

PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION



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

Re-Create
the Fourth International

Defend Iraq Against U.S. Attack! Behind Imperialist War Moves

The working class and every opponent of imperialism must join in action to stop the murderous attacks on Iraq by the U.S. imperialist war machine. War against Iraq has been going on continuously ever since the 1991 Gulf War, under both George Bush I and Bill Clinton. For years, the U.N. economic sanctions deprived the Iraqi people of food and medicine. For years, bombing raids were perpetrated under the pretext of defending the “no-fly zones” that the U.S. imposed. An all-out war is now on the agenda. The fight to stop the U.S., the world’s greatest terrorist power, requires a thorough understanding of the reasons behind the war – as well as of the political failures of the organizations currently attempting to lead the opposition.



George W. Bush gives the thumbs-up to terror against the people of Iraq. Mass working-class action is the way to stop imperialist war.

Washington wants to get rid of Saddam Hussein. Most of the world also knows that the U.S. war aim has nothing to do with Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction, his truly brutal regime or his supposed complicity in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The “regime change” in Iraq will have everything to do with conquering a major oil-producing country and asserting military dominance over the Middle East.

Of course, the real threat is not to the U.S. or its allies. In a report not widely publicized in the U.S., the London *Times* indicated the enormity of the anticipated horrors and the hypocrisy of the U.S. and the coalition “partners” it has bribed or intimidated:

The United Nations is making secret contingency plans for a war that would halt all Iraqi oil production, “seriously degrade” the country’s electricity system, provoke civil unrest and create 900,000 refugees.... Kofi Annan, the U.N. Secretary-General, is trying to keep the preparations secret for fear of signalling to Iraq that weapons inspections are futile and a U.S.-led attack is inevitable. (Dec. 23)

That is, the U.N. knows that its inspectors will find no proof of “illegal” weapons but that the U.S. will invade anyway. The whole routine is a sham. And it is contributing to the devastation by

covering up the mass destruction – by the U.S. – that is actually about to happen. The U.N., more nakedly than before, is an instrument of war, not peace.

REAL REASONS FOR WAR

For all the talk about the U.S. forces being part of a “coalition” and having the authority of the U.N. behind them, the war is in reality a power play by U.S. imperialism for its own interests. The Bush Administration, with bipartisan ruling-class support, is seizing the opportunity granted by Sept. 11 to show the world who is boss.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was former president Jimmy Carter’s National Security Adviser in the 1970’s, summed up the
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LRP/COFI Report

This report is brief, since much of our New York work in the last few months is reported in the article on the TWU transit workers' contract struggle (p. 24).

CHICAGO LRP

The Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU), the largest union in Illinois, continues to be a major focus of activity for the Chicago LRP. A supporter in the union raised and fought for a motion in the delegates' assembly in opposition to U.S. imperialism's planned war against Iraq. After months of maneuvers by the "progressive" PACT leadership, the resolution was defeated in favor of a substitute which in effect endorsed an Iraq war as long as it had U.N. approval: "The Chicago Teachers Union urges President Bush to exhaust all peaceful and diplomatic means, and not act unilaterally but in concert with the UN and our Allies in addressing the situation in Iraq."

The LRP supporter spoke for the defeated motion as follows:

It's clear that the Bush Administration will do everything in its power to wage war on Iraq – U.N. resolution or not. Who will pay for this war? First and foremost, the Iraqi people with their lives and blood. This war will result in even more carnage: even more Iraqis, over-and-above the 1.5 million who have already died as a result of the U.N. sanctions, will also lose their lives.

Secondly, who else will pay for this war?... Bush administration estimates project the war will cost anywhere between 100 billion to 1.9 trillion dollars. Where will they get this money? By attacking the standard of living of the working class, with Blacks and Latinos facing the worst attacks.... This is not to mention the unprecedented attacks on democratic rights and civil liberties that have occurred this year....

We have the responsibility as workers...to defend our Iraqi brothers and sisters against this blatant neo-colonial imperialist onslaught. Bush is *not* invading Iraq to help Iraqis or Kurds or Palestinians or any worker or oppressed group. He's invading Iraq for economic and political hegemony in the Middle East, and if hundreds of thousands of people have to die or lose their standard of living – so be it.... Let's add the CTU to the list of workers' organizations

who are on record opposing the war. Let's stop the war on Iraq before it starts.

Also speaking in favor of the LRP motion were supporters of the Progressive Labor Party and International Socialist Organization, as well as other delegates. Despite its defeat, it got 40 percent of the over 300 delegate votes.

A month later, at the January Delegate Assembly, a new resolution was introduced by a PLP supporter and backed by the LRP, calling on the union to send busloads of CTU members to the January 18 anti-war rally in Washington. The motion was adopted and two union buses were sent to the demonstration.

The Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue, a shadowy consortium of bourgeois leaders convened by Boeing, came to Chicago November 7 to be met by a protest of over 1000 people, including LRP supporters. Since the mostly student-based demonstration was built by anarchist anti-globalization activists, the platform was completely dominated by liberal speakers. It is noteworthy that the bourgeois state is willing to mobilize all-out even for such an innocuous event. There were more cops – decked out in full riot gear and sporting brand new surveillance equipment recently acquired as part of the racist, anti-working class "homeland security" initiative – than protesters.

Chicago is home to many thousands of Latino workers, so the defense of the workers and poor of Colombia and Venezuela is especially important here. LRP supporters participated in recent meetings and rallies about both of these struggles. Colombia receives billions of dollars in U.S. military aid each year, but the level of struggle led by union bureaucrats and solidarity activists in the U.S. is woefully out of step with the objective importance of the fight. Colombia's military and death squads kill 80 percent of the trade unionists slain in the world each year.

NEW YORK LRP

At the January Delegate Assembly of SEIU Local 1199, the hospital workers' union, President Dennis Rivera blamed the growing public-sector budget crisis on Bush's "destructive policy," hailed Clinton in contrast and specified the Democrats as the preferable alternative. He complained that the fiscal crisis might not allow the union to reap its hoped-for gains from its recent contract, which had been obtained by Rivera's treacherous endorsement deal with Republican Governor Pataki. Our supporters intervened to point out that the problem was capitalism, not a

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Proletarian Revolution

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

Editorial Board: Walter Daum, editor; Evelyn Kaye, Sy Landy, Matthew Richardson

Production: Jim Morgan

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

Send to: **SV Publishing**
P.O. Box 769, Washington Bridge Station
New York, NY 10033, USA.

Where We Stand:

The One-Sided Class War

Some days the papers say that the economy is getting worse; some days it's getting better. Better for whom? Latino unemployment is running considerably higher than the average, and Black workers without jobs are well over double the percentage for whites. The figures for young workers of all backgrounds are astronomical. In November, official unemployment figures hit 6 percent, an 8-year high. 8.5 million workers – white, Black, Latino, Asian – are jobless. Plus, government figures always underestimate (i.e., lie about) these numbers. And layoffs are climbing.

The attack on working-class people was already taking a huge toll, but under the cover of September 11, patriotic hype and the “war against terrorism” dodge, the capitalist ruling class has revved up its assault. It was bad enough that so many innocent workers were killed by criminal terror acts. But then our imperialist rulers, whom the rest of the world's working people correctly consider the greatest terrorists on the planet, used that event as an excuse to pillage us.

Despite the hypocritical “United We Stand!” claptrap, racial profiling is rampant, for the moment hitting hardest on Middle Eastern and South Central Asian immigrant workers. Many immigrants have been detained without even receiving elementary legal rights. In California in December, hundreds of Middle Easterners who were complying with new registration rules were suddenly handcuffed and jailed for no good reason – except to terrorize them and to deliver a warning to all of us that the rights we have won in the past are now undermined. Experience says that when racism in the U.S. runs rampant, it will sooner or later hit hardest on Black people and others of color. And as Black and Latino youth can tell you, despite the “heroic cops” crap, the reality of police brutality on the streets is hardly diminishing.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

President Bush's new \$674 billion plan gives massive tax reductions to corporations and the top capitalists. He has attacked his Democratic Party opponents with the claim that they are waging class war. Would that it were so. Both the current Republican and Democratic proposals are hyped as “economic stimulus” and “job expansion” packages, but neither is even faintly capable of doing either. As unemployment worsens and the undermining of working class income security continues, we are seeing yet another replay of the old “bad cop, good cop” sucker game played out between the conservatives' “trickle-down” scheme and the liberals' “trickle-up” dodge.

Bush's naked giveaway to the top tax brackets is justified as a stimulus to investors that would produce more jobs. The more covert Democratic plan disguises the fact that it gives workers a drop in the bucket: some workers would gain \$5.75 a week with most getting far less. Increased spending power by the poor will supposedly stimulate profitability, investment and therefore more jobs. Either way, the truth is that increased income for the capitalists means investment in machinery designed to cut labor costs and jobs. Both proposals are hyped as improving the lot of workers, but both ideas failed in the unrelenting Great Depression of the 1930's, when only massive war production and World War II succeeded in sopping up unemployment. A workers' government would provide jobs for all by creating massive public works to build housing, hospitals, schools, etc. for the benefit of all.

As for unemployment benefits, last year even short-term extensions were stalled in Congress by bipartisan finagling. This year's Republican scheme would give a 13 week extension of

unemployment insurance while the Democrats offer 26 weeks. Neither plan relieves the condition of those millions of workers who have already run through their meager benefits. Likewise, the difference in health care coverage for retirees, workers and their families between the two plans will do little to hinder the cascade of increasing costs, but it will do a lot to fatten drug company profits.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

The anxiety level among workers has risen because of the growing awareness that the bosses really own the government and dominate the economy. There are massive tax cuts for the wealthy. Their economy and the so-called war on terrorism has turned a \$236 billion surplus into a \$158 billion deficit. On top of this comes a new cycle of rip-off scandals by corporate executives. They steal billions, gut their companies and throw tens of thousands of workers out of work.

The politicians loudly denounce the “few bad apples” among the billionaire CEO's and promise to clean up the corporations. Then, after the one or two scapegoat thieves are sentenced to play golf in minimum security prisons, they fire a scapegoat administrator or two and appoint some other Wall Street plutocrat to proclaim that everything will now be spiffy. Then a new round of scandals explodes and hundreds of thousands more workers are thrown on the scrap heap.

Workers make a tremendous mistake if they believe the populist pap that the problem is just larceny and rich thieves. If that were true, we could just get rid of those s.o.b.'s and put in some honest ones – just as we are supposed to vote out Republican Party capitalist hacks and put in Democratic Party capitalist hacks, and then the other way around. The capitalist system treats us like hamsters in a cage, forever running and turning a wheel over and over to get nowhere.

But the problem is the capitalist system itself. Their system forces all the bosses to reduce their costs in order to maximize profits; otherwise their corporations die. Reducing costs means raising productivity – squeezing more production to create more profits out of fewer workers who earn less for working harder. Now the capitalist crisis is rapidly deepening, and profit rates are falling around the world. So the capitalists and the nation-states they own are forced to fight with each other over how much to exploit the working class.

“Honest” and dishonest capitalists alike must attack us with far greater venom if they are to survive and preserve their system and their own property. Given the unfolding crisis, the future is far more bleak. We face a 1930's-level Great Depression and the potential for fascism and World War III unless we stop it by overthrowing this ruling class and their capitalist system.

YOU CAN'T FIGHT REPUBLICANS WITH DEMOCRATS

Polls show that Bush continues to be popular. However, they also show that the “public” – overwhelmingly working-class – thinks he doesn't understand their economic problems. He is popular because he is thought of as strong in response to “terrorism.” Highly insecure workers are frustrated at their seeming inability to fight off the continuous assaults. Sucked into patriotism, they feel that at least on that front, “we” are hitting back.

