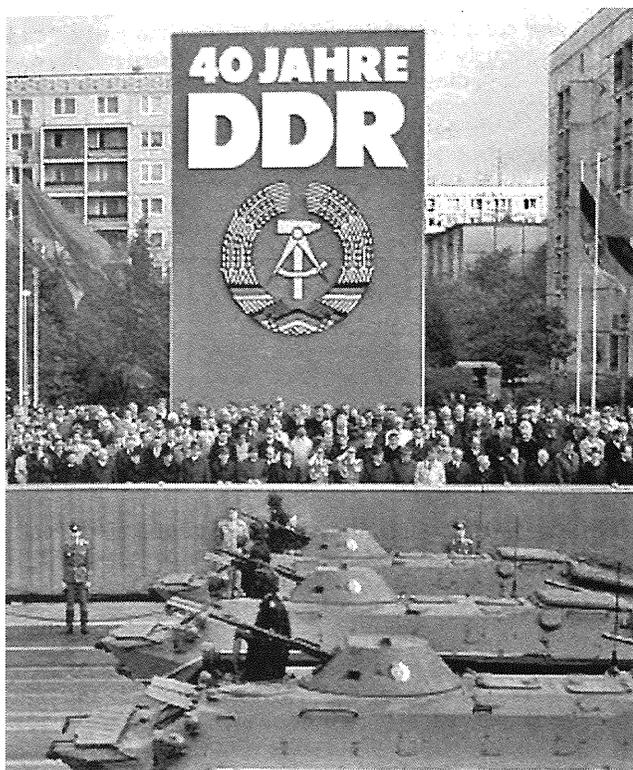
—1917 No. 8, Summer 1990

The ICL's exaggerated claims to have directly mobilized many of the workers who turned up at the Treptow protest led to fantastic projections that hundreds of thousands might vote for the SpAD in the election. But any such illusions were dashed on 6 March 1990, twelve days before the vote was held, when a demonstration called by the SpAD to protest privatization legislation drew no one outside their own ranks. *Workers Vanguard* (No. 497, 9 March 1990) had devoted most of a page to reprinting their German "party's" call for mass protest, suitably illustrated with a photo of a section of the vast crowd at Treptow. The next issue did not bother with a story on the non-event, but did run a photo documenting the fact that fewer than 20 people had participated.

In the same issue, *WV* reported the results of the 18 March election as an overwhelming mandate for *Anschluss*: "We ran candidates in four districts (Berlin, Halle, Leipzig and Rostock), receiving 0.06% of the vote in those districts" (*WV*, No. 498, 23 March 1990). With its bubbleburst, the ICL leadership sagely intoned: "Responsibility for the fateful results must be laid squarely at the door of Stalin and his heir Gorbachev."

DDR 'Political Revolution' Down the Memory Hole

Even after the landslide for counterrevolution, the ICL was still refusing to admit that no workers' political revolution had in fact been "unfolding." Instead, *WV* puzzled over why the working class had sat out their "political revolution":



October 1989: DDR on the brink

"The DDR political revolution was marked from the beginning by the absence of any organized participation by the working class as such. Why?"

—*Ibid.*

Try Occam's razor: *there was no political revolution.* The SED's proletarian base had not revolted against their leaders, and no section of the working class had participated in anything approximating a struggle for political power. But to admit the obvious would mean that the ICL leadership's whole orientation had been wrong. So the issue was just shoved down the memory hole where it could be retrospectively re-jigged.

The SL leadership's new "recovered memory" of its DDR policy was unveiled in its 1995 pamphlet "The International Bolshevik Tendency—What Is It?," where the previously "unfolding" political revolution was downgraded to merely a "nascent," or "incipient" possibility. To avoid having to admit that events had proved us right, we were simply assigned a new position—we had supposedly "declared that [in the DDR] there was no possibility of a proletarian political revolution."

The article in *Spartacist* No. 58 alleges that Jan Norden "denigrated and denied the ICL's role as the conscious revolutionary vanguard [in the DDR], repeatedly intoning that 'the key element was missing, the revolutionary leadership.'" This comment by Norden in his January 1995 Berlin speech provided one of the central pretexts for his purge the next year. Today the ICL dismisses its boast to having been "the revolutionary leadership" of a non-existent political revolution as a polemical exaggeration invented mainly for the purpose of attacking Norden.

In its 1994 "Perspectives and Tasks" document the SL brazenly congratulated itself for its political flip-flops:

"Programmatically this party kept on track through the Reagan years...The party's capacity to internally correct

political deviations and problems through exhaustive internal discussion and fights is also clear. The extensive discussion and critical examination of our intervention into the DDR events stands out in this regard and politically prepared our tendency for the Soviet debacle."

—*Spartacist* No. 51, Autumn 1994

The spectacular collapse of the ICL's Stalinophilic fantasies in the DDR did indeed "prepare" the group for its subsequent Stalinophobic lurch expressed by a refusal to take sides in the decisive August 1991 showdown in Moscow. It also laid the groundwork for the now-repudiated, Third-Campist claim made in the same document, that: "The Chinese Stalinists...are moving to attempt a cold restoration of capitalism from above" (*Ibid.*).

A decade later, the ICL is once again re-examining the 1989-90 events in the DDR—this time unanimously repudiating the unanimous conclusions reached after the previous "extensive discussion and critical examination":

"It is not correct to say 'the PDS led the counterrevolution in the DDR' and 'we were the revolutionary leadership' in the incipient political revolution in the DDR in 1989-90. These formulations are better: 'We were the only contender for revolutionary leadership of the working class in the revolutionary situation in the DDR in 1989-90. We can be proud of our fight for revolutionary leadership.' And 'When the Kremlin sold out the DDR to West German capitalism, the SED-PDS tops adapted to the betrayal and became the PDS.'"

—*Spartacist* No. 58, Spring 2004

It would be even "better" if the ICL leadership could come clean and tell the whole truth. In that case, their motion might read more like this:

"We attempted to suck up to the Stalinist bureaucracy, but were rebuffed. We claimed to have been in the midst of an unfolding workers' political revolution, but there was no such political revolution. We claimed to 'stand out uniquely as the conscious Leninist vanguard, the one party defending the workers of East Germany,' but we were not such a party—we were only a tiny propaganda group without significant influence in any section of the working class, and one, moreover, that was seriously politically mistaken on many of the most crucial issues. On all disputed political questions at the time, the comrades who subsequently formed the German section of the IBT were essentially correct against us."

We will not, however, see such a statement. Like Robertson's notion that the top layers of the SED/PDS could somehow be induced to assist in the "unfolding" of a workers' political revolution, the spontaneous self-reform of the ICL leadership lies outside the realm of the possible. It would indeed have been "better" had the ICL's leadership approximated our position (which they furiously denounced as "Stalinophobic" at the time). The really important question, which neither the SL nor the IG can address, is how such an elementary mistake could have been made in the first place. The character of the Stalinist bureaucracy of a deformed workers' state is a long established element of the Trotskyist program. The fact that this position could be tossed aside without generating any internal opposition demonstrates that, in the ICL, formal program and "principle" count for little when they conflict with the whims of the founder/leader.

ICL's 1990 Postmortem on the DDR

The ICL's venture in the DDR was by far the most ambitious undertaking in its history—the leadership promised

a great deal and the membership made many sacrifices, so the colossal failure of the entire perspective, as well as the inability to realize any appreciable gains, required some explanation. Accordingly, an internal discussion was immediately announced to digest the historical lessons of the collapse of Stalinism. The issues appear to have been posed on a high enough level of historical abstraction to avoid the question of how the ICL leadership's projections in the DDR could have been so wildly unrealistic. The two contributions deemed most valuable were reprinted in *Spartacist* Nos. 45-46, Winter 1990-91.

In a 6 September 1990 document, Albert St. John (aka "Al") Robertson's longest-serving supporter who seems to have recently slipped into the category of *persona non grata*, suggested that workers in Eastern Europe had acquiesced to capitalist restoration because they had been atomized and politically disarmed by Stalinism. He denounced the "petty-bourgeois" left in the DDR which had "obscured or avoided any programmatic or social analysis of Stalinism," and indignantly declared:

"...it wasn't the case that the workers of the DDR had *no* leadership. Rather the program of the [DDR workers'] traditional party, in the new colors of the 'reformed' PDS, as well as the parallel programs of the other 'leftist' DDR groupings, ran at an angle of 180 degrees to the objective interests and periodic impulses of the working class."

—*Spartacist* Nos. 45-46, Winter 1990-91

This would have been worth something had the ICL raised it when it mattered. But by September 1990, criticism of the PDS was pretty cheap. It is also worth noting that at this point Al was no longer clinging to the pretense that the tiny SpAD had been leading the working class (although he did cynically revive it a few years later as a factional stick with which to beat Norden). Today the claim has once again been designated "not correct."

Anschluss for the DDR & Destruction of the USSR

A second contribution, by SL theoretician Joseph Seymour, was a sensible and well-informed essay explaining why the destruction of the East European deformed workers' states without civil war did not invalidate the Marxist theory of the state. In his article, dated 10 October 1990, Seymour anticipated that the Soviet Union would soon see a confrontation between Stalinist conservatives and pro-imperialist democrats:

"Faced with the disintegration of Soviet society, the Kremlin bureaucracy splintered, signaled by the splitting up of the original Gorbachev team into mutually hostile figures. Yegor Ligachev became the spokesman for the conservative Stalinist apparatchiks, who desired to maintain the status quo with minimal changes. Boris Yeltsin—Moscow party boss in the early Gorbachev regime—became a pseudo-populist demagogue allied with the pro-Western 'democratic' opposition."

—*Spartacist* Nos. 45-46, Winter 1990-91

A couple of months earlier, in August 1990, the ICL had sent a final "Letter to the Kremlin" (with a copy to General Snetkov) "demanding" that Gorbachev stop conciliating imperialism (WV No. 590, 7 September 1990). Seymour suggested that, unlike in East Europe, capitalist-restorationists in the USSR would not come to power without a struggle: "Russian society today is polarized (prefiguring a possible civil war) between the forces of the 'bourgeois-democratic' counterrevolution...and an amalgam of conservative Stalin-

ist and Slavophile elements, with the working class divided between the two camps."

Seymour did not discuss the ICL's position on the impending showdown in the USSR. However, he did propose that in any future clash in either Romania or Bulgaria between the "leftist" governments comprised of former Stalinists and more aggressively right-wing restorationist elements:

"Our perspective should be to combine united-front military defense against the right with a political struggle to discredit and destroy the workers' illusions in the present erstwhile-Stalinist-cum-social-democratic regimes."