Bush looks strong compared to the weakness and vacillation of his loyal opposition, the Democrats. In reality it isn't just their feebleness. The Democrats' role in the election game is to appear

to workers as the “good cops” who nobly give us sops, in contrast to the Republican “bad cops” who take them away. But such is the depth of the capitalist crisis at home and abroad that the difference is a quibble over what they can take from us. Clinton’s “welfare reform” threw more poor workers into the labor market, paid them slave wages and thereby lowered wage levels for all workers. The Democratic administration simply paved the way for Bush’s attacks.

The Democrats don’t even bother much to fake being on our side, because the explosive anger of the working class has been bottled up. Our real strength as workers isn’t in voting – although elections can be useful for educating our class. Our power is in mass action. Does anyone now believe that the gains made by Black people in the ’60’s were a result of changes in voting laws? No, it was the rebelling masses’ power in the streets. Does anyone really believe that the workers’ great strides in the 1930’s came from votes? No, it was the massive strikes that halted profit-making. Today, voting has gotten us nowhere because the angry but still enormously powerful interracial working class has been diverted and contained – by its official leadership, the labor bureaucrats and the pro-capitalist heads of the racially and ethnically oppressed peoples.

ANGER: WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The eyes of many workers across the country were on the struggle of the New York City transit workers in December 2002, when it seemed that the fury of these workers would explode and stop the whole city and Wall Street itself. (See article on page 24.) Consciously and half-consciously, especially in the city itself, many workers looked toward the strike not as a personal inconvenience but as a blow for their side. A serious strike could well have led to a general strike against layoffs, givebacks, fare hikes and the like. The bosses knew it. Their media went into a frenzy, comparing the workers to bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. They threatened the workers with massive fines and extended time in jail.

Underneath all the careful build-up of the American military machine against Iraq is the certain knowledge that the Vietnam

Syndrome is still a factor. If the war erupts, American casualties mount and the already fragile economy takes a big hit, the working class could very well explode. His father knew it when he ended the first Gulf War quickly, and Bush II knows it because the economy is in far worse shape today.

The capitalists are well aware of the strength of the working class; tragically, the American working class, by and large, is not. Marxists know that action comes before and is the crucible for consciousness. The labor bureaucrats, with all their populist chatter, have successfully curbed all attempts at mass strikes in response to the attacks, so that workers haven’t had a chance to see how powerful they are – how they could cripple the current attacks and make the bosses pay for the crisis they and their system created.

The labor bureaucrats are wedded to the capitalist system. Their role is to broker the sale of our labor power, and they are committed to the brokerage business. The major reason why they get away with undermining us is the absence of a revolutionary working-class party alternative that threatens their leadership. Now that counterrevolutionary Stalinism has lost its grip on the left, the potential for a genuine communist leadership, which fights for the general strike and unleashing the anger of our class, is very real. The League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP), although still small, is steadily growing – and our influence among its fellow workers is now far greater than ever before. This is an omen of what is beginning to happen as the contradictions of capitalism deepen and the justified anger of the class that actually produces the wealth is on the edge of explosion. And when that inevitably occurs, there will be a sea change in consciousness and the political scene in America.

The working class needs its own independent class party beholden to itself and not to capitalist politicians and condescending middle class saviors. In common struggle, we in the LRP will do our best to convince fellow workers that that party should be a revolutionary party that seeks to overthrow the capitalist state and its reign of exploitation and oppression.●

marking the 85th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution on November 7, 2002 in Moscow, Russia. Not only did they counterpose revolutionary internationalism to the national chauvinism of the Communist Party, the dominant political force at the event, but they did so at a time when chauvinist views had been whipped up to a fury in Russia: the hostage-taking seizure of a Moscow theater by Chechen militants and the Russian government’s murderous raid had occurred just the week before. The RWO’s principled defense of the brutally oppressed Chechens was a courageous political stand. Although it was unpopular among most people at the demonstration, it won the support of a small but vitally important number of Russian internationalists.●

LRP/COFI

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specific capitalist party, and that the only road forward was to fight for nationalizing the health care industry and repudiating the public debt to Wall Street. They noted that the union leaders won’t raise such demands because they have sold out workers’ interests to the capitalist Democratic and Republican politicians.

At a public meeting sponsored by the International Socialist Organization on lessons of the Vietnam anti-movement of the 1960’s and ’70’s, we protested that the ISO pointedly refused to recognize more than one token LRPer from the floor. The ISO speaker, Joel Geier, then proceeded to accuse us of acting like cops. After the meeting, one ISOer grabbed an LRP supporter by the throat and attempted to choke him. The ISO offered to apologize some days later for the physical attack, but not for the cop-baiting by Geier, one of its leaders, that instigated it. Our protest letter to the ISO rejecting their “apology” is on our website and is available on request.

UKRAINIAN RWO

We continue to deepen our relationship with the comrades of the Revolutionary Workers Organization (RWO) in Ukraine. The RWO made an important intervention in the mass demonstration

Están disponibles folletos en español

El LRP tiene una variedad de folletos disponible en español y tendrá más en el futuro. Estos incluyen volantes y nuestra Resolución Política.

Si le gustaría recibir folletos en español, por favor solícitelos por correo al LRP, P.O. Box 769, Washington Bridge Station, New York, NY 10033.

Why Marxists Are Atheists

We print below a letter we received from a young reader on the existence of God and the reply by an LRP comrade.

I read the COFI political resolution. It looks like I would fit perfectly into the party except for one thing. Before I bother you further, I should ask if it's acceptable for me to join if I believe in God? I believe I should be allowed, and I will give some defense.

I understand wholeheartedly that all the major religions and denominations therein have been used to maintain the status quo and the wealth of the ruling classes throughout history. I also understand that religious intolerance and persecution have been effective in keeping the oppressed working class divided throughout history. However, my belief in God has nothing to do with religion any more.

In fact, it has been through thinking about the religious texts that I have come to the conclusion that communism is what we need to fight for. Robert Macafee Brown wrote a book titled *Unexpected News* in which he points out to modern American wealthy that God is not "on our side." He explains how the *central* theme running throughout the Bible is not religion, but *class struggle*! He explains that if the biblical trend holds true, the oppressed workers of the world must rise up and defeat their oppressors, and God will be on their side. The only reason this has not been realized is because of the ruling-class elite within the religious hierarchies, and preachers of most capitalist churches changing, deemphasizing, or overemphasizing parts of the texts in order to allow room for capitalism.

Finally, I would like to point out that I believe any true follower of God need not be concerned about religious differences, or converting people to a particular religion. They need to convert people to communism. No person who is against *true, permanent, proletarian* socialist revolution is a true follower of God.

In closing I would like to say that there should be no resources necessary for religious worship. Religious worship should never take any resources away from the people.

I don't feel my belief will be a hindrance. God desires the oneness of all humanity in love and justice. It is because of my belief that I want to join in the revolution, please allow me to do so. Thank you.

Reply by the LRP

Thanks for your email expressing your desire to join our organization. We are glad that you raised the question of your belief in God because it is important that we discuss this question frankly and thoroughly. As you probably know, we are atheists and materialists. The fact that you recognize that religion in general supports the ruling classes is important.

First, I would like to explain why we do not in general accept people who believe in God. Then I would like to give you a few of arguments against belief in God.... I hope that they give you reason to re-examine your belief in God.

A fundamental tenet of our organization is our conception of consciousness, and specifically class-consciousness. We believe revolutionary proletarian consciousness is a product of the class struggle itself. While others may adhere to and even formulate revolutionary principles, the spirit and letter of such are themselves owed to the struggle of the working masses. And for the masses of workers who will join the class vanguard, it will be more directly through their own experiences in deep class struggles. This commitment is indeed a moral one, but morals as framed and determined by class interests.

It is important to see revolutionary politics in this way, and important to see our organization as an institution of the working class itself. Part of our political clashes with other left organizations involves their notion of revolutionary politics as coming from outside the working class, in their case not from God but from the radical bourgeois intelligentsia. This both reflects and reinforces a manipulative attitude towards the working class. It tells workers to look to other sources (intellectuals, God, etc.) for their fundamental strength, as opposed to their own objective power. It is counterposed to the necessary development of revolutionary consciousness.

This whole matter has added importance given the state of the class struggle and our organization. We are a small, propaganda organization with an enormous task of cohering the vanguard of the working class. This requires a coherent, disciplined manner of intervention in the class struggle, which in order to be effective and democratic involves a tight set of shared values and political perspectives by the membership. (At a different stage of struggle and organization, when masses of workers are moving into revolutionary motion, such recruitment standards regarding religious beliefs may be relaxed, but even then the program of the party itself will remain militantly atheist.)

Of course we don't demand that people agree with us on every point in order to work together. We realize that there are many levels of consciousness, and people have to go through all kinds of stages. So for now it would not be appropriate for the most part for people who believe in God to join our organization. This is especially true in a case such as yours, in that you feel that your belief in God is in fact at the core of your reasons for wanting to fight for the revolution.

Now I would like to present some basic concepts for you to consider regarding the concept of God.

Let's start first with your statements that "No person who is against *true, permanent, proletarian* socialist revolution is a true follower of God" and that "God desires the oneness of all humanity in love and justice." These statements are about your own personal conception of the nature of God. What is the origin of this conception – for you? Even if it seemed to come to you through some revelation from God himself (herself?), the basic content really comes from your experiences in the world, especially in terms of your social experiences and your reactions and interactions that have brought you to want to fight against class exploitation.

The content of any conception of God, if it is to have any particular meaning besides the very abstract "infinite" or "all-powerful" or "all-knowing," has to come from the believer's own experience in the world. For example, the believer may think that if God is infinite, then God must be perfect. If God is perfect, then God is "good." If God is good, then God must support what I know to be good and oppose what I know to be evil. But what I know to be good and what I know to be evil come from my experience, not from revelation from God. So the believer projects into the conception of God all kinds of attitudes which in fact were originally generated within the believer himself.

Similarly and more abstractly, God as supreme consciousness is a projection of human consciousness. The human mind seeks to understand and explain the world. Prior to any scientific development, various creation myths provided an explanation for how the world began through various kinds of metaphors, projections arising from very basic experience into areas that cannot otherwise be conceived by the human brain. In some cases cre-

ation is thought of as giving birth. In other cases the metaphor is taken from the very human operation of making tools. God made the world the way people make tools, etc.

The particular conception of God necessarily flows from the real conditions of society. Often God is conceived as a "father" – sometimes as a "mother." If one's model for family life is based on having a tolerant, loving, nurturing parent whose main goal is to prepare the child to be a loving, nurturing parent in the future, God as father or mother is seen in analogous terms. If one's model for the family is based on a strict parent, who must prepare the child through discipline to follow strict rules, then God is seen as demanding strict obedience to divinely given laws and as being punitive towards law-breakers. Again the conception flows from social reality; the social reality does not flow from God's nature.

OK, let's take a different tack. One of the most common arguments as to why there "must" be a God is that the nature of the universe requires a creator as an "explanation." For example, the fact that there is predictable causation in the universe is said to require a "first cause." If you have read some of the classics in Western philosophy, you may already know David Hume's famous refutation of this type of argument. This kind of "explanation" doesn't really explain anything. Causation is "explained" by kicking it upstairs to a new mystery. There can be no explanation for the "first cause." Theologians love to say that science cannot explain how the universe began, or why the universe exists in the first place.

This is true. Science cannot provide this kind of explanation. *But neither can theology!* Theology's attempts to explain such questions always beg the question, "explaining" a mystery by creating a new one.

Another argument commonly used to support the idea of God and to oppose materialism is the idea that consciousness as experienced by us cannot be explained by examining purely material processes. Another great philosopher in the Western tradition, René Descartes, argued that no matter how sophisticated a machine might be, it could never have a mind as we know it. He concluded that the mind must be composed of a "substance" completely different from matter (physical "substance"). This led him to the dead-end of "dualism": that we are composed of two totally different kinds of "substances": one mental or spiritual and the other physical.

The reason this is a dead-end is that if these two substances are alien to each other there is no way to explain their interaction. At bottom Descartes was forced to say that the interaction between the mental substance (the "soul") and the physical substance (the "body") occurs through the activity of God. So the view that consciousness cannot be explained through examining physical, material processes led to another example of an "explanation" that doesn't really explain anything. It simply presents the mystery in new clothes.

Some theologians would say, yes, these spiritual concepts don't really explain anything, in the way science seeks to explain, but these theologians say that these spiritual ideas provide a place for the "essential mystery" that they claim is at the "core of reality." Our response would be that it is certainly true that there are still many problems of nature, including human nature, that science doesn't yet explain. It doesn't even try to explain "why" the universe exists. (Most contemporary philosophers say that questions like "why does anything exist" are "meaningless" questions, in that any possible answer cannot be tested through experience.)

But many of the questions that people have long thought to be unanswerable *have* been answered by science. For example, many of the objections raised historically to the theory of evolution have been answered through new evidence. In the field of

consciousness and cognition, research done in the last twenty years by neurologists and cognitive scientists have made great advances in exploring the human mind.

So science may not be able to explain *everything*, but then again in any particular aspect of nature we have no reason to draw a line and say that science cannot advance beyond this point. The idea that there is a value to maintaining a zone of mystery beyond which the human mind should not go is quite reactionary and can only help those whose interests lie in opposing scientific and technological progress, i.e., the most reactionary elements in the ruling classes.

Finally you might ask, even if one cannot embrace the concept of God, how does one *know* that there is no God? Why atheism, as opposed to "agnosticism," the view that there may be a "God" but we have no way to know one way or the other, or to know the nature of God. Friedrich Engels characterized agnosticism as "shamefaced atheism." In other words, where religious thinking is socially dominant, agnosticism is socially more acceptable.

The problem with agnosticism is that once the concept of God is exposed as being a morass of confusion, there is no reason to pose the possibility of its existence. "Something" (labeled "God") may exist. What does that mean? For a proposition to be "true," then it has to have meaning. A proposition that could be true but which can never be proved one way or the other has no practical meaning.

Your beliefs are in fact quite similar to my own process of religious thought. I was raised in a fundamentally Protestant household. Over time, I began shedding many of the cornerstones of this faith. But at about your age and in similar circumstances, I still held to an abstract concept of God, while attempting to reconcile this with the basics of Marxism I was beginning to adhere to. I was in effect creating my own religion. I came to this insight at the point that I dropped my religious beliefs.

I hope that these considerations are useful to you.... You say your "belief in God has nothing to do with religion any more," so I gather that you were formerly religious in the conventional sense.... In any case, we can continue to discuss these questions, and even if you should find that you cannot abandon your belief in God, there is no reason why we cannot work together towards common political goals. I hope you understand, given the nature of our organization and its tasks, why it would probably not work for you to join so long as you hold to the belief in God.●

KOVI-Dokumente VII Kommunistische Organisation für die Vierte Internationale

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Lessons of the Vietnam Movement

by Joseph Andrews

Many who oppose the looming U.S. war against Iraq look back at the movement against the U.S. war on Vietnam with a combination of nostalgia and admiration. The widespread opposition to that war, and its manifestation in massive events many hundreds of thousands strong, seems an inspiration, for young activists especially.



Kent State University, Ohio, 1970. Protesters against U.S. escalation of the Vietnam War were fired on by the National Guard; 4 were killed.

The fact that we are once again confronted with the necessity of building opposition to yet another imperial slaughter, ought to lead us to reflect not on the Vietnam anti-war movement's partial successes but on its enormous failures. For working-class revolutionaries who abhor the capitalists' drive to sacrifice us and our Iraqi brothers and sisters for the sake of world supremacy, the task is to overcome the harmful legacies of the past, not to repeat them.

WHY THE U.S. LOST IN VIETNAM

The subject of the greatest myth-making is the student anti-war movement. Its centerpiece organization, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), claimed 100,000 members at college campuses throughout the country by 1968, on the basis of a program which clearly pinned full responsibility for the war on U.S. imperialism.

Working-class opposition to the Vietnam War is rarely mentioned in histories of the period. Yet in 1970, poll data showed that 48 percent of Northern white workers favored immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Vietnam, in comparison to 40 percent of the white middle class whose youth were supposedly the mainstay of anti-war sentiment. Opposition to the war was especially strong among Blacks; among all workers, including Blacks, a clear majority favored full withdrawal. Yet despite their opposition to the war, many workers felt alienated from an anti-war movement dominated by forces alien to their class interests.

Working-class anti-war sentiment found its way into the armed forces. Though the Army was drafted, workers in general and people of color in particular were represented in disproportionate numbers, thanks to student deferments and other devices

available to middle-class youth. By 1971, sources close to the top military leadership described the Army presence in Vietnam as "approaching collapse" and "near-mutinous." The collapse of discipline included frequent "fraggings" – the killing of officers by their troops. By the end of the war the U.S. ruling class had given up on the draft and developed a decided preference for the type of mercenary, "professional" and "volunteer" force they have today. By 1973, the U.S. withdrew its military forces from Vietnam. (For more on this, see "Vietnam: the 'Working-Class War'" in *PR* 45.)

The U.S. withdrawal came too late for the over two million Vietnamese who died as a result of the war. As early as 1968, the Tet offensive had shattered U.S. dreams of an easy military victory. Yet U.S. involvement and its deadly consequences dragged on for another five years, as the imperialists sought a way to extract themselves from a messy situation while minimizing the consequences to the "prestige" – that is, terror – inspired in the world's masses by U.S. might.

The U.S. withdrawal came about in great measure not because of the demonstrations at home but because of the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people, who endured tremendous sacrifices to rid their nation of foreign invaders. To rebuild U.S. prestige and overcome their "Vietnam syndrome," our rulers have engaged in quick wars in Lebanon, Grenada, Iraq, Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, most often facing little more than token opposition at home.

The second factor was the ruling class's fear of a potential working-class upheaval at home. The capitalists attempted to wage the Vietnam War on a "guns and butter" basis. But the war came at the tail-end of the lengthy economic boom which followed World War II, which gave way to economic stagnation and crisis beginning in the early 1970's. Afraid of a social explosion if body bags from overseas were combined with declining living standards and racial unrest at home, the rulers attempted to avoid sharp austerity measures. The fraggings in Vietnam, the ghetto revolts across the U.S. and a wave of wildcat strikes were sharp warnings.

The prestige of the Vietnam anti-war movement derives from its image as "an anti-war movement that won." But in reality it was the third factor, after the Vietnamese struggle and the domestic working-class threat.

Today the system's economic crisis continues to intensify. The ruling class has no choice now but to pose the war as "guns versus butter." Increasingly open assaults on workers' jobs, living standards, democratic and union rights go hand-in-hand with the war plans of the bourgeoisie. The potential for massive and deep radicalization is tremendous. Yet so are the dangers of a revival of class-collaborationist populism and a deflection of that radicalization away from working-class revolution. That is why we examine the actions of the left in the Vietnam anti-war movement and the hyping of it by their present-day successors.

REVOLUTIONARY RETREAT

It is a tragedy that a movement of hundreds of thousands in the U.S. actively and consciously opposing their own imperialist rulers left no revolutionary legacy. The reason is that those who led the Vietnam anti-war movement, despite the stated intentions of many, led it down the garden path to a graveyard – the Democratic Party. Their populism, often masquerading as revolutionism, worked as an obstacle to the mass development of a genuinely revolutionary understanding of capitalist society. Rather

than draw a clear class line between the imperialist rulers and those who had no lasting material interest in the war, they left the door open for dissident members of the ruling class to hijack a swiftly radicalizing movement into continued support of a system which depends on war to survive.

Many of the anti-war leaders of the day were what Marxists refer to as “centrists,” political forces that vacillate between rhetorical advocacy of revolutionary struggle against capitalism and a practice which seeks instead to smooth over the system’s rougher edges. Some sought to police the movement and prevent revolutionary voices from being heard. Others sought to build new political parties on a populist rather than a revolutionary basis, thus giving support to illusions in the electoral process and preparing the way for more successful efforts from within the Democratic Party. Both justified their strategies with a stagist understanding of what the struggle was ready for: liberalize and reform now, overthrow the system later. All, in various ways, ended up helping to preserve the continued dominance of liberal leaders and the ideology of liberalism over the movement.

SWP KEPT MOVEMENT SAFE FOR DEMOCRATS

During the Vietnam War, the largest organization claiming the heritage of Trotskyism was the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), which played a leading role in one of the main anti-war coalitions, the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC). Today’s SWP has long since given up on its claims to Trotskyism, yet there remain smaller organizations which uphold the heritage of the Vietnam-era SWP. The most prominent of these is Socialist Action; the November 2002 issue of its newspaper contains an article by Jeff Mackler, “Strategy and Tactics in the New Antiwar Movement,” which whitewashes the way the SWP and NPAC carried out their work.

Mackler paints a picture of a very democratic, non-exclusionary movement. He described a “united-front” method of anti-war work, in which “the broad range of groups involved can express their individual views as part of the rally program, where the movement’s full diversity is best expressed.” Yet, as he aptly says, “Organizational forms are subordinate to politics.” In the case of NPAC – which Mackler never mentions by name – the organizational form was subordinated to pacifist politics designed to keep things comfortable for liberal imperialists who wanted the U.S. to get out of a losing war. Those politics the SWP enforced.

The central misrepresentation in Mackler’s article is its presentation of the SWP’s central slogan for NPAC, “Bring the Troops Home Now!”, as “the political expression of support to the Vietnamese right of self-determination.” It is true that this slogan was counterposed to openly pro-imperialist slogans defended by the Communist Party and others, like “Negotiate Now!” – a slogan that granted the U.S. invaders the right to negotiate over Vietnam’s future. But “Bring the Troops Home” was deliberately ambiguous regarding Vietnamese self-determination and deliberately ignored the imperialist character of the war. The SWP, in the pages of its party press, interpreted it as “objectively” anti-imperialist. Yet for the many Democratic Party figures who chose to grace NPAC platforms as the war dragged on, it meant nothing more than a tactical judgement against the advisability of continuing the Vietnam War.

Further, the slogan’s emphasis on *U.S.* troops lent it a patriotic tinge designed to appeal to the liberals. Similar slogans during the first Gulf War adapted even more openly to patriotic sentiment, in the form of “Support Our Troops, Bring Them Home Now.” As we wrote at that time:

For many activists this sentiment expresses their hatred of sending American youth to kill and die for an unjust cause.



Anti-war marchers in New York, 1966. Slogans and flags blurred support for Vietnamese self-determination with liberal imperialist sentiment.

But the liberals use these feelings to create a defensive adaptation to the patriotic propaganda flooding the country. “Support Our Troops” is above all the warmakers’ motto. To them it means “Support Our War”; it corrupts and dulls human feelings against war and turns them into their opposite. The slogan also promotes the poison of American chauvinism: the idea that American lives are more valuable than others. (PR 38.)