This was clearly written prior to Robertson's Stalinophobic pronouncement that the SED/PDS bureaucrats he had previously been so eager to meet were in fact the leaders of the counterrevolution in the DDR—a position that was soon extended to the Soviet Union and, somewhat later, to China. By March 1991, *Workers Vanguard* was floating the new line, suggesting that there was little to choose between the Yeltsinite "democrats" and the conservative Stalinist "patriots" who were still clinging to the CPSU:

"Soviet working people must cut through the false division between 'democrats' and 'patriots,' both products of the terminal degeneration of the reactionary and parasitic Stalinist bureaucracy. Both are enemies and oppressors of the working class in the interests of world capitalism."

—WV No. 522, 15 March 1991

In May 1991, at the Lutte Ouvrière fete, where we debated Workers Power on the Russian question, one of their leaders, Keith Harvey, predicted that in any showdown between the Yeltsinites and the CPSU "hards," we would find ourselves alone among all the world's ostensible Trotskyists in backing the Stalinists. Harvey predicted that "even the Sparts" would not be backing the Stalinists this time. We thought it possible that when push came to shove the ICL would come down on the right side, but Harvey's estimate proved correct. In the final confrontation in August 1991, the erstwhile "Yuri Andropov Brigade" refused to militarily support the Stalinists against the counterrevolution, thus ignominiously abandoning the last-ditch defense of the Soviet degenerated workers' state. The ICL's shameful neutrality in this confrontation, a mistake it compounded with the stubborn refusal to admit that Yeltsin's victory represented the triumph of counterrevolution, has continued to pose awkward political problems for the Robertsonites.

The *Spartacist* No. 58 article blusters: "At the crucial hour, in sharp contrast to much of the left, the ICL stood at our post in defense of the gains of the October Revolution of 1917." Paper will take anything written on it, as Stalin observed, but nothing can change the fact that "at the crucial hour" in August 1991, the ICL declined to take a side.

The fundamental incoherence of the ICL's 1991 position has been a source of continuing confusion, and the conflicting rationalizations and interpretations of the position that have appeared over the years simply don't add up. While indignantly denying that they were in any way neutral in the August 1991 confrontation, the ICL leaders also claim that neither side warranted military support because both were equally pro-capitalist:

"The IBT attempts to dress up its defeatism in August 1991 by declaring military support for the Stalinist coup plotters—a ludicrous position since the coup plotters, who were just as committed to capitalist restoration as Yeltsin, were not about to undertake the kind of political and military mobilization required to mount a serious

opposition."

—"The International Bolshevik Tendency—
What Is It?"

We replied:

"If in fact the Yanayevites were 'just as committed to capitalist restoration as Yeltsin,' then why should Trotskyists care about whether or not they undertook a political and military mobilization? If the Stalinist bureaucrats (including the heads of the KGB and the military) had been 'just as committed' to capitalist restoration as the CIA's friends gathered around Yeltsin in the Russian White House, then there would indeed have been nothing of great importance at stake in August 1991. Yet, if one asserts that Yanayev et al. were 'just as committed to capitalist restoration' as Yeltsin, then it follows that at some point prior to 19 August 1991 the CPSU bureaucracy had been transformed into a formation that was counterrevolutionary through and through and to the core."

—*Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 5, 1996

The ICL cannot answer these questions. While admitting that Yeltsin's victory had opened the "floodgates of counterrevolution," they adamantly deny that state power (however weak and disjointed initially) from that moment on was wielded by forces committed to restoring capitalism. The Soviet degenerated workers' state had been smashed, and the whole world knew it. But in the interest of preserving the prestige of their leadership, the SL refused to admit it and spent a year in the company of Jack Barnes of the American Socialist Workers Party, Ernest Mandel of the United Secretariat (USec), Workers Power and an assortment of other revisionists, ludicrously claiming that the Soviet degenerated workers' state survived under Czar Boris. As time passed and Yeltsin's grip on power became increasingly assured, this posture became just too ridiculous to maintain, and so by November 1992 *Workers Vanguard* was referring to the Soviet workers' state in the past tense. But to this day, the ICL cannot explain when or how this transformation occurred.

Everyone knows what took place in 1991; the only thing that changed in 1992 was Robertson's mind. The catalyst for this, so we have been told, was a written exchange in August 1992 between two Toronto Robertsonites and Marc D., a former USec cadre and prospective ICL recruit who refused to swallow the notion that "the Soviet Union still exists as a degenerated workers' state." Upon reading this correspondence, which we reprinted in 1917 No. 12, Robertson is reported to have commented that Marc was right, the Soviet workers' state was no more.

The ICL's new position solved one problem, but created another. The destruction of the Soviet workers' state could not be backdated to Yeltsin's August 1991 victory without admitting that the "renegades" of the IBT had been right all along. Having refused to militarily bloc with Yanayev, Pugo et al, the SL leadership could hardly admit that Yeltsin's victory represented the end of the workers' state. So the ICL (and the IG, which also clings to this particular stupidity) embraced the profoundly anti-Marxist notion that in "1991-92" the degenerated workers' state, under Boris Yeltsin, was gradually and incrementally transformed into a bourgeois state. Trotsky aptly dismissed this sort of nonsense as "reformism in reverse."

The SL's position on the August 1991 confrontation has occasionally been at odds with its polemics with other groups. For example, WV recently denounced Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) for

dispatching its Moscow supporters to Soviet factories during the coup to discourage workers from backing the Stalinist "hardliners":

"The adherents to Taaffe's Militant tendency did not just climb on Yeltsin's barricades—where they were, in any case, not needed. They went to the factories, where these social-democratic traitors tried to *head off* workers mobilizations against Yeltsin and Bush's 'democrats':

"From the declarations of the [putschist State Emergency Committee] it followed that they were acting against the so-called "democrats," and that posed the danger of support to the putschists by workers organizations that did not share the principles of the "democrats"—the rule of private property and capitalist power. And that is exactly what happened. Some of the workers organizations were getting ready to send greetings of welcome, and at several factories the workers even tried to organize defense detachments in support of the putschists.

"From the morning on, all of our members explained to workers at their workplaces that the position of the Emergency Committee did not coincide with their interests. In addition to this, they connected up with worker activists of other organizations, in order to prevent hasty actions."

—"Where We Were" [CWI statement]"

"The impulse of these workers was far better than that of the Militant tendency, whose support to Yeltsin put it in the same camp as every imperialist power on the face of the globe."

—WV No. 828, 11 June 2004

True enough, but the "impulse of these workers" was also "far better" than the hypocritical ICL leadership, whose refusal to take sides between the two camps put it in a third one.

In a 1995 article, we noted the connection between the SL's programmatic departures on the Russian question and its highly bureaucratized internal regime:

"The Spartacist League now finds itself in a state of complete confusion regarding the single question that more than any other had defined it as a tendency—the Russian question. This is not simply a case of faulty analysis. The adaptation to Stalinism in the early 1980s, like the social-patriotic deviations, could easily have been reversed in a healthy, democratic-centralist group. Even the misestimate of the situation in the DDR, or the failure to grasp the significance of the August 1991 events, do not in themselves constitute betrayals. Honest revolutionaries can make mistakes. The SL, however, lacks the capacity for correcting these mistakes that only a democratic internal life can provide. It is the doctrine of Robertsonian infallibility, and the adamant refusal to acknowledge that an opponent could be right where it was wrong, that drives the SL to persist in and compound its original errors, to play havoc with reality in the process, and finally to descend gradually into incoherence."

—1917 No. 15, 1995

The SL/ICL is an organization in which criticism only flows downward. In cauterizing potential opposition from below, James Robertson and his acolytes originally imagined that they would be able to avoid the costly overhead of faction fights and splits, but only succeeded in strangling the once-revolutionary Spartacist League and setting it on the path to political oblivion. The SL/ICL's current intractable problems demonstrate the inextricable connection between the internal regime of a revolutionary organization and its formal political program. The necrosis of the Spartacist League, like the split between the Russian Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903, demonstrates that in the final analysis, for revolutionaries, *the organizational question is a political question.* ■

Forward to a Revolutionary Workers' Party!

No to 'Lesser Evilism'

The following statement was distributed during the 2004 American election campaign.

This year's presidential election takes place in the shadow of the dirty colonial war in Iraq, a bi-partisan bid to secure U.S. control of Middle East oil, thereby cementing the global dominance of the world's only "superpower." Although the conquest of Iraq has turned out to be considerably more painful and difficult than the Bush gang anticipated, Republicans and Democrats remain united in supporting this criminal adventure that has so far cost the lives of almost a thousand U.S. military personnel and many thousands of Iraqis, mostly civilians.

Today the U.S. has a chain of military bases that stretch from the oil fields of formerly Soviet Central Asia, through Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf. It is hardly coincidental that the "war on terrorism" is being fought in regions with major oil deposits and/or the pipeline routes necessary to access them. While the war on Iraq never had anything to do with Saddam Hussein's supposed "weapons of mass destruction," the failure to find even a trace of the Iraqi dictator's biological and chemical weapons has been a minor embarrassment for the British and American governments that had originally supplied them. The paranoid fantasies about the danger of Iraqi terror attacks, endlessly repeated by the lapdog media, were never anything more than projections of the imperialists' plans for Iraq.

There are no substantial differences between the Democrats and the Republicans on Iraq or anything else—they are both committed to the pursuit of class warfare at home and imperial conquest abroad. But the war for Iraq is not going well, and important elements of the ruling class are seriously concerned about the competence of the present administration and its doctrine of unilateral preemptive attacks. Colonial wars have their own logic, and Kerry, just as much as Bush, is committed to crushing Iraqi resistance with bloody repression. To pull out now would be a humiliation that would significantly weaken the U.S. position in this critical region and within the entire imperialist world order.

Kerry is campaigning on his record as a Vietnam combat veteran and the claim that he can wage a smarter and cheaper war in Iraq. He has also pledged to expand the military by 40,000 and has chastised Bush for not taking a harder line on North Korea. As Marxists, we oppose everything that the Democrats (and Republicans) stand for. We defend the North Korean workers' state despite its deformations, and side militarily with Iraqi resistance to the imperialist crusade.

Kerry's Promise: 'A More Effective War'

Vermont's governor, Howard Dean, created a sensation last winter when he emerged as the surprise front-runner in the early Democratic primaries on the basis of his criticism of Bush's "war of choice" on Iraq. The fact that Dean pledged not to precipitously withdraw from Iraq tended to be obscured by his energetic attacks on the administration's policy, an issue which most of the other candidates



MARY ALTAFFER—AP

Police brutality at Republican National Convention, August 2004

downplayed. Dean's sudden popularity unnerved the upper echelons of the Democratic hierarchy, who feared that if he won it could vastly increase pressure for a U.S. pullout. They soon began to denounce him as unelectable, and eventually coalesced behind Kerry. Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* was speaking for more than himself when he proposed that if Kerry wanted to be president, he should declare:

"If I am president, I will not cut and run. I will not pull our troops out [of Iraq]...the way Ronald Reagan fled from Lebanon [in 1983]....The best way to endanger [American troops] is to suggest to the terrorists that there is daylight between me and President Bush—that if he won't run, I will...."