Only because of the fading of memories over thirty years can Mackler present “Bring the Troops Home Now!” as a principled, anti-imperialist slogan. In the context of the rapid radicalization of the day, its softness on imperialist patriotism was readily apparent to most observers. It thereby served to exclude from NPAC large numbers of radicalizing workers and youth, especially those of color, who had come to realize through their own struggles that U.S. imperialism was a deadly enemy. Liberal Democrats could mount NPAC podiums secure in the knowledge that the SWP would neither denounce them in public nor allow anyone else to do so. Despite the warnings against support for the Democrats buried ritualistically in the SWP press, the SWP played a key role in enabling some Democrats to burnish their anti-war credentials unchallenged. As the hardened social-democrat Michael Harrington enviously put it, the SWP “carried out Menshevik politics with Bolshevik discipline.”

PEACEFUL PROTEST?

Central to the SWP and NPAC’s ability to police the movement was their insistence on the tactical centrality of “massive peaceful protest,” which Mackler defends. His argument rests on a counterposition between “mass action” and small-group civil disobedience. “Mass strikes and similar direct challenges to capital” he dismisses as “music of the future.”

But revolutionaries are not passive spectators waiting for the working class to put on a grand concert for us. It is our job to demonstrate to our fellow workers that the ruling class which wages war on Iraq is the same class that is waging war on our lives and living standards. We hope to reach the most militant and questioning workers and to break down the patriotic atmosphere that demands that workers sacrifice on behalf of the “national interest.” The gain in consciousness would mean that the working class could then fight not only in defense of its immediate economic needs but also at the forefront of the anti-war struggle. Since these are in reality one struggle against the same enemy, the “movements” would increasingly fuse.

Workers know from experience that force is necessary to defeat the bosses. They do not have the luxury of pacifism when defending their interests and will not have much patience for it in the anti-war struggle. Treating massive peaceful protest and small-group civil disobedience as the only options means dismissing the powerful methods of struggle that the working class has at its disposal. It is a recipe for keeping anti-war protest action hermetically sealed from any future working-class uprising. The policing of the anti-war movement which the SWP carried out and its successors alibi may appear, for the moment, to pose a threat only to small groups to their left. In fact, it is designed to squelch the working class as a whole and prevent it from performing its raucous “music.”

WWP REPEATS SWP HISTORY

Socialist Action today cannot act nationally like the SWP in the Vietnam movement. But other, larger organizations clearly aspire to such a role.

A significant left force in the anti-war movement is the Workers World Party (WWP). During the Vietnam War, WWP’s fondness for radical rhetoric, combined with their uncritical attitude toward Stalinist leaderships, led them to vigorously cheerlead for the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. Thus they were frequently at odds with the SWP’s way of currying favor with liberal politicians. Today, however, their class-collaborationist politics has since put them deeper in bed with the same elements.

WWP, and the anti-war formation International ANSWER which it runs, have come under attack by squeamish liberal commentators for being the “reds under the bed” of the anti-war movement. WWP is worthy of criticism – not for being communists, but for not acting in any way like communists. At the October 26 rally in Washington, although there was a profusion of WWP supporters speaking from the platform under various guises, not one had the nerve to denounce lead speaker Jesse Jackson’s support for the first Gulf War, or the role of the Democratic Party in prosecuting and supporting imperialist wars. Like the SWP of old, the WWP also made sure that all the “radicals” they invited to the podium were similarly tamed.

Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle

A Proletarian Revolution pamphlet

by Sy Landy

An overview of the Marxist understanding of revolutionary proletarian interracialism and the historical course of the U.S. Black struggle. The pamphlet discusses the idea of Black liberation through socialist revolution as the alternative to integrationism and nationalism, whose failure it analyzes in detail.

\$3.00 from:

Socialist Voice Publishing Co.,
P.O. Box 769, Washington Bridge Station,
New York, NY 10033.

RADICAL ELECTORALISM: ANOTHER DEAD-END

For the WWP, which has a long history of urging “tactical” votes for figures like Jackson and Al Sharpton, providing a platform for Democratic Party liberals is standard practice. Others on the far left are following a less direct route down the same path.

One such group is the International Socialist Organization (ISO). In the November 1 issue of its *Socialist Worker*, a lengthy article by Bill Roberts purports to teach the lessons of the Vietnam movement. Instead, it points up some of the lessons ISO leaders failed to learn. For example, Roberts writes:

[One] sign of the antiwar movement’s accomplishments in early 1968 was the result of the Democratic primary in New Hampshire. Minnesota Sen. Eugene McCarthy, who campaigned as an opponent of the war, nearly beat the incumbent president, Lyndon Johnson, in the first contest for the 1968 nomination. In short order, Johnson said that he was retiring from politics and vowed not to run in the general election.

This certainly was a sign of growing popular opposition to the war. Yet it was also a sign of how the “movement” – not the anti-war masses but the “anti-war” reformist organizations – had misdirected many of its efforts and ended up siphoning that opposition back into the Democratic Party.

In the lead-up to the 1968 election, the ISO’s predecessor organization, the International Socialists (IS), entered into a bloc with Maoists, Black Panthers and other radicals to build a new, anti-war third party, the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP). The PFP was not based on mass working-class organizations, nor was it intended to be a working-class party. It attempted instead to appeal across class lines on a radical populist anti-war platform. A vigorous petitioning campaign won the PFP hundreds of thousands of signatures and ballot access in California and other states. At a time when many in the movement had become disillusioned with the capitalist electoral process, the IS and other forces behind the PFP helped revive the electoralist strategy.

The initial success of the PFP campaign alerted Democrats like McCarthy (who had come to oppose the war) that there was a real constituency out there, and they jumped on it in true opportunist fashion. Many who had supported the PFP out of desperation, or who preferred its somewhat leftward stance, looked to McCarthy as a leader who could deliver more than protests on the war question. The PFP’s electoral and activist support base dried up, as thousands of young war opponents were urged to “get clean for Gene.” Robert Kennedy would soon do to McCarthy what his campaign had done to the PFP, and many activists were later shocked by the Democrats’ nomination of Johnson’s Vice-President, Hubert Humphrey. Yet the damage had already been done; thanks in part to the PFP, many radicalizing activists had been taught demoralizing and false lessons, encouraged to try and play the system from the inside. They were played instead.

The ISO leaders’ failure to draw any lessons from this is clear from their present practice. Today, they campaign for the middle-class radical Green Party and hype its candidates as “anti-war.” In fact, the anti-war credentials of the Green Party are pretty shoddy, as in the case of Stanley Aronowitz, the New York gubernatorial candidate, who supports “military sanctions” against Iraq. Through its campaign the ISO promotes liberalism and electoralism and denigrates the importance of the political independence of the working class.

In the event that popular opposition to the war grows and the leadership of the Democratic Party remains pro-war, it is possible that the fortunes of the Green Party will temporarily surge. This would spur Democratic liberals to try to capitalize on the movement for their own gain, in a replay of the McCarthy campaign.

In that event, the ISO will find that their castles made of sand have fallen into the sea; they will be hard-pressed to avoid getting sucked in along with the liberal populist tide. The only sure bulwark against it is the open struggle for the building of a revolutionary workers' party.

BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

A minority of those who went through the experience of the anti-war movement and related struggles learned this lesson the hard way. By making a critical balance sheet of events and their own role, some who entered the struggle with centrist views were able to discard them in favor of a consistently revolutionary stance. In particular, the struggles of the day had a strong impact within the ranks of the IS. A small number who came to reject the opportunism and dishonest maneuvers of the IS and the rest of the centrist left were able to develop and revive the world-view of authentic working-class Trotskyism, and went on to form the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP). (See our pamphlet, *Twenty Years of the LRP*.)

Centrist anti-war leaders both then and now have substituted leadership blocs with a liberal reformist program for genuine united fronts, which are blocs of groups and individuals with varying programs who unite for common actions against the war. Within such blocs, genuine revolutionaries seek to convince activists that it is necessary not just to end a war but to get rid of

the liberal and imperialist leaders (and their radical supporters) who want to keep the system alive to maraud another day.

Over the past decades, the union bureaucracy has been tremendously successful in checking the working class's will to fight, especially in the U.S. The apparent quiescence in the class struggle has allowed cynical ideologies which see working-class consciousness as incidental to political struggle to flourish. The class-collaborationist political practice of the centrist left is an application of such ideas.

But the increasing nakedness of the capitalists' attacks on the working class is revealing the inadequacies of the old leaderships' past practices. New opportunities for working-class struggles and for revolutionary leadership in them are arising. As the centrist leaders prepare new populist detours and traps for future struggles, in order to tie the working class to sections of the bourgeoisie, the need to fight for political honesty and open opposition to capitalism becomes increasingly urgent.

Historically, the only struggle that *ever* stopped a war was the movement of workers at the end of World War I, which shook all the warring capitalist governments. This movement reached its peak in Russia, which had an established revolutionary party with trained cadres committed to telling the truth to their fellow workers – that capitalism today means imperialism, which means war. Our times demand no less. ●

“No Draft” Is No Answer!

Two Democratic members of the Congressional Black Caucus, Charles Rangel of New York and John Conyers of Michigan, are introducing legislation to resume the military draft. Writing in the December 31 *New York Times*, Rangel says he is doing so on democratic grounds:

A disproportionate number of the poor and members of minority groups make up the enlisted ranks of the military, while the most privileged Americans are underrepresented or absent.

As well, he notes that he voted against the resolution authorizing the president to wage war against Iraq, and suggests that a draft would make war less likely:

I believe that if those calling for war knew that their children were likely to be required to serve – and to be placed in harm's way – there would be more caution and a greater willingness to work with the international community in dealing with Iraq. A renewed draft will help bring a greater appreciation of the consequences of decisions to go to war.

In reality, like other “anti-war” Democratic politicians, Rangel wants to carry out imperialist policies with a better cover. And to prove his respectability, he tries to out-tough Bush on the need for a strong military:

The administration has yet to address the question of whether our military is of sufficient strength and size to meet present and future commitments.

Rangel's proposal has already run into opposition from Black nationalist figures. They note that even with conscription, the burden of the fighting and dying would still fall on the poor and people of color: witness the U.S. Army in the Vietnam War. Drove of upper- and middle-class youth, including radicals and even “socialists,” inevitably cop out of the draft. Reviving the draft will undoubtedly also be opposed by the leaders of the anti-war movement, on the grounds that it would serve to strengthen American militarism.

As revolutionary Marxists, we oppose all bourgeois armies, conscripted or mercenary. But we understand that any capitalist country, above all an imperialist one, relies for its very existence on military force. As Lenin and Trotsky stressed, a mass conscripted army has the virtue of training the working class for its survival in the violent class struggles approaching and for its future revolutionary needs. Moreover, in an unpopular war, a drafted army poses a clear danger for capitalist stability: again, witness the U.S. Army in Vietnam.

So we do not join efforts against a draft. Given the reality of imperialism, either they are in effect campaigns *for* a “voluntary” army of mercenaries, or they foster absurd pacifist illusions. Since our ruling class must have an army, we prefer that it be drafted – not, like Rangel, because an all-out mobilization is necessary to fulfill imperialist goals, but because a “professional” army is more easily disciplined and more loyal to its bourgeois paymasters. ●

For a thorough discussion of the Marxist and Leninist attitude toward the military, we recommend two of our publications: the pamphlet “No Draft” Is No Answer, and the article “Marxism and the Draft” in *Socialist Voice* No. 9. Each is available for \$1.00 from SV Publications, P.O. Box 769, New York, NY 10033.