—*New York Times*, 15 February 2004

Kerry has repeatedly stated his intention to "stay the course" in Iraq, and recently announced that even if he had known there were no weapons of mass destruction, he would still have voted to authorize Bush's attack. Kerry promises "a more effective war on terror" without having to pander to the born-again "End-Time/Rapture" Christian Zionist fanatics at the core of Bush's electoral base. A sizable section of the capitalist money men who previously backed Bush seem inclined to agree.

Bipartisan Domestic Policy: Austerity & Repression

The U.S. today, contrary to official mythology, is a country with very limited social mobility. People born poor tend to stay at the bottom, regardless of how hard they work. Between 1973 and 2000, real incomes for the bottom 90 percent of Americans fell by an average of seven percent, while those in the top one percent went up 148 percent, and the top .01 percent increased 599 percent (*Nation*, 5 January

[2004]). Since then, income distribution has been further skewed by Bush's tax cuts on corporate profits and stock dividends that, like his cuts in income tax rates, have disproportionately benefited the rich.

Today there are ten million Americans actively looking for work, while millions more have given up or are struggling to make ends meet with low-paying part-time McJobs. While job creation turned up slightly this year, the Economic Policy Institute estimates that the average wage of new jobs is 15 percent lower than those lost (*Z Magazine*, July/August [2004]). As usual, the hardest hit are American blacks, the last hired and first fired, whose unemployment rate in June 2003 was double that of whites, and whose median net household worth is only a fifth that of white families.

Despite posturing as a friend of blacks and working people, Kerry is firmly committed to the maintenance of the status quo. In April he told guests at a \$25,000-a-plate dinner at Manhattan's "21" Club that he is "not a redistribution Democrat" (*New York Times*, 16 April [2004]). Kerry is proud of having voted for the USA-Patriot Act, the main instrument used by the Bush administration in its continuing assault on democratic rights and political dissent. A chilling example of the domestic face of the supposed "war on terrorism" was provided on 7 April 2003 when police on the Oakland docks opened fire with rubber bullets and wooden dowels on longshore workers and a peaceful demonstration of anti-war protesters. Many were injured, some seriously. This brutal repression had apparently been sparked by a warning of possible "violence" issued five days earlier by the California Anti-Terrorism Information Center:

"So why was the warning issued in the first place? In an interview with the *Tribune*, Mike Van Winkle, spokesman for the California Anti-Terrorism Information Center, issued a remarkably broad definition of terrorism. 'You can make an easy kind of link that, if you have a protest group protesting a war where the cause that's being fought against is international terrorism, you might have terrorism at that protest,' he said. 'You can almost argue that a protest against that is a terrorist act.'"

—"Outlawing Dissent," *Salon.com*, 11 February [2004]

The supposed threat of "terrorism" has been used as a pretext for intimidating, marginalizing and harassing protesters at both the Democratic and Republican national conventions. Even the *New York Times* (17 August [2004]) recognizes that: "The F.B.I.'s questioning of protesters [intending to attend the Republican National Convention] is part of a larger campaign against political dissent that has increased sharply since the start of the war on terror." Government agents are busy infiltrating a wide variety of organizations, and seeking to lure the unwary into participation in criminal activities for which they can be "stung." Harassment of political critics, racist round-ups of Arab and Muslim citizens, and the deportation and/or imprisonment of immigrants for petty visa infractions seem to be among the main activities of the government's burgeoning "counter-terrorism" program to date.

'Anybody But Bush'?

The blatant reaction promoted by the Bush administration has led many supposed leftists to follow muckraking filmmaker Michael Moore and Noam Chomsky in reluctantly supporting Kerry. Moore has never been anything more than a pro-Democratic Party liberal, but Chomsky, who has produced a considerable volume of insightful

analysis of U.S. policy over the years, has a popular reputation as a formidable opponent of both Republican and Democratic "factions of the business party." While admitting that Kerry is just "Bush-lite," Chomsky says that this year he will be voting for him anyway "despite the limited differences both domestically and internationally" because "in this system of immense power, small differences can translate into large outcomes" (*Guardian* [London], 16 March [2004]).

Various opportunist "socialist" outfits are calling for votes to consumer rights advocate Ralph Nader, despite the fact that he too is an open partisan of capitalist free enterprise who has never claimed to be any sort of socialist. As a representative of small capitalists who feel they have not been well served by what he calls the "two-party duopoly," Nader has never identified with the workers' movement. Twenty years ago he personally smashed a union organizing drive at a magazine he owned (*Washington Post*, 28 June 1984). Tim Shorrock, one of the fired employees, bitterly observed:

"Ralph Nader may look like a democrat, smell like a populist, and sound like a socialist—but deep down he's a frightened, petit bourgeois moralizer without a political compass, more concerned with his image than the movement he claims to lead: in short, an opportunist, a liberal hack. And a scab."

—*Left Business Observer*, October 1996

Nader's anti-labor record has not prevented Socialist Alternative, affiliated with Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), from singing his praises:

"Socialist Alternative strongly supports Ralph Nader's decision to run an insurgent campaign against the Democrats and Republicans, as we did in 2000. We firmly believe Nader's campaign will be the best way in the 2004 elections to forward the interests of workers, young people, women, people of color, LGBT people, the environment, and the anti-war movement."

—"Support Nader's Campaign for President," 25 February [2004]

A few months later, after Nader accepted the endorsement of the Reform Party, the reformists of Socialist Alternative found themselves in an awkward position:

"As active and enthusiastic supporters of Ralph Nader's independent campaign for President, we are deeply concerned by his decision to accept the Reform Party's endorsement and to consider accepting their ballot lines. With good reason, the Reform Party is widely seen as a right-wing, racist, anti-immigrant organization."

Rather than break with Nader, these "socialist" cretins ludicrously proposed:

"The Nader campaign must boldly explain that the racist, homophobic, sexist ideology espoused by right-wing demagogues only serves to strengthen the corporate elite who run this country by dividing the exploited majority against each other and creating scapegoats...."

Disregarding the CWI's advice, Nader's chief campaign spokesperson, Kevin Zeese "boldly explained" that his boss had "an 85 per cent area of agreement" with the Reform Party (*Salon.com*, 14 July [2004]). This was confirmed when Pat Buchanan, the Reform Party's 2000 presidential candidate (described by Socialist Alternative as "a man best known for his virulent racism, homophobia, and far-right nationalist agenda") asked Nader about his position on immigration:

"Buchanan: The Democrats have picked up on Bush's amnesty idea and have proposed an amnesty for illegals who

have been in the country for five years and who have shown that they have jobs and can support themselves. Would you support the Democratic proposal?

"Nader: This is very difficult because you are giving a green light to cross the border illegally. I don't like the idea of legalization because then the question is how do you prevent the next wave and the next?"

—*American Conservative*, 21 June [2004]

It seems that Nader and Buchanan's views overlap on more than immigration:

"Buchanan: Let me move to the social issues. Would you have voted against or in favor of the ban on partial-birth abortion?"

"Nader: I believe in choice. I don't think government should tell women to have children or not to have children. I am also against feticide. If doctors think it is a fetus, that should be banned. It is a medical decision.

"Buchanan: Between the woman and her doctor—

"Nader: And whoever else, family, clergy."

—*Ibid.*

The British Socialist Workers Party, which considers those who refuse on principle to vote for capitalist politicians to be hopelessly old-fashioned "sectarians," is also supporting Nader:

"At this point, only the Nader campaign genuinely offers political space to demand the US out of Iraq and to contest Washington's broader interventionist agenda. Only Nader is likely to press the attack on the corporate puppeteers of both political parties."

—*Socialist Review*, June [2004]

In fact, Nader is standing as a third capitalist candidate with policies that, on many questions, are not so very different from those of the Republocrats. Contrary to his leftist touts who paint him as some sort of anti-imperialist, Nader's Iraq policy is in fact "multi-imperialist." Rather than call for the unconditional, immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops, Nader proposes to continue the occupation under the aegis of the United Nations Security Council, the central political institution of the capitalist world order.

Break With the Democrats! Forward to a Workers' Party!

The prostration of fake "socialists" before petty-bourgeois hustlers like Ralph Nader is not a whit better than the defeatist claim pushed by Chomsky, the tired old Stalinists of the Communist Party and the AFL-CIO bureaucrats that radical youth, blacks, poor and working people should vote Democrat to "block the drive to the right." In fact, those who vote for Kerry out of fear of Bush only add momentum to the rightward shift of American politics that over the past 30 years has narrowed the space between the twin parties of U.S. capitalism to the point where they are virtually indistinguishable.

A vote for Kerry is a vote for the Patriot Act; for continuing Zionist brutality against the Palestinians; for the overthrow of the deformed workers' states of China, North Korea and Cuba; for the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq; and for further encroachments on what remains of the rights of working people at home. Kerry is promising nothing to blacks or other victims of the systematic racism of American capitalism. He promises nothing to the millions of unemployed and those trapped in dead-end, minimum wage jobs. What he is offering is more tax breaks and subsidies for corporations and the rich, and more belt-tightening



WILLIAM PHILPOTT—REUTERS

Born-Again Evil-Doer

for the poor and working people.

When the Democrats occupied the White House during the 1990s they carried out a wholesale assault on those they pretend to represent. Bill Clinton, who proudly claimed to have ended "welfare as we know it," also oversaw the expansion of the racist "war on drugs" and nearly doubled the number of people in jail during his tenure. By 2000, almost half the eligible voters, roughly 100 million people, decided that there was no reason to even bother to vote.

Marxists reject the reformist illusion that capitalist society is necessary and inevitable, and with it, the notion that the task of would-be leaders of the workers' movement is to make recommendations on which of two (or three) poisons is least toxic. The picture of America presented in the capitalist media in no way reflects social reality. It conceals but does not resolve the enormous, and growing, social tensions in American society that must, sooner or later, erupt in cataclysmic upheavals. The pervasive illusion that "there is no alternative" is a critical factor in holding this entire decaying social order together.

Capitalism is a cancer that, left unchecked, will ultimately destroy human society. It will not disappear on its own—it must be uprooted and replaced with a higher, socialist, form of economic organization. The development of the consciousness necessary for the working class to carry out this task must begin with an assertion of absolute independence from the political agencies of the exploiters. Only a socialist planned economy, organized on a global scale, can lift the majority of humanity out of the poverty, hunger and disease to which the market has consigned them. The objective interests of working people and the oppressed stand in stark opposition to a social order based on the pursuit of private profit. They can only find political expression through the creation of a mass revolutionary party based on a program of wholesale expropriation of capital and the reorganization of society according to the principle that those who labor must rule. This is the revolutionary perspective upon which the International Bolshevik Tendency is based and for which we fight. ■

Canadian Federal Election 2004: No Choice for Working People



MICHEL DURAND

Canadian Navy provided support for U.S. in Iraq

The following statement, dated 18 June 2004, was distributed prior to the Canadian federal election.

Urging voters to "choose your Canada," Prime Minister Paul Martin declared that the vote on 28 June will be the "most important election in Canadian history" (*Toronto Star*, 8 May [2004]). But for working people there is no good choice—the Conservatives, Liberals and NDP are all committed to serving and protecting the interests of the tiny layer of multi-millionaires who own and control this country. They differ only over how best to do so.

When Martin called the election on 23 May, he hoped the Liberals could somehow sleepwalk their way to a fourth consecutive majority. But that is not how things have worked out. The stink from last winter's sponsorship scandal, in which \$100 million from a "national unity" slush fund disappeared into the coffers of various Liberal-connected agencies in Quebec, has lingered longer than Martin expected. The separatist Bloc Québécois, which has downplayed the issue of independence during the campaign, is enjoying a huge resurgence largely as a result of voter disgust with Liberal corruption and cronyism. In both British Columbia and Quebec, trade unions have recently spearheaded sizable protests against the austerity measures introduced by Liberal provincial governments.

"Team Martin" wanted to portray itself as the defender of medicare against Conservative leader Stephen Harper's plans for two-tier health care and tax cuts for the rich. Unfortunately for the Liberals, people have not forgotten that in the 1990s, when Martin was finance minister, he slashed

federal medicare funding by some 40 percent while introducing the most sweeping tax cuts in Canadian history, disproportionately benefiting those at the top of the economic pyramid. A week before the campaign officially began, Ontario's newly-elected Liberal premier, "Dilbert" McGuinty, delivered what may turn out to have been the *coup de grace* to his federal cousins when he unveiled his government's plans to simultaneously cut health services while imposing a new, regressive, health insurance levy.

The Liberals' disarray has made it easy for the Conservative/Reform/Alliance Party to project the image of a responsible and fiscally prudent alternative. Harper, whose chief political credential is having briefly headed the virulently right-wing National Citizens Coalition (a corporate lobby group created in the late 1960s to attack public medicare and other "socialistic" policies) has been evasive about what he intends to do if his party takes power. He has spent much of the campaign disavowing overly candid remarks from various Conservative candidates on abortion, capital punishment and gay rights. The newly "united right" is an unstable coalition between traditional Bay Street Tory moneymen and a veritable Noah's Ark of "pro-life" death penalty advocates, racists, Quebec-bashers, homophobes, flat-tax cranks and born-again evangelicals.

The chief difference between the two big business parties is one of spin. Team Martin feigns concern about "ensuring equality of healthcare, education and opportunity for everyone," while Harper's gang is more explicit about their plans to improve the business climate by reducing overheads (i.e., wages and corporate taxes) and creating investment opportunities through the privatization of healthcare and other social services. Despite Martin's lip-service to looking after the less fortunate, during the Liberals' tenure social inequality has accelerated tremendously. The June issue of the *National Post Business* magazine reports that last year, under the Liberals, Canada's 500 top companies racked up a record \$70.6 billion in declared earnings by "slashing payrolls, reducing salaries, [and] ending product lines."

In attempting to differentiate themselves from Harper's Conservatives, the Liberals are making much of their supposed opposition to the unpopular U.S. invasion of Iraq. But the truth is that Canada was the fourth-largest contributor to this murderous crusade, after the U.S., Britain and Australia. Canadian escorts shepherded American warships in the Persian Gulf while dozens of Canadian soldiers, embedded in U.S. and British units, took part in the ground assault. In 1999 the Liberals dispatched Canadian planes to participate in NATO's brutal assault on Yugoslavia, and two years later, Canada joined the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan. Earlier this year, some 500 Canadian soldiers were sent to Haiti to prop up a right-wing regime headed by former death-squad leaders, which came to power in a U.S.-supported coup.

The Liberals have been hinting that they are prepared to participate in Washington's provocative "Star Wars" missile shield program, just as they joined in the "anti-terror" scare after the criminal attack on New York's World Trade

Center in 2001. The Liberals' Bill C-36, the so-called "Anti-Terrorism Act," permits prosecutors to arbitrarily suspend the right to *habeas corpus* and public trials in cases where the defendants are accused of being "terrorists."

In August 2003 the RCMP's "Project Thread" rounded up 25 South Asian students in Toronto. Wild tales of an Al Qaeda sleeper cell scoping the CN Tower, Pickering nuclear plant and other possible sites of future terrorist strikes were breathlessly retailed by the capitalist media. It wasn't long, however, before the racist frame-up began to unravel and the authorities were forced to admit that none of the "suspects" had been guilty of anything more than petty infractions of immigration regulations.

And then there is the case of Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen of Syrian origin, who was arrested in September 2002 in New York during a stop-over on a flight returning to Canada from Tunisia. After a two-week interrogation, American officials deported him to Syria where he was held in jail for a year and tortured. He was finally released and allowed to return home in October 2003. The government pretended to be outraged at Arar's treatment, but it turned out that the reason he was picked up in the first place was because the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) had fingered him to the FBI as someone with a possible Al Qaeda connection.

The Islamophobia and shredding of civil liberties that has accompanied the creation of "Fortress North America" is aimed, in the first instance, at immigrants and minorities, but it also poses a deadly danger to the entire left and labor movement. "Terrorist activity" is defined in such a way that it can include mass picketing, direct action protests and anything else that might disrupt "business as usual." The government has also created a list of "terrorist" organizations, including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), which Canadians cannot legally support. This is aimed not at preventing "terrorism," but at suppressing political dissent and bulwarking neo-colonial clients. The labor movement has a vital interest in exposing the "War on Terror" for the anti-democratic hoax that it is, and vigorously defending immigrants, refugees and others unjustly caught up in its clutches.

NDP—A Bourgeois Workers' Party

The New Democratic Party is unlike the Liberals and Conservatives. It is what Marxists call a "bourgeois workers' party"—a party that is based on the trade unions, the mass organizations of the working class, but has the pro-capitalist ideology of the union bureaucracy. The NDP is therefore *organizationally* independent of the capitalists, yet completely *politically* subordinate to them. While capable of occasionally spouting "anti-corporate" rhetoric, depending on the audience, the NDP aspires to nothing more than smoothing down some of the rougher edges of the predatory, dog-eat-dog system of capitalist competition.

In 1990, when the NDP came to power in Ontario, it was promising to tax the corporations and expand social programs. These pledges were soon ditched as Premier Bob Rae went on to impose the infamous "Social Contract," which ripped up union contracts and rolled back public-sector wages. Rae's government also jacked up tuition fees, jailed postal workers for picketing "illegally" and launched a PR campaign targeting "welfare cheaters." The cowardly

refusal of the labor bureaucrats to organize any serious resistance to these attacks emboldened the more belligerent, anti-union elements of the ruling class and paved the way for Mike Harris and his "Common Sense" reaction.

The scandal-plagued NDP governments that held power in B.C. throughout most of the 1990s also displayed a propensity for scapegoating the poorest and most defenseless members of society. The NDP introduced an unprecedented three-month residency requirement for welfare recipients. In the summer of 1995, the social-democratic government dispatched 400 Mounties to Gustafsen Lake to besiege a group of native protesters seeking resolution of long-standing land claims. In 1999, the NDP government howled for the internment of "illegal" Chinese immigrants who were intercepted off the coast.

During its time in office, the B.C. NDP managed to shift the entire political spectrum far enough to the right for Gordon Campbell's Liberals to get elected on an austerity program. The current NDP governments in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are ardent proponents of balancing budgets through closing hospitals and scaling back social programs. They too are preparing the way for a more aggressive brand of "neo-liberalism" when the patience of the NDP's traditional base is exhausted.

Today Bob Rae has turned in his NDP card and is pursuing a lucrative career as a Bay Street lawyer, while Ujjal Dosanjh, the last NDP premier of B.C., is running for the Liberals in this election. It's hardly accidental that these are the type of careerists who inevitably float to the top of Canada's social-democratic party.

Class Collaboration as 'Pragmatic Realism'

Early in the campaign [NDP federal leader Jack] Layton created a minor flap when he observed that Martin's cuts to social housing programs contributed to the increased death of homeless people on Canada's streets. While proposing a few petty reforms, like an inheritance tax on estates over \$1 million and a marginal increase in corporate taxes, Layton has played down any intention to redistribute wealth in favor of stressing that his priority is balancing the budget.

In an attempt to give the NDP some traction in Quebec, Layton came out in favor of repealing the reactionary Clarity Act, with which the Canadian government asserted its "right" to set the conditions for Quebec's independence. All but two NDP MPs voted for the legislation when it was adopted in 2000 and pressure from influential NDPers, including Alexa McDonough (the party's former federal leader) and Lorne Calvert (Saskatchewan's NDP premier), soon had Layton "insisting that repealing the Clarity Act isn't on his radar screen" (*Toronto Star*, 11 June [2004]).

The Clarity Act is a denial of Quebec's inalienable right to self-determination. Quebec is a nation and if the Québécois wish to leave Canada, socialists must unconditionally support their right to do so. If the Canadian bourgeoisie were to attempt to forcibly retain Quebec, it would be the duty of every class-conscious worker in English Canada to defend the Québécois by every possible means, including protests, political strikes and, if necessary, military assistance.

Canadian nationalism figures prominently in the NDP campaign. Sometimes it has a "leftist" coloration, as when Layton has attacked Harper and Martin for their willingness to consider participating in the Bush administration's reckless Star Wars initiative. But the NDP has also been at-

tacking the Liberals from the right, echoing Harper's complaints about supposed military underfunding:

"As Liberal Finance Minister, Paul Martin enacted deep cuts to the Canadian Armed Forces, whose women and men were already suffering from low salaries and sub-standard housing."

—"Jack Layton on peacekeeping and national defence," NDP statement

Revolutionaries say, "not one person, not one penny" for the Canadian military. Layton has a very different policy and has seized the opportunity of the current election campaign to disavow the NDP's long-standing formal advocacy of unilateral withdrawal from NATO in favor of somehow "transforming" this imperialist military alliance into a force for peace and happiness.

In 1999, in the midst of the imperialist propaganda barrage about "poor little Kosovo," the NDP's parliamentary caucus supported NATO's criminal attack on Yugoslavia. The NDP dissented from the U.S.-led assault on Afghanistan in 2001, but only on the grounds that it should have been carried out by the United Nations. Today, instead of simply calling for all imperialist troops out of Iraq, the NDP advocates a UN fig leaf for the U.S.-led occupation. This is particularly grotesque in view of the fact that the 1991 war against Iraq was conducted under the flag of the United Nations, as were the starvation sanctions that killed well over a million Iraqis during the subsequent decade.