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by Sy Landy, plus *COFI Political Resolution* 75¢

Australia: League Press, P.O. Box 578, Carlton South, Vic. 3053

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U.S.: SV Publishing Co., P.O. Box 769, Washington Bridge Station, New York, NY 10033

Imperialist War

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three-pronged American strategy in a recent book:

The three grand imperatives of [U.S.] imperial geostrategy are to prevent collusion and maintain security dependence among the vassals, to keep tributaries pliant and protected, and to keep the barbarians from coming together.

Indeed, the U.S. has three overall aims in this war. It will tighten its chokehold over the world's oil resources, to strangle the economy of any "friendly" imperialist power – Japan or Western Europe – that challenges America. The opposition to the U.S.'s war drive by France and Germany, backed by China and Russia, reflects this inter-imperialist conflict. The U.S. is also putting the squeeze on the lesser powers – from the Middle East to Latin America – who might try to defy the imperialist grip. And it is telling the super-exploited working people of the world beyond Iraq: stay in your place, for you too can be bombed and terrorized at will.

Under Bush, the increasingly open strategy for the ruling class's American Empire is to use military power to overcome the deepening economic crisis. They hope that seizing Iraq's oil resources will enable U.S. capitalism to overcome its economic problems without arousing excessive working-class anger at home. But the crisis is not just a momentary fluctuation: it is built into the contradictions of the capitalist system. (See "The One-Sided Class War" on page 3.)

North Korea, ruled by a stifling Stalinist regime that has led the country into economic disaster and famine, was included along with Iraq and Iran in George W. Bush's "axis of evil." In defiance of American dictates, it announced its intention to develop nuclear weapons (which, like Iraq and every country targeted by imperialism, it has every right to do). It is seeking both to force a deal for aid from the U.S. and to prevent a pre-emptive attack like what Bush is planning against Iraq. In doing so it has exposed the hypocrisy both of Bush's justifications for the Iraq war and of the anti-war liberals in the U.S., who grant the imperialists the sole right to own nuclear weapons.

ANTI-WAR DEBATES

With intensified war against Iraq on the horizon, a new anti-war movement has emerged in the U.S. It has already displayed the widespread popular discontent with the imperialist consensus: 25,000 protested in New York on October 6; there were 100,000 in Washington DC and 50,000 in San Francisco on October 26. Even more massive demonstrations took place in Washington and San Francisco on January 18.

So far the majority of the demonstrators have been middle-class, young and white, although polls show that support for the war among Black people is under 20 percent. It is politically significant that although a considerable number of labor unions have adopted resolutions condemning the war, at the January 18 rally in Washington there was only token labor representation on the podium.

To stop the imperialist warmongers, mass working-class action is necessary, for only the working class has the social power to stop capitalist profit-making. A small-scale example is that of British train drivers, who refused in early January to move a freight train carrying ammunition destined for forces sent to the Gulf for action against Iraq. The danger of working-class unrest was a key factor in forcing the U.S. to withdraw from its war on Vietnam a generation ago. (See the article on the lessons of that anti-war movement on page 7.) But the policies of the anti-war leaderships, both radical and liberal, are aimed at keeping the

movement safely within capitalist bounds.

Participants at the mass demonstrations have ranged from those like us in the League for the Revolutionary Party who expose the imperialist drives behind the war, to liberals who prefer that the U.S. carry out its imperialist policies with U.N. cover. At the October and January rallies, even though the main organizers were affiliated with left organizations, the most prominent speakers – the public face of the protests – have been politicians pushing pro-Democratic Party, and therefore imperialist, positions.

That hasn't stopped the liberal establishment from fighting to take control of the movement and keep it within tighter bounds. The liberals claim to be concerned about the Stalinist politics of the main sponsoring groups: ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War & End Racism), which is tightly controlled by the Workers World Party, and NION (Not in Our Name), led by the Revolutionary Communist Party. But their real concern is that the growing movement is attracting a genuine mass anti-war sentiment that is not tied to the Democrats and will not be fooled by the fig leaf of U.N. endorsement for Bush's war.

One attack comes from a handful of journalists and academics who criticize the mass demonstrations because they were not sufficiently patriotic. The flag-flying liberals favored the "anti-terrorist" war against Afghanistan in 2001 but object to Bush's war against Iraq for various reasons: it won't establish democracy (as if the war in Afghanistan did!); the oil connection is too blatant; it will damage relations between the U.S. and its imperialist allies. What they fail to recognize is that the two wars are really one: a war for U.S. hegemony over allies and enemies alike.

"WIN WITHOUT WAR"

Another swipe comes from a coalition titled "Win Without War" that includes the National Council of Churches, the National Organization for Women, the NAACP and the Sierra Club among its sponsors. It published a full-page ad in the *New York Times* December 15, signed by a host of entertainment celebrities plus left activists Studs Terkel and Howard Zinn. The coalition's name alone makes its imperialist intentions clear. Its statement asserted that "The valid U.S. and U.N. objective of disarming Saddam Hussein can be achieved through legal diplomatic means." The U.S.'s objective is not just to disarm Iraq but to dominate the region and its energy resources. Granting the U.S. and U.N. imperialists the "valid" right to determine what arms Iraq can and cannot have is just setting the stage for war.

Another liberal endeavor, led by socialists affiliated with *New Politics* magazine and the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, is trying to carve out a "moderate" anti-war position. Their statement, headed "We Oppose both Saddam Hussein and the U.S. War on Iraq," was published in *The Nation* magazine and elsewhere. The headline equates the two sides, as if the undoubted crimes of Saddam Hussein are comparable to the misery and devastation imperialism inflicts on the world. Any socialist worth the name would take sides in wartime against the imperialist enemy of humanity – in this case, in defense of Iraq.

The statement calls for a "New, Democratic U.S. Foreign Policy," which among other things means "renouncing the use of military intervention to extend and consolidate U.S. imperial power." This fantasy simply overlooks that the U.S. is imperialist. Asking U.S. capitalism to renounce its militarism and imperial power is either the height of naivety or a cynical manipulation of anti-war activists who don't understand the system's drive. The only way to stop imperialism is to get rid of the capitalist system and the imperialist states it produces.

Another candidate for leadership of the anti-war protests is United for Peace and Justice, which embraces many of the

mainstream groups in Win Without War. This coalition sponsored vigils against the war on “Human Rights Day” in December and is the main organizer of the protests planned for February 15.

A major divisive issue is the Israel-Palestine conflict. The liberals don't want to hear support for the Palestinian struggle at anti-war events, even though Israel's remorseless oppression is an integral part of the U.S. design for dominating the Middle East. At the January demonstrations, ANSWER seems to have accommodated the liberals by reducing the number of speakers and banners denouncing Israel. Some of the reformist/populist political blocs reject any attack on Israel's anti-Palestinian pogrom; others like ANSWER seek to diminish its importance. Genuine revolutionaries adamantly insist on showing that the coming war on Iraq is inextricably linked to the present U.S.-backed war on the Palestinians.

In practice there is little difference between the political lines of the liberal and radical wings of the anti-war leadership. Both sides want to keep the movement safe for the Democrats, but the liberals don't trust the radicals to do so, while the radicals see that the liberals' “no war without the U.N.” line won't mobilize people who oppose any U.S. war of aggression. Both wings abhor the

idea of giving any platform to revolutionaries who will expose the Democrats' imperialist line in public.

We fight for united action against the war. As revolutionary workers, we participate and fight alongside those who have illusions in the present pro-bourgeois leaderships. Within the current struggle, we openly seek to expose betraying leaders in order to win the genuine anti-war militants to a revolutionary understanding. U.S. aggression can only be smashed by ending imperialism – that is, the capitalist system itself. And that requires the conscious rejection of bourgeois and middle-class views and the re-creation of the internationalist proletarian revolutionary vanguard party.

In the period right ahead, we will fight all attempts by the established “movement” groupings to gain hegemony over the developing struggle. We do not expect to be able to accomplish this alone. But we are confident that the disgust that the U.S. working class, especially people of color, already feels about the growing attacks – at home and abroad – will grow. Our fight for the revolutionary party is based on our understanding that today's working-class sentiment against the war can be transformed into an active force mobilized against the ruling class's designs.●

— January 26, 2003

Transit Struggle

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against the contract, which were distributed extensively throughout the system.

Toussaint & Co. launched their own campaign – of lies, misinformation and intimidation – in defense of the contract. They issued leaflets that lied about the giveback of the no-layoff clause, falsely claiming that the old no-layoff clause gave no real job protection and represented no loss. And they attempted to intimidate the membership, saying that if the contract were voted down it would go to arbitration and the union would get a worse deal.

An overwhelming majority of transit workers were opposed to the contract. But given Toussaint's sellout leadership, the fear of getting stuck with an even worse deal led many to vote in favor in the false belief that it would be better to wait to fight another day. Ultimately, Toussaint & Co.'s efforts succeeded, with 60 percent of workers voting for the contract in a mail ballot.

While Toussaint claims the ratification of the contract as a vote of confidence in his leadership, transit workers know better. A majority clearly wanted a better contract but saw no alternative leadership capable of taking the struggle forward. In the coming months they will continue to look for such an alternative – and they will have to. Before the contract vote was even counted, management announced that it was moving to close token booths, though it said it would not lay off any workers but rather move them into other jobs. The attacks will only get worse now that the contract has passed.

In the course of the contract fight, a small but crucial layer of workers has been radicalized. They want to understand why Toussaint sold out, how to take the struggle forward and avoid such defeats in the future. In this effort they come up against others for whom the experience has reinforced the cynical belief that there is no alternative to the betrayals of union leaders. But such betrayals are not inevitable. At every point the LRP and RTW not only warned of Toussaint's impending sellout, but also put forward proposals to prevent it. By reviewing the lessons of the struggle we can begin to show the way forward, not just for transit workers, but for militant workers everywhere who are looking to advance their class's struggles and avoid betrayals by their union leaders.

FROM WILLIE JAMES TO ROGER TOUSSAINT

The transit workers' December 7 strike votes were a high point in a long struggle. In 1999, transit workers built a powerful movement for a strike, to which then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani responded with injunctions threatening workers with massive fines for even using the word “strike” in conversation, and jail if they put such words into action. The LRP played a key role in building that strike movement, which culminated in a mass meeting of thousands of transit workers voting unanimously in favor of a motion raised by Josephson to strike in the face of Giuliani's threats.

But that movement was sabotaged by the leaders of the Local, the corrupt “old guard” led by Willie James, who worked with Giuliani to enforce the anti-strike laws. It was also betrayed by the “militant” opposition group in the Local, “New Directions” (ND), whose most prominent members in elected union posts had the power to lead the struggle forward but refused to do so. (See *PR 60* for detailed analysis of these events.)

In the absence of an alternative leadership that could take the struggle forward, the workers were forced to accept a sellout contract. But they longed for the time when they could throw out the leaders who betrayed them, replace them with leaders who they hoped wouldn't sell them out and finally strike back against the MTA.

ND's years of posing as the militant alternative to the entrenched bureaucracy had built them a reputation as reliable fighters. After months of equivocal statements, ND had at the last minute come out in favor of the strike; but it then refused to use its posts in the Local to act on the members' strike votes. But the James Gang's betrayal was so outrageous that it blinded most workers to ND's treacherous refusal to lead the struggle forward.