The link between nationalism and class-collaborationism is made explicit in the NDP's protectionist economic policy:

"Canadians are hard-working people and our businesses can compete on the world stage. But unfair trade deals and a Liberal government that's consistently shown it won't stand up for our softwood, steel, auto and film industries has hurt too many Canadian workers, communities, and businesses. It's time we stood up for ourselves, protected our workers from attack and used practical solutions to create better jobs and more jobs right here at home."

—"Jack Layton on defending Canadian jobs from attack," NDP statement

The idea that the exploited and their exploiters have common interests is poison for the working class. Canadian bosses are the *main enemy* of Canadian workers, just as American and other "foreign" workers are their main ally. It is "our" business barons who are slashing wages, cutting jobs, gutting benefits and busting unions. Recognizing this simple fact is the only basis for launching any serious struggle to defend the gains of the past or to win new ones.

The class-collaborationist illusions pushed by the trade-union bureaucracy are mirrored in the NDP's eagerness to participate in a coalition government with the Liberals. Ten days before the election was even officially called, the *National Post* (13 May [2004]) reported:

"A formal coalition is unlikely, Layton says. But he reminisces fondly of the two-year pact negotiated with the Ontario New Democrats in 1985, which kept the Liberals free from non-confidence votes in exchange for policy concessions."

In the first few days of the campaign, Layton was signaling the NDP's willingness to prop up the Liberals if it got the chance. The *Toronto Star* praised the NDP leader's "businesslike" demeanour and noted how the party has shifted subtly to the right over the past decade:

"[T]he NDP leader has turned in a surprisingly disciplined performance, light on antics, heavy on 'positive'

tone, as he puts it. He always appears dressed up, in crisp, businesslike suit and tie, as if he is just headed over to Bay St. to make a deal. It's not exactly the image of a New Democrat politician.

"It is also a mark of Layton's image success in this campaign that few critics have jumped upon him when he's dared to speculate about NDP conditions for participating in a minority government.

"In 1993, then-leader Audrey McLaughlin was crucified for musing about this scenario....

"It was defeatist, unsportsmanlike, the critics opined.

"Times—and leaders—have changed. Now when Layton talks about his conditions for propping up a Liberal minority, such as demanding a pledge for instituting a system of proportional representation, the NDP leader is viewed as a pragmatic realist."

—*Toronto Star*, May 27 [2004]

An NDP coalition with the Liberals would effectively suppress the contradiction between its pro-capitalist policies and its working-class base—the NDP would assume responsibility for the Liberals, thus functioning as an open agent for capital and renouncing, for the duration of the parliamentary bloc, any pretense of representing the independent interests of the working class.

NDP's 'Marxist' Loyalists

Given the NDP's history of betrayal, overtly pro-capitalist program and eagerness to participate in a coalition with the Liberals, there is obviously no reason for class-conscious workers to consider casting a vote for them in this election. Yet a variety of supposedly Marxist organizations insist that socialists have a duty to vote for the NDP regardless of its record or program simply because, as the party of the trade-union bureaucracy, it has an organic link to the working class. Several years ago, Abbie Bakan, a long-time left social democrat and leading member of the International Socialists (IS), offered the following explanation for her group's chronic NDP loyalism:

".for socialists the criteria for this vote are not based on trying to win seats in parliament. Nor are they based on the program these parties advocate. Instead, this tactic is taken because a vote for a labour party is a vote with the working class, with all its mixed ideas.

"In Canada today, where the NDP exists as a serious political alternative (which is in virtually all elections except provincial elections in Quebec), socialists should call for a vote for the NDP. But it is important to do so critically."

—*The ABC of Socialism*, p 50

While freely admitting that working people have no illusions in the NDP's willingness or capacity to seriously resist capitalist attacks, Bakan is still calling for votes to the NDP in this election:

"The electoral success of the NDP in the current election will not bring about major changes through Parliament that benefit workers' lives. In fact, the history of the NDP when it has formed provincial governments shows the opposite tendency. The NDP is notorious for implementing cutbacks and attacks on unions that give a green light for employers' offensives.

"So voting in this election won't put an end to capitalism or the threat of war.

"But getting the chance to kick back against the Liberals is an opportunity no socialist should miss."

—*Socialist Worker*, 2 June [2004]

The idea that the way to "kick back against the Liberals"

is to vote for Layton, who openly proclaims his intention to keep them in power if he gets the chance, is almost too idiotic for words. It is a policy that can only serve to *create* illusions among any leftist workers or radical youth who are fooled by IS claims to represent the tradition of Marx and Lenin.

While frequently rationalizing electoral support to the NDP on the grounds that it is a part of the workers' movement, the IS has a record of entirely disregarding the class line and offering electoral support to various popular "progressive" capitalist formations, from South Africa's African National Congress, to the Green Party in British Columbia (see *Socialist Worker*, 4 October 2000). In Zimbabwe, IS supporters actually ran as candidates of the bourgeois Movement for Democratic Change which pledged to implement the IMF's program of neo-liberal austerity! (See 1917 No. 23.)

Socialist Worker (28 April [2004]) has already declared Ralph Nader to be "the only candidate worth voting for" in the upcoming U.S. presidential election. The IS leadership is not particularly concerned that in 1984, when employees of Nader's *Multinational Monitor* attempted to unionize, he fired them (see *Washington Post*, 28 June 1984). Marxists are distinguished from fake-socialists like the IS by their recognition of the centrality of the class line—i.e., the necessity for working people to organize themselves independently from *all* wings of the capitalists—big or small, "left" or right. But for the leaders of the IS there is only one "principle"—if it is big, tail it.

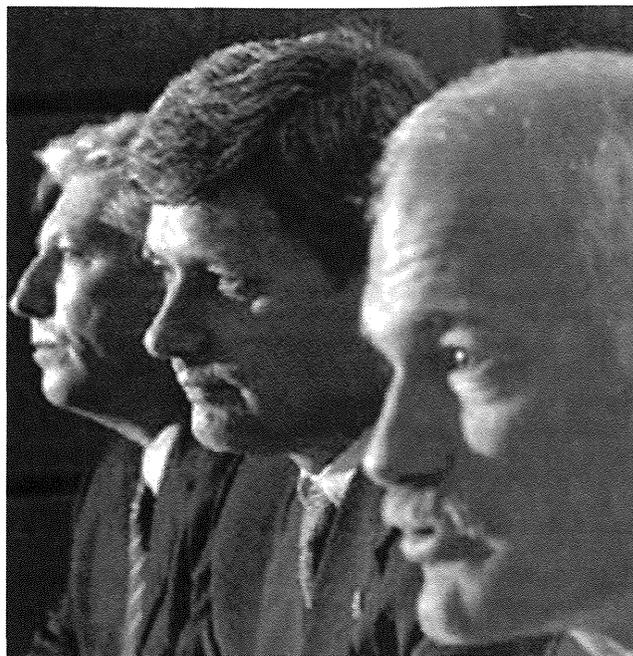
The IS is the largest, but not the only, group of "Marxist" NDP loyalists. Socialist Action, the tattered remnant of the United Secretariat in English Canada, has been buried in the NDP for years in a sterile bid to congeal a "Socialist Caucus" capable of nudging the social-democratic labor traitors a bit to the left. The supporters of *L'Humanité* [now *Fightback*], who are affiliated with Ted Grant's Workers International League, are pursuing a similar project in and around the NDP's moribund youth group. Their forlorn hope to see the "NDP to power on a socialist program" is reflected in a rather peculiar pamphlet, entitled "Best of Manifestos," incongruously combining Marx and Engels' world-historic 1848 *Communist Manifesto* and the muddled Fabian-socialism of the 1932 "Regina Manifesto," the founding document of the NDP's forerunner, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).

'The working class and the employing class have nothing in common'

The former Moscow-loyalists of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) and the ex-Maoist Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) are both fielding candidates in the election. But neither of these Stalinist-reformist campaigns comes even close to approximating a program of working-class political independence. Instead of proletarian internationalism, they both push crude, undiluted bourgeois nationalism. The CPC is concerned with preserving the "sovereignty" of the Canadian bourgeoisie:

"The very future of the country is threatened, as NAFTA, the proposed FTAA and other 'free trade' deals accelerate the U.S. domination of Canada. Moves to 'harmonize' Canadian foreign, immigration, resource and military policies with the U.S. are further undermining what's left of our sovereignty."

—Platform of the Communist Party, Federal Election 2004



GLOBE AND MAIL

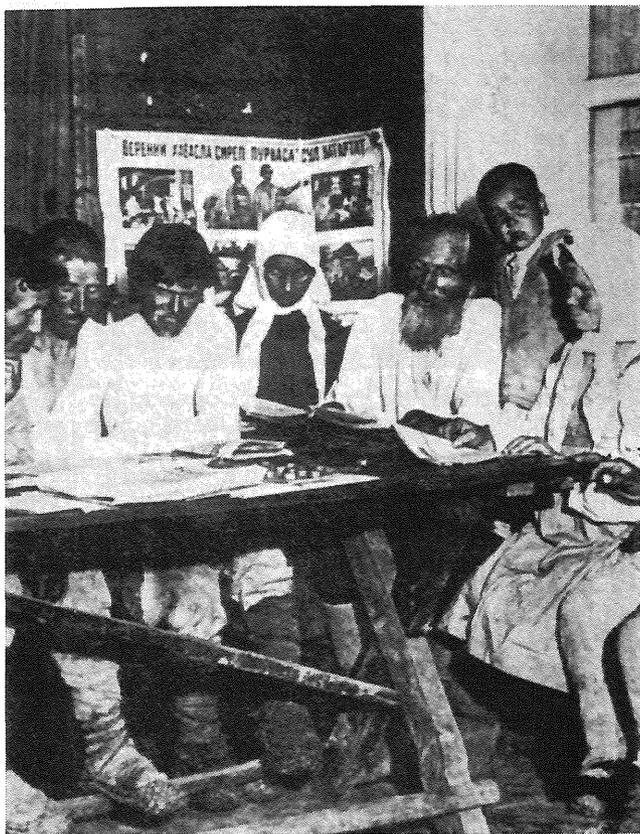
9 September 2004: Bloc Québécois, Conservative, NDP leaders float possible alternative to Liberal government

CPC(ML)'s electoral vehicle, the "Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada," is campaigning under the slogan: "Who Decides? We Decide! Annexation No! Sovereignty Yes!" A 26 May [2004] statement by the Marxist-Leninist Party Youth calls for "taking up the challenge to build the kind of political party in Canada which will empower all Canadians and release their initiative to take up their own nation-building project."