ND's undeserved militant reputation was further enhanced when Roger Toussaint replaced the group's perennial presidential candidate Tim Schermerhorn at the top of their ticket. Schermerhorn's political softness and sleepy personality had always been a burden for ND. While Toussaint was a late-comer to ND, he had a much more militant style. He had started his political career as a left-wing Stalinist, but had at least openly advocated his communist views – unlike the closet socialists in ND. And while he had given up on socialism by the mid-1990's, he had earned a reputation as a militant in the Track Division. He surrounded himself with a loyal grouping of supporters who

joined ND and voted for him as ND's Presidential candidate.

When the next election for the Local's leadership took place in 2000, militant workers rushed to support ND, mistakenly viewing them as militant fighters and a real alternative to the old guard. This support gave ND a big victory and raised workers' expectations in the new leadership even further.

But a deeper radicalization had taken place. As an open socialist and supporter of the LRP, Josephson had won a broad respect among militant workers for his role in the 1999 struggle. We did not have the forces to challenge ND union-wide. But Josephson did run for union office in the Track Division. He proudly explained his revolutionary socialist views and called on workers to support his program of mass struggle against management attacks. Against both old-guard and ND candidates, he won election to the post of Vice Chair of the division.

In the Local elections overall, we could not stand aside from our fellow workers' struggle and simply lecture them that ND was no alternative to the old guard. Rather, we joined with workers in voting for ND, in order to put them to the test of office and prove our warnings. Following ND's election we redoubled our efforts to hold ND to their promise of a militant struggle against the bosses, all the time warning that they would fail to lead the mass struggles against the bosses that would be necessary and that a new leadership would have to be built.

TOUSSAINT'S FIRST YEARS IN OFFICE

Transit workers had become accustomed to a union leadership which, when it wasn't cooperating with the bosses, exhibited the most shameless laziness. So when the new leadership took power and the Local headquarters was transformed into a hive of activity, workers were impressed. Divisional leaders were generally more aggressive in enforcing work rules and defending workers against disciplinary charges. A new body of shop stewards was created and training classes for them begun.

Toussaint & Co.'s response to management's next attacks on the union also raised expectations that they would prove to be reliable fighters. Thanks to a giveback clause in the 1999 contract, the MTA reduced funding for the workers' Health Benefit Trust (HBT), threatening their health care unless the union agreed to more givebacks. Toussaint eventually responded by calling a series of protests rallies.

Many workers were initially impressed when political guests at the first rally included Rev. Jesse Jackson and other Democratic Party politicians. The workers didn't necessarily care what the politicians said, but their attendance at Local 100 events seemed to show that the union was gaining powerful friends. In reality, Toussaint was beginning a strategy of avoiding mass action and encouraging workers to direct their energy toward electing Democrats, in the hope that the politicians would return the favor with labor-friendly policies.

But the Democrats, like the Republicans, are no friends of the working class. Every last one of the politicians Toussaint paraded at the rallies, including Senator Hillary Clinton and the mayoral candidate he later backed, Fernando Ferrer, supported the Taylor Law.

In *RTW* we warned that relying on the Democrats rather than on workers' own power to fight back would set up workers for defeat. We fought for general membership meetings in which the ranks could discuss and decide how to fight management's attacks on the HBT, and could hold the leadership to a definite course of action by binding votes. We argued that the attacks on the HBT were cause to re-open the contract that the MTA, Willie James and Giuliani had forced on us and that the union should prepare to strike.

Having earlier stated his willingness to re-open the contract, Toussaint soon backtracked. He floated the idea of concessions to

management in return for funding the HBT – namely agreeing to the MTA's creation of a regional bus company that would mean speed-up, attacks on seniority rights and job losses. The members immediately rejected this idea, after which Toussaint's strategy turned to delaying any struggle with the MTA until after the mayoral elections, when he hoped a Democratic administration might offer him a better deal as payback for throwing the union's support behind its candidates. (See *RTW* Nos. 4 and 5.)

As the reality set in that the union's rallies were being used to boost the Democrats rather than build the union's struggle, workers' attendance fell off. But for as long as the MTA didn't force the HBT into bankruptcy, most workers continued to take a wait-and-see attitude toward the Toussaint leadership. Many responded to our criticisms of Toussaint & Co. by saying that we weren't giving them a chance to prove themselves. They continued to hope that Toussaint would prove to be the militant fighter he claimed to be.

THE TOUSSAINT BUREAUCRATIC MACHINE

Toussaint, however, knew better. While he had renounced his socialist views years earlier, he had concealed just how far to the right he had shifted. His support for the Democratic Party he once hated was a sign that he had come to really embrace the capitalist system. He had adopted the standard outlook of the union bureaucracy.

While not, at least for now, as highly paid and financially corrupt as other union leaders (although he still makes more than any transit worker), Toussaint and his ilk enjoy a highly privileged position. They traded their work clothes and tough jobs for suits and office chairs, and get a rush from rubbing shoulders with bosses and politicians. These privileges depend on their position as brokers between the bosses and the workers. While they have to try to defend the workers to maintain their positions, they also seek to accommodate the interests of the capitalist bosses, whose economic system they now rely on for their comfortable lives and social status.

The problem for the bureaucrats is that with capitalism slipping into ever more acute crisis, profits can only be saved by intensifying the exploitation of the workers, and that means taking back past concessions and weakening the unions. To maintain their privileged position, the bureaucrats have to constantly perform a balancing act between the workers and the bosses; but their fundamental loyalty is to the capitalist system. They try to mobilize the workers as little as possible, to avoid the danger of workers developing a real sense of their power and interests that would inevitably threaten the bureaucrats' positions. This Marxist understanding of the class nature of capitalism and the role of the trade union bureaucracy enabled us to predict clearly the Toussaint leadership's inevitable betrayal. *Toussaint's sellout was not the result of his being personally corrupt or weak, though he is both, but of the specific class interests of the trade union bureaucracy and the capitalist class generally.*

Under these conditions, Toussaint knew he would have to eventually cut deals with the bosses that sacrificed the workers' fundamental interests while hopefully securing enough less-important concessions to help him get re-elected. He also understood that workers would fight against this, and that he would have to surround himself with a strong bureaucracy to enforce his policies and weaken his militant opponents.

Toussaint first moved to shore up a core of bureaucrats loyal to him. He bought the allegiance of a number of the more corrupt Executive Board members by appointing them to staff positions, making them dependent on him for their higher salaries. He hired a large number of staffers from outside the union to work in education and other programs. The new shop

stewards remained mostly unelected and trained to convey the leadership's views from the top, rather than represent the ranks from the bottom.

At the same time, Toussaint began an offensive against his left-wing opponents. First, knowing that there were members of ND who would not accept his sharp turn to the right, Toussaint moved to shut down ND. He stacked an ND meeting with loyalists who were never really part of ND and got motions passed that would in effect prevent ND from ever meeting again or publishing its newspaper *Hell On Wheels*. NDers opposed to this gave in to Toussaint's coup and went on to start a new publication, *Rank and File Advocate (R&FA)*. Then Toussaint moved to ban the distribution of oppositional literature in union meetings: he had distributors of *RTW*, the dissident newsletter *The Station Reporter* and others physically thrown out of union meetings. The resulting outcry and public relations disaster made Toussaint partially back down: opposition literature is allowed on lobby tables at Local 100 functions outside the Local's hall, as long as no one hawks it.

Then came a series of attacks on militant opponents at the divisional level. Divisional Chairs are entitled to "release time" in which they are able to travel around the system enforcing work and safety rules and conducting other union business on company time. Toussaint & Co. began a campaign of removing oppositionists from elected release-time positions on trumped-up charges. This began with Eric Josephson, who was deprived of his release time on the preposterous grounds that he had backed down to the bosses.

The most outrageous of these attacks came when *R&FA* supporters tried to run a slate in elections for delegates to the International Union Convention against Toussaint's handpicked slate. Toussaint had the opposition slate barred from the elections and prominent *R&FA* supporter Naomi Allen brought up on charges that she forged the signatures of candidates on an election application. Toussaint's rubber-stamp Executive Board upheld the charges only to have them overturned on appeal to the International union. Boss-loving International President Sonny Hall no doubt had his own cynical reasons for overturning Allen's conviction, but when the International forced Toussaint to run a statement in Local 100's newspaper decrying the "shocking violation of [Allen's] basic rights," one could not disagree.

PRIVATE BUS LINES – REHEARSAL FOR BETRAYAL

Following Toussaint's election, the attention of most members was focused on the December 2002 expiration of the Local's contract with the MTA. But a preview of what could be expected was provided by their conduct of contract negotiations starting in January 2001 with seven different private bus companies which supplement MTA services in the outer boroughs of the city.

As employees of private companies, these workers are not covered by the Taylor Law and so can legally strike. Private lines workers' top concern as they entered contract negotiations was winning an Employee Protection Plan that would guarantee their jobs and working conditions if the companies were sold to other owners – as was being planned.

Toussaint & Co. had a perfect opportunity to organize a simultaneous strike against all of the private lines companies, not just to win those struggles but to prepare the rest of the Local for a potential strike against the MTA later in the year. But Toussaint & Co.'s biggest concern was to avoid the private lines strikes radicalizing the rest of the local and raising their expectations of a strike against the MTA. So they pursued separate settlements with the different companies and preached reliance on the politicians.

A one-day strike against the Liberty Lines company won a seemingly decent contract, and Toussaint adopted the strategy of

"pattern bargaining," hoping that contract would set the standard for the others without strikes. This strategy immediately failed as the Liberty Lines Express workers were forced to accept a below-inflation wage "raise."

Toussaint & Co. were then forced to call one half-day and then another two-day strike at three of the remaining companies in the borough of Queens in early 2002. These strikes were very effective at shutting down bus transport in Queens, and the workers felt confident they had the bosses on the ropes. But Toussaint immediately called off the strikes, arguing that they had gained the politicians' attention and that friendly Democrats on the City Council would pass legislation that would answer the workers' needs. Of course, the politicians found one excuse after another not to pass such legislation.

After a year and a half without a contract, Toussaint could no longer hold the workers back from striking. But throughout the 7-week strike from June to August by Queens private lines workers, Toussaint & Co. were at pains to keep the rest of the Local's members away from the strike. In spite of promising to "mobilize the rest of our Local in support of Private Lines members" (*TWU Express*, Dec. 31, 2001), Toussaint did not organize a single real demonstration of Local 100 members in solidarity with the private lines workers.

After over a month out on strike and picketing in the burning summer sun, the workers were summoned by Toussaint to a meeting where he presented them with a proposed contract that secured the workers' health benefits but omitted the Employee Protection Plan. When workers discovered this, they were outraged. Leaders of the private lines workers, remnants of the corrupt Sonny Hall-Willie James bureaucracy, took advantage of the anger by leaping to the head of their protests. But instead of challenging Toussaint to organize real solidarity with the struggle, they instead led a mass walkout from the union meeting and threatened to split from the Local.

The strike dragged on for almost another month until Toussaint again presented the workers with the same contract, and this time the old-guard leaders recommended approval. Seeing no alternative to the rotten contract, the workers accepted it and went back to work defeated and bitter.

The private lines workers had been caught in the crossfire of the power struggle between the Toussaint leadership of the local and the Sonny Hall bureaucracy which maintains control of the international union. Hall saw the strike as an opportunity to set the workers against Toussaint. He and his flacks spread propaganda through the strike complaining that Toussaint was not backing the strike, but didn't do a thing to help the struggle himself. For their part, Toussaint & Co. were happy to hang the private lines workers out to dry to protect their power in the rest of the local.

This dispute continued after the strike. Toussaint disowned the strike, telling the media he'd been against it all along, and then brought Hall's allies George Jennings and Michael Curran up on charges of trying to split the union. The latter denied the charges, but then Hall and his aides conducted a petition campaign to split from Local 100 the three Queens private lines that had struck. This action was despicable, and *RTW* opposed Toussaint's charges against Hall's team as well as their attempts to split the local. We argued that the local should remain united and that replacing the Division leaders was something that only the workers they represent should decide.

The private lines workers ultimately voted overwhelmingly in favor of remaining in Local 100, but the struggle between Hall and Toussaint remained a factor in the MTA contract struggle. If Toussaint led a strike against the MTA in violation of the Taylor Law, Hall would no doubt look for an excuse to bureaucratically

oust Toussaint and put Local 100 in receivership and thus under direct control of the International. A powerful strike could have beaten back such attempts and dealt a death blow to Hall's control of the International. But Toussaint had no intention of leading such a struggle and thus feared that any misstep could lead to a clash with Hall that he couldn't win. The threat of receivership became a weapon for Toussaint to use against Local 100 members' demands for strike action.

TOUSSAINT'S MTA CONTRACT STRATEGY

Ironically, Toussaint's success at separating the private lines struggle from the rest of the union meant that most members remained unaware of the betrayal and defeat of the Queens strikers. As a result, transit workers' expectations that Toussaint would lead a militant struggle against the MTA remained high.

Toussaint understood that given his commitment to cutting a deal with the MTA, he would have to perform a balancing act. He would have to try to not disappoint workers' expectations of a winning contract struggle and if possible lower those expectations over the course of the negotiations. At the same time, he would have to pressure the MTA for the concessions he would need to stand a chance of getting the contract approved and winning reelection, but without mobilizing the membership so much that they would demand a strike.

Throughout the campaign, Toussaint & Co. vacillated between militant declarations echoing the ranks' fighting mood, on the one hand, and efforts to lower the ranks' expectations, on the other. For example, over a year before contract negotiations began, the leadership conducted a survey asking members to prioritize their most important contract concerns, including maintaining health care coverage, reforming the oppressive disciplinary system, and wage raises. This survey was full of leading questions calculated to instill in workers' minds the idea that they may have to accept improvements in some areas and not others. The survey later provided Toussaint with an opportunity to blame the workers for his contract compromises and givebacks. But workers didn't necessarily buy into the idea of a trade-off. And the same survey indicated that almost a third of members were in favor of strike action, before the campaign had even begun.

Toussaint then went to the media in an attempt to dampen expectations of a strike. First the *New York Times* reported that Toussaint denied any intention of supporting a strike. (Aug. 7, 2002.) Then *Newsday* ran an article, which Toussaint & Co. posted on the Local's website, headlined "Transit Union Averse to Strike: Leader Downplays Possibility." (Aug. 25.) The article quoted Toussaint promising that his leaders would "do everything within our power to avoid [a strike]."

But word spread among transit workers of Toussaint's anti-strike declarations, and management adopted a provocatively hard line in negotiations. This forced Toussaint to perform an about-face and drop his anti-strike statements. He declared that he would not rule out a strike and that the union leadership was prepared to do everything possible to win its contract demands.

REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY AND TACTICS

The transit workers' contract campaign posed a classic problem for revolutionaries. We had to participate in a struggle in which our fellow workers held illusions in a leadership that we knew would betray them. Standing on the sidelines of the struggle and lecturing our fellow workers that Toussaint would sell out, a formula used by a number of other socialist groups, was never an option for us. It is the approach of sectarians who prefer to write the obituaries of struggles rather than fight in them.

Rather, we employed the method learned from Lenin and

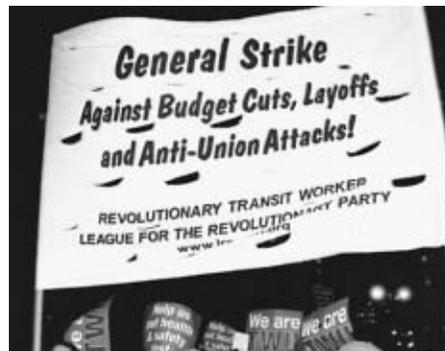
Trotsky. We coupled clear and repeated warnings that Toussaint was preparing a sellout with tactics designed to build the struggle, maximize the workers' self-organization and put their illusions in the Toussaint leadership to the test by fighting to hold Toussaint to his promises. We were confident that by fighting side-by-side with our fellow workers, the experience of the struggle would prove to them that we were right and that they would have to prepare to oppose a sellout and lead the struggle forward. In the issue of *RTW* explaining our overall strategy for the struggle, we wrote:

RTW makes no secret of the fact that we have no confidence in the Toussaint leadership's preparedness to lead a winning contract struggle. On the contrary, we are convinced that they are already preparing a sellout. To those workers who still hope that Toussaint & Co. will lead a winning struggle, we say that we are ready to join with you in a united campaign to push the Local leadership to do what it takes to lead the struggle to victory. We predict that they will betray. But we'll let the struggle prove who's right, and be ready to show the way forward in the event of an attempted sellout. (RTW 9.)

We argued for the greatest possible membership involvement and democratic control as the best way to build the struggle. In particular we called for the creation of strike preparation committees and demanded that the union leadership support them. We added that such democratic control would prove essential to resisting a sellout, and that we would make every effort in the course of the struggle to organize the most militant workers into the nucleus of a new leadership that could lead the struggle forward in the event of a sellout.

Central to our strategy for the transit struggle was our recognition of its potential to spark a much broader working-class fight-back against the capitalist attacks, particularly at a time of severe budget cuts, tax hikes and layoffs in New York and the ruling class's union-busting rhetoric. So we made a point of spreading the idea of a transit strike leading to a general strike of all the city's unions. We pointed out that a general strike would be the best way to defeat the ruling class counterattack that would surely come in response to a transit strike. We explained that a general strike would mean a head-on confrontation with the bosses' state power and advance workers' class-consciousness towards socialism. As we wrote in *RTW* 15: "A general strike would also show the working class the power that it has not just to defeat the rulers but also to run society in the interests of the vast majority of society, the working people."

So we sought to join with other militant workers to build a new leadership in the union committed to going all the way in a transit strike, and we began to link-up with other workers wary of a sell-out. But the potential for a transit strike to unleash such a massive challenge to the capitalist system meant that the need for a revolutionary socialist leadership was particularly urgent and that the struggle would provide the opportunity to convince work-



LRP/RTW banner at TWU demo over Brooklyn Bridge on Dec. 16

ers of this perspective. We explained:

An all-out struggle for our demands, let alone against all the anti-working class attacks, will deal a body blow to the capitalists. The Toussaint leadership is committed to working within the limits of what capitalism can afford. Therefore we should expect them to betray us eventually. Only a revolutionary socialist leadership can be relied on to lead an all-out contract struggle because only it is dedicated to the system's overthrow. ...

In the course of the current transit struggle *RTW* and its supporting organization, the League for the Revolutionary Party, hope to get in touch with other transit workers who are thinking along these lines. Together we can not only play a decisive role in the contract fight. By joining to build a revolutionary socialist party we can prepare to lead even greater struggles in the future. (*RTW* 13.)

FIRST-CLASS CONTRACT OR STRIKE!

At the beginning of the contract fight, Toussaint & Co. adopted the slogan "Second Class No More" as the locals' campaign slogan. It referred to the fact that transit workers suffer more oppressive working conditions and significantly lower wages and benefits than workers in other transit systems. We knew that Toussaint would later try to downplay that slogan's reference to lower comparative wages and focus on the need to reform the "plantation justice" disciplinary system that treats workers as "second-class citizens," and we noted that the slogan did not commit the union to any specific action to end transit workers' second-class status. But we saw Toussaint's slogan as an opportunity to tie him to specific demands and pressure the leadership for the action necessary to win them. *RTW* explained:

For our contract campaign, the Toussaint leadership has adopted the slogan: "Second Class No More!" This has to mean that we'll fight to win the respect that we've been denied, as well as all the wages, benefits and working conditions that go with it. But we all know that we can't just demand respect, we've got to command it. In this society, the only thing that commands respect is power, and in this city no group of workers has more potential power than transit workers. We make this city run, and by striking we can shut it down if the MTA and politicians won't give in to our demands. (*RTW* 10.)

Therefore, we adopted as our contract campaign slogan *First-Class Contract or Strike!* To focus workers' demands, rally their pro-strike sentiment and pressure Toussaint to deliver on his promises, we distributed over a thousand placards at contract rallies with the slogan on it as well as a list of the most important demands to fight for. Beneath the main slogan, our placards spelled out what a first-class contract means:

- Full Health Care Coverage With No Increased Payments!
- A Big Wage Raise Well Above Inflation!
- End Plantation Justice!
- End Workfare (WEP) Slave Labor! Full Union Wages, Benefits and Protection for Everyone Doing Members' Work on the Property!
- No Transit Fare Hikes or Service Reductions!
- No MTA Regional Bus Company!
- No Give-Backs, Trade-offs or Concessions of Any Kind!
- Amnesty From All Taylor Law Penalties!

Because we aimed not just to promote revolutionary politics but also to build the strongest struggle possible, we did not advertise the LRP or *RTW* on these placards. We wanted every worker who agreed with the demands to be able to carry one without demanding that they support us. The placards proved



very popular – we could never produce enough to meet workers' demands. The placards presented a real challenge to Toussaint. At rallies where he was trying to lower the workers' expectations, he was confronted with a sea of placards demanding a contract he had no intention of winning and a struggle he had every intention of preventing

TOUSSAINT ATTACKS *RTW*

Enraged, Toussaint launched a slanderous and threatening attack on the LRP, *RTW*, and Josephson in particular. First, in union meetings he attacked *RTW* supporters for "putting up strike placards and headlines and other bullshit rhetoric everywhere." Then, in a personal letter to Josephson, Toussaint unbelievably claimed that we were engaging in "deceit and trickery" by trying to pass off the placards as official Local 100 placards (despite the issue of *RTW* clearly explaining the opposite), and acting as "agents-provocateurs." The letter implied that Josephson could face internal union charges or worse.

If Toussaint thought that he could intimidate us, he was in for a shock. We quickly responded with an open letter to Toussaint, exposing his lies and explaining the importance of our slogan in pressuring him to make good on the promises he planned to betray. While disagreeing over the strategy for the struggle, we urged unity against the MTA, demanded that Toussaint withdraw his false charges and threatened to hold him personally responsible for any physical attacks that his letter could have inspired. When thousands of copies of our response were distributed and it gained much support from transit workers, Toussaint backed down and never mentioned his allegations again.

HOLDING TOUSSAINT TO HIS PROMISES

Our struggle to hold Toussaint to his promises continued in meetings to adopt the local's official contract demands. As Vice-Chair of the Track Division, Eric Josephson was part of the Contract Policy Committee. At the Committee's single meeting, called at the last minute by Toussaint, the leadership presented a long list of demands, but there were serious problems.

In particular, the demand for a "fully funded Health Benefit Trust [for] current and additional benefits," "prescription coverage" and "Major medical or its equivalent for pre-Medicare retirees" seemed good at first. But it left open the possibility of increased members payments as well as of retirees' getting less than full health benefits. Also, with the MTA threatening a fare hike and service cuts, Toussaint had launched a campaign in alliance with liberal pressure groups to beg the politicians to save the fare. But

he was anxious to avoid this becoming part of the contract struggle, and no demands on these issues were included in his proposals.