Canada is an imperialist country with its own fully developed ruling class which wields its state apparatus as an instrument for the oppression and exploitation of working people at home and abroad. The Canadian ruling class has all the "sovereignty" it can use. It is the willing partner—albeit a weak, junior, one—of the American imperial colossus to the south. The Maple Leaf patriotism and brainless "nation-building" schemes advanced by these Stalinist reformists means they are not worth considering as any sort of electoral alternative.

The central function of bourgeois elections is to mask the fact that under capitalism the tiny handful of privileged social parasites who own and control the means of production effectively dictate the conditions of life for everyone else, particularly for working people, who must sell their labor power in order to survive. There is only one historical alternative to the misery and irrationality of capitalism—socialism, i.e., an economic system in which production is determined by human need, rather than private profit. To open the road to the socialist future it is necessary to construct a mass, revolutionary workers' party capable of leading all the oppressed and exploited in struggle to expropriate the capitalist class. Such a party can only be forged on the basis of an uncompromising struggle for the complete political independence of the working class from the bosses and their political agents. For, as the preamble to the constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World put it 99 years ago: "The working class and the employing class have nothing in common." ■

Polemic with the ICL on Tibet and Falun Gong: On Combating Religion & Social Backwardness



NOVOSTI PRESS

Soviet literacy campaign, Algeshi, Chuvash SSR

The 28 May 2004 issue of *Workers Vanguard* (WV—literary flagship of James Robertson's *International Communist League* [ICL]) attacked our treatment of Tibet and national oppression in the Chinese deformed workers' state in 1917 No. 26. The WV polemic was tacked onto the end of a lengthy recapitulation of the ICL's stock slanders against us, most of which are rebutted in detail in *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 5, "ICL vs. IBT." But, as we noted in a 15 July 2004 response to WV (available on www.bolshevik.org) the issue of Tibet was both "new and noteworthy." The passage from our article, "China: Towards the Brink," that the ICL found so objectionable was the following:

It is clear that the Tibetan people, who have their own language, culture and territory, resent Han domination. Like the Uighur, the Tibetans are entitled to their own national existence, but for socialists the defense of the national rights of oppressed peoples in China must be subordinate to the defense of the deformed workers' state. The international campaign to "free Tibet" is one prong in the imperialist drive against China...

Marxists recognize that reactionary ideologies and nationalist sentiments are rooted in the material inequality of

class-divided society. Whenever possible, we would seek to erode the influence of social backwardness through education and economic incentives rather than repression. A Leninist regime would combat Han chauvinism by combining generous subsidies for development with real regional autonomy for national minorities, including the right to control local political institutions, to receive education and government services in the language of choice, freedom of political expression and freedom to travel. By agreeing that the Tibetans or Uighur have the right to control their own domestic affairs, a revolutionary government in China would signal its willingness to coexist with Tibet's traditional ruling caste and Xinjiang's mullahs as long as they retain popular support.

This prompted the following criticism from Workers Vanguard:

More recently, the BT has extended its embrace of counterrevolution to take in not only the German SPD but the CIA's favored 'god-king,' the Tibetan Dalai Lama, arguing in the latest issue of 1917 (2004): "By agreeing that the Tibetans or Uighur have the right to control their own domestic affairs, a revolutionary government in China would signal its willingness to coexist with Tibet's traditional ruling caste and Xinjiang's mullahs as long as they retain popular support." Where the Beijing Stalinist bureaucracy promotes "one country, two systems" in maintaining Hong Kong as a capitalist enclave, the BT goes the extra mile—to "coexist" with feudalism!—or, in other words, "one country, three systems." Such respect for the devotion of benighted peoples to their religious leaders has much in common with images purveyed by apologists for class and race oppression of an earlier era...

In our 15 July 2004 letter, we replied:

As every beginner socialist knows, a workers' state (even a bureaucratically deformed one) can only be created through a social revolution i.e., the effective expropriation of the indigenous ruling classes. This was the major accomplishment of the Chinese Revolution led by Mao Zedong's Stalinist Communist Party. Yet the transformation of property relations did not put power directly in the hands of the working class, nor did it automatically eradicate the influence of capitalist and pre-capitalist ideologies, particularly among the oppressed nationalities. The latter is the problem we sought to address.

Our proposal for regional autonomy for national minorities in China, including the right to elect whoever they choose to administrative positions, is simply an attempt to speak to the deeply-felt grievances and suspicions of peoples long oppressed by the dominant Han. The social backwardness of Tibet and Xinjiang make it likely that, initially at least, members of the reactionary traditional elites would be among those elected. 'Co-existing' with such persons within the economic/legal framework of a workers' state

does not imply tolerating attempts to undermine the system of collectivized property.

You sneer at us for showing "respect for the devotion of the benighted peoples to their religious leaders," but what we propose is exactly how the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky sought to deal with the peoples of the former Czarist empire among whom superstition and ingrained habits of deference to traditional authority persisted. In its first appeal to the Muslims of the former Czarist empire, the fledgling Soviet government proclaimed:

"Muslims of Russia, Tatars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirgiz (i.e. Kazakhs) and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks and Tatars of Transcaucasia, Chechens and Mountaineers of the Caucasus, and all you whose mosques and oratories have been destroyed, whose beliefs and customs have been trampled under foot by the Tsars and the oppressors of Russia. Your beliefs and usages, your national and cultural institutions are henceforth free and inviolable. Organize your national life in complete freedom. You have the right."

—"To all Muslim Toilers of Russia and the East,"
quoted in E.H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, v 1

Despite this pronouncement, the first period of the Russian Civil War saw conflicts between Red Army units and various "benighted peoples" of the East in which:

"the opposition was intensified by the intransigent attitude of Soviet emissaries towards the Muslim religion. The Soviet leaders had had little knowledge of the eastern parts of the vast domain which they had so unexpectedly acquired. They had in their minds a vague picture of oppressed peoples awaiting emancipation from superstitious mullahs as eagerly as from Tsarist administrators; and they were astonished to discover that, while the hold of Islam over the nomadic peoples and in parts of Central Asia was little more than nominal, it remained elsewhere a tenacious and vigorous institution which offered far fiercer resistance than the Orthodox Church to new beliefs and new practices. By the end of 1919 the Soviet authorities seem to have reached the conclusion that the only course was to divide the priesthood against itself by wooing the support of its younger members. This involved a compromise with Islam; in other words, an abandonment of the stiff ideological attitude of the civil-war period and a return to the toleration of the first winter of the revolution."

—*Ibid.*

The Bolsheviks provide us with a model of how a revolutionary leadership in China should seek to deal with Islamic mullahs, Tibetan monks and other purveyors of reactionary mysticism, as WV noted in a major article on Falun Gong a few years ago:

"Under Lenin and Trotsky, the Bolshevik regime enforced the separation of church and state and carried out a concerted ideological effort to educate the masses in materialism. The revolutionary government nationalized the vast property holdings of the Russian Orthodox church, but the church itself was not banned. The Bolsheviks understood that religion could not be abolished by decree but would disappear only as want and suffering disappeared."

—WV No. 762, 3 August 2001

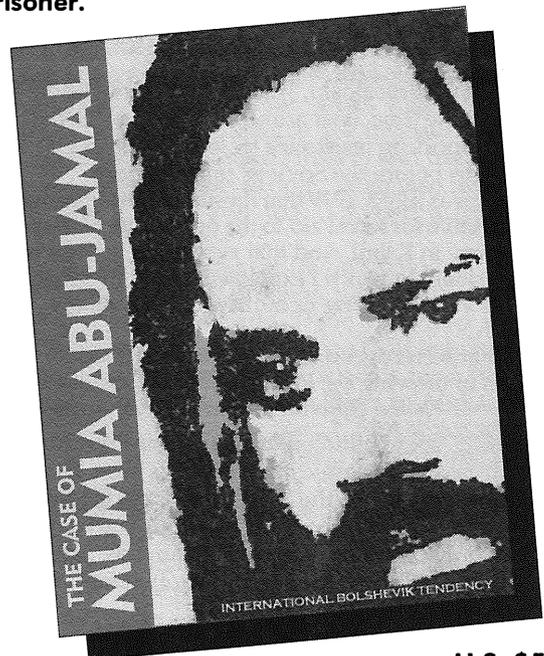
Yet, while you cited the Bolshevik example, your article hints that in contemporary China you incline to a policy of repression, at least toward Falun Gong. Branding it a "Force for Counterrevolution in China," you chastised two Hong Kong-based ostensibly Trotskyist tendencies (the USec

[United Secretariat]-affiliated *October Review* and the Pioneer group) for opposing the "persecution of Falun Gong" and "rally[ing] to the defense of the Falun Gong reactionaries against Beijing's 'high-handed repression'." While acknowledging that Falun Gong is "not different in substance from any other religion," you nevertheless equate defense of it with the USec's scandalous support to the CIA-connected leadership of Polish Solidarnosc in 1981 (see our pamphlet "Solidarnosc: Acid Test for Trotskyists").

Do you imagine that the best way to destroy the popular influence of Falun Gong practitioners, Tibetan monks and Xinjiang's mullahs is to round them all up and throw them in jail? Repression is appropriate when dealing with active counterrevolutionaries like Lech Walesa, but Leninists, unlike Stalinists, recognize that the popular influence of religion and other forms of reactionary idealism can only be effectively combated by a combination of education and the eradication of "want and suffering." Your assertion that this amounts to "embracing counterrevolution" only demonstrates your distance from the Trotskyist tradition you purport to uphold.

WV chose not to publish our letter. Perhaps they have reconsidered their criticism in light of our comments; in any case we have heard no more on this issue. Given the rather intemperate character of the original accusation, it seems unlikely that, even with the limited glasnost now in effect in the ICL, we will soon see a formal retraction of the accusation that proposing a policy of limited "toleration" and "compromise" as practised by the Bolsheviks under Lenin and Trotsky amounts to an "embrace of counterrevolution." ■

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



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Terrorism...

continued from page 40

reminiscent of Ariel Sharon—the butcher of Sabra and Shatila—talking about eradicating “terrorist nests” in Palestinian communities in Gaza.

The U.S. “war on terror” is intended to terrorize other countries, in the first instance the so-called rogue states, into submitting to the dictates of American imperialism. Peter Ustinov once aptly observed that “terrorists” are people who have bombs but no air force to deliver them. Those officially designated “terrorists” tend to be the retailers—the wholesalers are the U.S. and other major imperialist powers (supported, in their own duplicitous, “peace-loving” ways, by weaker imperialists like Denmark and Canada).

Origins of Al Qaeda

The connection between wholesalers and retailers in the terror business is perfectly illustrated by Al Qaeda. We should not forget how Osama bin Laden and other leading cadres of Al Qaeda got their start—they were trained and equipped by the CIA to fight a *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. (This is the same period in which the United States and Britain were providing Saddam Hussein with his infamous “weapons of mass destruction” to use during his war with Iran).

In 1978, when the pro-Soviet People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) took power in Kabul, it immediately began distributing land to the peasants, reduced debt payments for the poor, and lowered the bride price. The PDPA also encouraged girls to go to school. The semi-feudal landowners, moneylenders and reactionary Muslim clerics considered this a threat to their traditional way of life and, aided by the CIA, began to organize an insurgency. In December 1979 the Soviet Union countered by sending its army into Afghanistan to back the left-nationalist government.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter’s national security adviser at the time, later admitted that the U.S. had been actively supporting resistance by the clerics and landholders for months before the Soviets’ intervention:

“[I]t was July 3, 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention....”

“That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap....”

—*Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris, 15-21 January 1998

The U.S. spent billions of dollars training and equipping 100,000 radical Islamic *mujahedin* whose leaders were among those who, in the 1970s, had been throwing acid in the faces of unveiled women at Kabul University. Ronald Reagan praised the Afghan reactionaries as “freedom fighters” and called them the “moral equivalent” of America’s founding fathers.

Marxists had a side in Afghanistan. We called for the military victory of the Soviet Army and the PDPA over the *mujahedin*, and would have welcomed the extension of the Soviet collectivized property system to Afghanistan. But in 1989, in a prelude to the August 1991 destruc-

tion of the Soviet degenerated workers’ state, the Kremlin bureaucracy gave up and pulled out of Afghanistan.

After the Soviet retreat, the U.S. lost interest and a bloody war erupted among competing *mujahedin* factions that was eventually won by the Pakistani-backed Taliban in 1996. The United States welcomed the victory of the Taliban as a stabilizing factor in a region that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, had assumed renewed importance due to the discovery of huge oil and natural gas deposits in the lands bordering the Caspian Sea. (The U.S. was particularly interested in the possibility of building a pipeline from Turkmenistan, through Afghanistan to Pakistan. This route would bypass both Iran, a country designated by the U.S. as part of the “axis of evil,” and Russia, which opposes American expansion in the region.)

The fact that the Taliban was a brutally repressive, misogynist theocracy was a matter of complete indifference to the apostles of liberty and freedom—Washington’s only problem with the new Afghan government was that it was not sufficiently pliable. So plans were being laid long before 9/11 for installing a friendlier regime in Kabul. The destruction of the World Trade Center in New York in September 2001 provided a perfect pretext for removing the Taliban and establishing a string of military bases across formerly Soviet Central Asia—all in the name of fighting “terror.” The real reason was to undercut Russian and Chinese influence and insert the American military into the region.

The Russians have been waging a reactionary war for more than a decade to crush the attempt by the Chechen people to win their independence. The U.S. has been happy to see the Russian military bogged down in a protracted guerrilla conflict in Chechnya and has been reluctant to include the Chechens as targets in the global “war on terror.” Even after the horrific massacre of Russian school children in Beslan on 1 September [2004], the corporate media in the U.S. refused to endorse the Kremlin’s brutal campaign against the Chechen resistance. The *New York Times* wrote that “despair and anger at Russians” drove Chechens to suicide attacks and observed:

“Mr. Putin is also responsible for Russia’s stubborn refusal to deal with the political dimensions of Chechen separatism, as if punishing military offensives, puppet governments and fraudulent elections could somehow make the problem go away.”

—*New York Times*, 14 September 2004

Yet, like the rest of the American media, the *Times* “stubbornly refuses” to take a similarly broadminded approach to the question of why so many Iraqis are prepared to sacrifice their lives to deliver blows to American forces occupying their land. The transparently stupid assertions by President Bush that “the terrorists” hate America because of its freedom and democracy explain nothing. A retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant-colonel, Robert Bowman, offered a far more plausible explanation when he noted that the United States is:

“...the target of terrorists because, in much of the world, our government stands for dictatorship, bondage and human exploitation. We are the target of terrorists because we are hated. And we are hated because our government has done hateful things.”

—*National Catholic Reporter*, 2 October 1998

‘Hateful Things’

The United States and every other imperialist power does violent and “hateful things” to the oppressed masses

of the world because a social system that condemns half the world's population to life on less than \$2 a day for the benefit of a tiny handful of billionaires can only be maintained by constant, massive brutality.

Within two months of the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, more civilians were killed than perished in New York on 11 September. Tens of thousands of Iraqis have been killed by the "coalition of the willing" since March 2003 when the U.S. blitzkrieg was launched with an aerial bombardment designed to "shock and awe," i.e., terrorize, the population. Some 200,000 Iraqis were killed by the imperialists in the 1991 Gulf War. And more than a million Iraqis, many of them children, died during the 1990s as a result of the sanctions imposed by the United Nations on behalf of the U.S.-led imperialist coalition.

Last spring when four American mercenaries were killed in Falluja, the U.S. responded by attacking the city and killing 600 civilians. During the past few weeks U.S. aircraft have been relentlessly bombing residential neighborhoods in Falluja, as a prelude to the long-awaited assault. There is barely a pretense of winning hearts and minds—the clear intent is to terrify the population into submission. But it is not working. As one young Iraqi told the *New York Times* (14 September 2004): "When the Americans fire back, they don't hit the people who are attacking them, only the civilians. This is why Iraqis hate the Americans so much. This is why we love the mujahedeen."

The horrors of imperialist terrorism have been highlighted by recent reports of torture, rape and murder of prisoners in Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison and other facilities. In waging its "war on terror" the Bush administration decided to suspend the Geneva Convention for any prisoners it chose to designate as "unlawful combatants," including those held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, so that they could be routinely subjected to what the *New York Times* decorously refers to as "brutal interrogation techniques," i.e., torture. At a U.S. Senate hearing last month General Paul Kern revealed that as many as 100 people detained by the American military in Iraq have not been officially recorded, to avoid the risk of embarrassing investigations into their torture or execution (*Washington Post*, 10 September 2004).

Imperialist rule has always been characterized by brutal repression. The French and American imperialists butchered two million Vietnamese workers and peasants in a long, losing counterrevolutionary war. At least half a million people were slaughtered in 1965 in a CIA-supported coup in Indonesia. Tens of thousands were killed in Chile under Augusto Pinochet, whose military dictatorship was backed by the U.S. During the 1980s, the CIA's "contra" terrorists in Nicaragua murdered thousands of people, many of them schoolteachers and healthcare workers, in an attempt to undermine the left-nationalist Sandinista regime. Of course, none of this qualifies as "terrorism" in the capitalist media.

A few months ago the Bush administration ordered three anti-communist Cubans with long-standing ties to the CIA to be admitted to the U.S. They had been convicted in Panama of planning to detonate 33 pounds of explosives to kill Fidel Castro, along with dozens of university students, when he visited in 2000. These terrorists are welcome in the United States.

In fact the U.S. "war on terror" provides employment for many terrorists. A good example is Ayad Allawi, the long-time CIA asset appointed by the U.S. as Iraqi "prime minister" last June, who Bush has praised as a "strong



Victim of attack on schoolchildren in Beslan, September 2004

leader" in the fight against international terrorism. In the 1970s, Allawi ran a Mukhabarat death squad for Saddam Hussein. During the 1990s, while on the CIA payroll, he helped organize several bombings in Iraq, including one that killed several schoolchildren.

Bush's chief ally in the "war on terror" is British Prime Minister Tony Blair. In the 1920s, in an attempt to put down a popular uprising in Iraq, British airplanes dropped poisonous mustard gas in civilian areas. Eighty-odd years later, Blair sought to rationalize the invasion of Iraq by feigning outrage that Saddam Hussein had used chemical weapons "against his own people." Blair also neglected to mention that Britain and the U.S. had supplied the weapons in the first place.

Canada officially sat out the Iraq war, though Canadian military planners and 31 soldiers participated alongside British and American troops. Three Canadian warships with 1,300 sailors were in the Persian Gulf helping to protect American aircraft carriers. Canada's most important contribution was sending 3,000 soldiers to Afghanistan to free up American troops for Iraq. U.S. Ambassador Paul Cellucci, commenting on the Liberal government's refusal to officially endorse the assault, pointed out: "Ironically, the Canadians indirectly provide more support for us in Iraq than most of those 46 countries that are fully supporting us" (*Globe and Mail*, 31 March 2003). Canada is what we call a "jackal" imperialist—it tags along behind the big predators and picks up the scraps they leave behind.

'To Impose the Will of the United States'

The pretext for the attack on Afghanistan was that it was harboring terrorists. In a desperate attempt to ward off an



Guantanamo Bay: U.S. terrorizes defenseless prisoners

imminent American assault, the Taliban offered to expel bin Laden and his cronies, but the U.S. wasn't interested. Al Qaeda was never the issue. The war on Afghanistan was part of a larger strategic military plan for control of Central Asia and the Middle East.

In its September 2001 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, the U.S. Department of Defense referred to the importance of "access to key markets and strategic resources," and noted:

"U.S. forces must maintain the capability at the direction of the President to impose the will of the United States and its coalition partners on any adversaries including states or non-state entities. Such a decisive defeat could include changing the regime of an adversary state or occupation of foreign territory until U.S. strategic objectives are met."

It's no coincidence that most of the countries targeted in the supposed "war on terror" are either sitting on important oil deposits or are strategically located in relation to them. Iraq, which possesses the world's second-largest oil reserves, is right next door to Saudi Arabia which has the largest. Iran, on Iraq's other flank, also possesses important oil and gas deposits. In a speech delivered on the first anniversary of the criminal assault on Iraq, Bush claimed that the "ultimate ambition" of "the terrorists" was "to control the peoples of the Middle East" and "blackmail the rest of the world with weapons of mass terror." That's U.S. foreign policy in a nutshell.

Under the Bush Doctrine, the United States claims the right to preemptively attack any country which *might* possess "weapons of mass destruction" which *could* fall into the hands of terrorists at some point in the future. That of

course was the excuse for invading Iraq. Meanwhile, the U.S. is planning nuclear first strikes on "rogue states." In 2002, according to a leaked Pentagon document, there were seven countries on that list: China, Russia, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Syria and Libya (*Daily Mirror* [London], 11 March 2002). Cuba, too, is in grave danger. The only reason it is not on the to-be-nuked list is because of its proximity to Florida. The imperialists are anxious to uproot the system of collectivized property and restore capitalism in China, Cuba and North Korea. While revolutionaries advocate the overthrow of the ruling Stalinist bureaucracies through workers' political revolution, we also stand for the *unconditional* defense of these states against both internal counter-revolution and imperialist aggression—and we defend their right to possess nuclear arms.

The War at Home

The "war on terror" is fought on two fronts. In addition to extending U.S. military power globally, it also serves as a tool for strengthening the position of the American ruling class at home by hobbling domestic political resistance, particularly from the left and labor movement. The social basis of capitalist profit is the exploitation of living labor in the process of material production. Without the socially necessary, productive activity of the working class, capitalist society would not function. Any imperialist power that seeks to dominate the planet must first ensure the subservience of its own proletariat.

The color-coded "war on terror" uses a time-honored mechanism for getting the oppressed to identify with their oppressors: fear of an external danger. Today in North America, particularly in the U.S., there is a concerted campaign to promote a level of fear, bordering on paranoia, that has resulted in widespread acquiescence to a whole range of repressive measures that many Americans would not normally tolerate. The elaborate security checks, funk lines, data mining of credit cards, library and health records, the "orange" and "red" alerts, are all accepted because of the supposed danger of terrorist attacks.

Do you know how many people were killed by terrorist attacks in the United States in 2002? In 2003? This year? *No one*. And yet the avalanche of anti-democratic legislation continues, all under the guise of protecting American "freedom." Marxists have no illusions in the capitalists' commitment to democracy, and we remember that the right to free speech, freedom of assembly, the right of *habeas corpus* and all other democratic rights were won through hard social struggle. They must be jealously guarded against infringement by the ruling class.

At a Senate hearing in December 2001, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft openly attacked those who dared to complain about the assault on civil liberties: "Your tactics only aid terrorists for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve. They give ammunition to America's enemies and pause to America's friends" (CNN.com, 7 December 2001).

The supposed "war on terror" has meant attacks on organized labor, immigrants and minorities (especially Muslims, South Asians and Arabs). Since September 2001, more than 5,000 foreign nationals have been arbitrarily detained by the U.S. Justice Department as "suspected terrorists." Of those 5,000 only one has been convicted by a jury of anything related to terrorism. And last month, a federal judge in Detroit threw out that conviction citing a lack of

evidence and gross prosecutorial misconduct.

The U.S. government has drawn up secret, arbitrary "no-fly" lists of Muslims, leftists, peace activists and other suspected "dissidents" who are not allowed aboard airplanes in the U.S. This is pure political harassment. The workers' movement has a vital interest in fighting all such attacks on democratic rights because an attack on any minority is an attack on all the oppressed and exploited. That is clear if you look at the scope of the Patriot Act, which defines "domestic terrorism" as acts that "appear to be intended" to "influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion" or "to intimidate or coerce a civilian population." The law was deliberately formulated so that it could be interpreted as applicable to picket lines, strikes or demonstrations. Proposals are floating around the U.S. Congress to ban unions for anyone deemed essential to "homeland security" (*Washington Post*, 27 September 2004), a category the government would like to expand to include longshore and other unionized workers. This is a proposal for government-organized union busting, under the guise of a "war on terror."

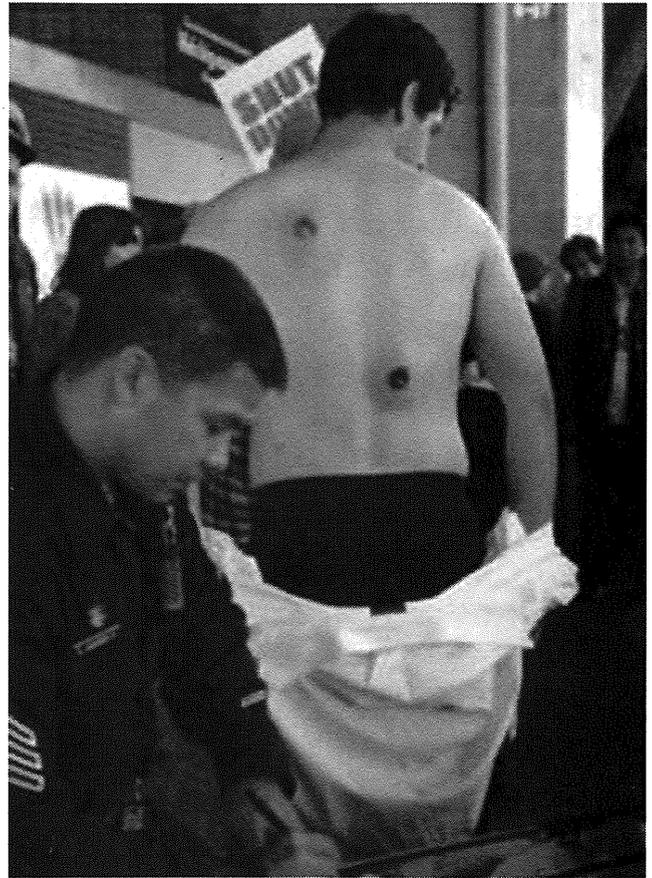
The increasingly authoritarian climate in the U.S. was evident during the Democratic and Republican national conventions this summer, both of which featured massive cop intimidation, police pens, preventative arrests and other preemptive measures to suppress dissent. The FBI recently seized internet servers which host various Indymedia websites on the grounds that in the course of exposing police brutality by undercover cops in Europe, "personal information" had been revealed. In Italy, Indymedia is currently being investigated for supposed links to "terrorism." And here in Toronto people remember [police chief] Julian Fantino's denunciation of OCAP [Ontario Coalition Against Poverty] as a "terrorist" group after the police riot at Queen's Park in June 2000.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the Canadian government passed its own draconian "Anti-Terrorism Act" (Bill C-36) which defines terrorism as an act (or omission) "compelling a person, a government or a domestic or an international organization to do or refrain from doing any act." Like the U.S. Patriot Act, this law defines terrorism broadly enough to include almost anything. It is an enabling act for police repression.

Only Socialist Revolution Can End Capitalist Terror!

Marxists adamantly oppose attacks on innocent civilians—whether office workers in New York, pizzeria patrons in Jerusalem or schoolchildren in Russia. We are opposed to violence directed against the working class and the oppressed, and to all acts that undermine the struggle for a better future. But Marxists are not pacifists. We do not oppose the use of force in principle. Pacifism is the ideology the oppressors recommend for their victims. It is, in Trotsky's phrase, a "debilitating narcotic" for the proletariat.

The capitalist media and politicians sometimes refer to the blows struck against the imperialist occupation by the Iraqi resistance as "terrorist attacks." There is no question that, as in Afghanistan, most of those actively resisting the imperialist occupation embrace extremely reactionary and virulently anti-working class ideologies. But that does not change the fact that the peoples of Iraq have a right to determine their own future free of coercion by foreign invaders



Oakland 7 April 2003: Police fired on peaceful protesters

and their puppets. In Iraq today the issue is not one of democracy versus dictatorship. It is a question of whether or not the U.S./British imperialist "coalition" will be able to re-impose colonial rule.

The "war on terror" is essentially a marketing device designed by the American ruling class to promote its campaign for global supremacy. It is used both to justify military adventures abroad and vicious repression at home. Under capitalist rule things are rarely called by their right names: exploitation is fair exchange, war is peace and occupation is liberation. The so-called war on terror is no exception. It is, in reality, a war of terror.

The only way to put an end to this system of chronic violence and brutality—which condemns some 40,000 children to starve to death every day—is through proletarian socialist revolution. The capitalists and their ideologues insist that "there is no alternative" to the tyranny of the market, but that is a lie. For the vast majority of humanity, capitalism is terrorism.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 proved that with revolutionary leadership ordinary working people have the capacity to rise up and smash capitalism. The working class was victorious in October 1917 because of the existence of a revolutionary socialist organization – the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky. Our job as socialists is to lay the political foundation for a mass-based, revolutionary workers' party capable of leading a successful struggle to expropriate the expropriators and open the road to a new world order in which human need, and not corporate profit, is the highest priority. ■

Paranoia & Hypocrisy in the Age of Imperialism Capitalism & Terrorism



AMY SANCETTA—AP

New York, 11 September 2001

The following is an edited version of a talk given in Toronto by Josh Decker on 23 October 2004.

Capital, as Karl Marx observed, came into the world “dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (*Capital*, Volume 1, Chapter 31). Yet Marxists recognize that the overthrow of feudalism represented an enormous leap forward for humanity: capitalism vastly accelerated the development of science and technology, increased labor productivity exponentially and opened up vast new possibilities for the expression of human individuality. That these contributions were limited and deformed by the straitjacket of private property should not blind us to capitalism’s immensely progressive character in relation to all previous class societies.

The French Revolution of 1789, the decisive event that established the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie over the feudal aristocracy, pitted a dynamic new form of social organization against a decrepit old one. In place of feudal absolutism, the rising capitalist class established what Marx termed the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.” The new social order

was consolidated through the infamous Reign of Terror associated with Maximilien Robespierre. Contemporary bourgeois academics, who tend to view the Jacobin “Terror” as an unfortunate excess, generally prefer to ignore the role that violence played in establishing capitalist supremacy. For them, the development of human civilization is a gradual, evolutionary process that would be entirely peaceful if not for the activities of subversives, fanatics and other “evil-doers.” But the Terror of the French Revolution, like all important events, must be seen in its historical context, as Mark Twain observed in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*:

“There were two ‘Reigns of Terror,’ if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years; the one inflicted death upon ten thousand persons, the other upon a hundred millions; but our shudders are all for the ‘horrors’ of the minor Terror, the momentary Terror, so to speak; whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the ax compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heartbreak?”

The cumulative violence of the old order was infinitely greater than that of Robespierre and his associates. The Jacobin Terror was historically justified because it helped secure a new, progressive social order. Likewise, for ordinary Russians the violence of the “Red Terror” employed by the Bolsheviks to defend the October Revolution against the Whites and their imperialist backers, was nothing compared to the horrors of life under the Czarist autocracy. Leon Trotsky, who, after Lenin, was the central leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, wrote at the time:

“The State terror of a revolutionary class can be condemned ‘morally’ only by a man who, as a principle, rejects (in words) every form of violence whatsoever—consequently, every war and every rising. For this one has to be merely and simply a hypocritical Quaker.”

—*Terrorism & Communism*

Revolutionaries judge everything, including the use of “violence,” not on the basis of abstract moral categories, but rather by its consequences for social development. By this criterion, the terrorist attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001 were not progressive; they were profoundly reactionary acts. Most of those killed were ordinary working people. We shed no tears for the military cadres in the Pentagon who died that day, but the mass murder of three thousand innocent civilians in the twin towers and aboard the four commercial airliners was a heinous, anti-working class crime.

Nine days after the attacks, in an address to a joint session of Congress, George W. Bush took advantage of Americans’ fear and sense of vulnerability to launch his cynical “war on terror.” The Commander-in-Chief of the military apparatus that deliberately exterminated hundreds of thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to “shock and awe” the Japanese into submission and intimidate the Soviets, proposed to launch a war—on behalf of the entire “civilized world”—against “terrorism.” It was

continued on page 36