Josephson moved to adopt the demands for “fully-MTA funded health benefits with no new or increased membership payments” as well as for “no fare hikes or service reductions” to be an official contract demand. Another worker raised “full medical benefits for retirees.” Other improved demands were also proposed. For Toussaint to oppose these demands before the struggle had even begun would have been too embarrassing, so he remained silent when they were debated and passed unanimously.

The one proposal Toussaint opposed concerned wages. Marty Goodman, an Executive Board member from the Stations Department, noted Toussaint’s vague call for a “substantial wage raise” and reminded Toussaint that he had supported Willie James’s brief call in 1999 for yearly raises of 10 percent. Toussaint didn’t oppose specifying a 10 percent raise demand explicitly. Rather, he said that he was opposed to including any specific percentage raise because it would limit the leadership’s flexibility at the negotiating table. Of course, it would have limited Toussaint’s flexibility to lower the union’s wage demands, but he made it sound like it might prevent him from demanding a bigger raise or other gains. Toussaint had enough support on the Committee to defeat Goodman’s motion, but we continued to pressure Toussaint to make concrete the union’s wage demand, seeking to popularize the slogan “If Willie Said 10%, Why Won’t Roger? Let’s Win 10%!” (See RTW 9, Supplement 2.)

We also warned:

Of tremendous importance is that the members hold the Local’s leadership to our contract demands during the course of the negotiations. We know that in almost every contract negotiation, if the workers allow the union bureaucracy to get its way, the leadership comes up with an initially strong list of contract demands only to sell them out as the negotiations proceed. (RTW 10.)

It did not take long for confirmation to come of the importance of our warnings. The *New York Times* (Nov. 30) reported that in interviews with the media Toussaint “gave hints of moderation, noting that the results of the [negotiations] would be “conditioned by the current circumstances,” saying that if the deficit-plagued authority [were] more accommodating on non-economic issues, most notably safety and discipline,” the union could be open to reaching an agreement.

CAPITALIST CRISIS AND COOKED BOOKS

Toussaint’s argument that hard economic times mean that workers cannot expect to win big wage raises is obviously crucial. The capitalist economy is indeed in deepening crisis. It is the desperate need to raise falling profits, not just personal greed, that drives the capitalists’ escalating attacks on the working class. Tremendous struggle is required for the working class to just maintain its current living and working conditions, let alone improve them. Revolutionaries fight for every reform that will even temporarily improve our class’s living conditions. Moreover, through such struggles the working class builds its organization and sense of power. And only by testing the possibility of reforming the system will it ultimately learn that there is no solution to the crisis under capitalism and that the system must be overthrown.

It is possible for workers to win wage raises even in much worse economic times – if their struggles threaten to cost the capitalists even more. In fact Local 100 won its first contract, with the original IRT and BMT transit lines in 1937 in the depths of the Great Depression, when both companies were already bankrupt. Then, Local 100’s fight threatened to inspire the rest of the working class at a time of rising union struggles.

While the New York and U.S. economies are in deepening crisis, they have certainly not reached the depths of the depression, and the capitalist politicians would certainly find the money to fund wage raises if a transit strike threatened a bigger class struggle. Moreover, the MTA is notorious for keeping two sets of books: one to keep track of their real finances and another to screw transit workers and defraud the public. During the union’s 1996 contract fight they claimed a \$350 million debt in order to demand concessions; but a week after transit workers narrowly voted to accept that contract the MTA announced a projected budget surplus of \$256 million!

This time around they lied even more brazenly. In 2001 they reported a \$300 million surplus. In 2002, with contract negotiations looming, they reported a projected deficit of \$663 million for 2003. Only one week later they claimed a \$1.1 billion deficit for 2003 and a \$1.6 billion deficit for the following year. It turns out that they are actually still running a surplus and their claims of a deficit were based on not counting \$1.4 billion in standard government subsidies. Further, the MTA will indeed be in debt in the coming years because it funded capital investments through loans at high interest rates rather than from government funding – a sweetheart deal to line the pockets of Wall Street bankers with extortionate debt payments.

All this was used as justification for the MTA’s demand that transit workers accept a three-year wage freeze, with raises permitted only where they could be tied to productivity gains. But Toussaint did not use the contract struggle to demand that the MTA open its books or that the state increase funding of public transportation. His acceptance of the capitalists’ profit crisis as limiting workers’ ability to fight for wage raises was further evidence that he had sacrificed the working class’s interests in favor of the capitalists’.

DECEMBER GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Toussaint & Co. had scheduled general membership meetings for December 7. As the day approached, Toussaint’s campaign strategy had gotten nowhere. His talk of compromise and his failure to take any steps toward preparing for a strike had encouraged the MTA to take a hard line in negotiations. Seeing this, the ranks came to the meetings in a fighting mood, ready to vote to strike to win their demands.

We knew that this would be a decisive moment in the struggle. And Toussaint no doubt feared that if the members were allowed to democratically debate and decide the way forward, there could be a repeat of 1999 with a massive vote to strike. We tried to introduce motions that would do exactly that.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF STALINISM

A Resurrection of Marxist Theory

by Walter Daum

The Marxist analysis of Stalinism that makes today’s events understandable and shows the working-class way forward.

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Al Richardson, Revolutionary History

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We circulated a leaflet in thousands of copies that proposed a three-step plan to take the struggle forward by:

1. reaffirming the Local's most important contract demands, to counter Toussaint's hints at compromise and make it harder for him to sell them out;

2. ordering the Executive Board to call a strike at contract expiration on December 15 if the MTA had not gone a long way to satisfying those demands; and

3. ordering the Board to prepare the Local to strike by creating a Strike Preparation Council that would be open to all members to debate and decide on how to prepare and conduct the strike.

We knew it would require a fight on the floor of the meetings just to secure the members' right to discuss the issues. We approached *Rank and File Advocate* supporters for an agreement to join together to fight for the ranks' democratic rights in the meeting, but got no commitment from them. We did reach such an agreement with a number of independent militants.

The issue of *RTW* that we also distributed at the meetings explained the situation to our fellow workers. In particular, we warned that Toussaint might try to avoid a real strike motion by raising one of his own that would tie him to nothing and keep all power over the struggle in the hands of his rubber-stamp Executive Board. We wrote that the ranks' militancy would force Toussaint to adopt a militant posture: "He may even move for a strike authorization vote. If President Toussaint takes steps forward in the struggle against the TA, we will support him. But given his recent hints of a bad compromise, we can't afford to go along with a vote that gives Toussaint and his Executive Board a blank check to call a strike if they wish, or call one off for an unsatisfactory contract." (*RTW* 13.)

This prediction proved absolutely accurate. At the first meeting (there were morning and afternoon meetings to allow all shifts to attend), thousands of workers listened to reports from various division leaders on their negotiations. The stories of management's refusal to positively respond to a single union concern and their continued demands for massive concessions had the members furious by the time Toussaint took the microphone. Since microphones had been set up on the floor at the front of the room, it seemed that there would be an opportunity to ask questions and raise motions, as there had been in 1999, but such illusions in union democracy were soon to be dispelled.

Toussaint gave a rousing speech against the MTA and the racist *Post* editorial, and asked the workers to show whether they were in favor of a strike. The hands of every worker in attendance immediately rose, and chants of "Strike!" rang through the hall. When order was restored Toussaint explained that the decision was unanimous to authorize the Executive Board to call a strike if it decided one would be necessary, and that this did not mean a strike was automatic.

To make matters worse, Toussaint announced that a rally of New York unions in solidarity with Local 100 would be taking place on December 16, marching over the Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall. This rally had originally been planned for December 11; moving it to December 16 meant that it would occur the day *after* the contract expired and could not happen if there was a strike. Toussaint was thus signaling to the MTA his commitment to work past the contract expiration date.

The ranks' excitement that the leadership seemed to have finally come out in support of a strike blinded them to the trick Toussaint was pulling. Toussaint ended the meeting soon after, with no opportunity for questions, let alone discussion of other motions.

During the break before the afternoon meeting, we prepared ourselves to fight again for our strike motion. Josephson joined with Marty Goodman to issue a joint motion that would tie the

leadership to the same three-step motion we had circulated earlier. And we adjusted the motion to Toussaint's tricks. Had we insisted that the strike go ahead at midnight on December 15 when the contract expired, Toussaint could have made us out to be sabotaging the December 16 solidarity rally. So we instead moved that a strike must begin at midnight on December 16 if the MTA had not gone a long way toward satisfying the Local's most important demands.

Unfortunately, Toussaint was able to succeed with the same tricks in the afternoon meeting. What made it particularly easy for him was the fact that the supposed "militant oppositions" from *Rank and File Advocate* on the stage with Toussaint – Recording Secretary Noel Acevedo and Vice President Tim Schermerhorn – went along with Toussaint's trampling of the members' democratic rights without a peep of protest. Schermerhorn was handed a perfect opportunity to advocate for the ranks' right to discussion when he was given the microphone by Toussaint, but he chose instead to give the same canned speech reporting on divisional negotiations that he had delivered in the morning meeting.

With the ranks' one opportunity to directly determine the course of the struggle thwarted, we knew we would have to encourage the much more difficult struggle of workers to pressure the Executive Board from the outside.

FACING THE CONTRACT DEADLINE

The bosses' media and politicians responded to the apparent strike votes of December 7 with hysterical threats of fines, jail and the smashing of the union in the event of a strike. They demagogically painted a transit strike as a blow to the city as potentially devastating as the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Shockingly, Toussaint & Co. echoed the idea that a transit strike would be a horrible thing that had to be avoided. The union issued tens of thousands of leaflets to the public calling on Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki to "Stop a Crippling Transit Strike!" Toussaint's idea that such rhetoric would pressure the politicians to direct the MTA to offer the union more to avoid the strike was idiotic. His accommodation with the ruling class's anti-strike propaganda only undermined the workers' resolve to strike. As everyone expected, Bloomberg and Pataki escalated their legal threats against the union. In an admission of how hopeless his strategy had been, Toussaint showed a moment of fight when he told Bloomberg to "shut up." After eight years of racist Mayor Giuliani bullying anyone who got in his way, it was an inspiration to many to see a Black union leader appearing to standing up to the new Mayor. But as was to be expected, Toussaint didn't follow his loud talk with action.

Toussaint & Co. continued their attempts to reach a deal by acting weakly. Toussaint announced that the union was lowering its wage demand from 8 percent a year to 6 percent, in the hope that management would respond with an offer of at least some modest raise. Instead, the MTA responded as it had to every other sign of weakness, with a toughened stance. It reaffirmed its insistence of a wage freeze, withdrew some contract offers it had already made and even refused to turn up at some negotiating sessions. Toussaint then declared that he would never accept a "zero" raise in the contract, not simply because it was unacceptable to transit workers but also because it would set a precedent for other city workers. But he backed down on this too.

As the contract expiration at midnight December 15 closed in, it seemed possible that despite their best efforts to reach a sell-out agreement, Toussaint & Co. might still have been forced to call a strike in the face of continued MTA intransigence. Under the headline "No Sellout! No Contract Extension! Transit Workers Have the Power to Strike and Win!" *RTW* urged workers



Local 100 President Toussaint and MTA Chairman Kalikow hug. Sellout deal gives MTA go-ahead for layoffs and city bosses a green light to screw all workers.

to demand that the Executive Board break from their strategy of offering concessions in return for nothing and instead set a definite strike date for definite demands. With a Joint Expanded Executive Board meeting (consisting of all elected union officers and open to all interested members) scheduled for the morning of December 15, we encouraged all workers committed to fighting for a strike to attend. Josephson and Goodman were again ready to raise their three-point motion to set a definite strike date and launch a strike committee. But Toussaint limited the meeting to a quick report by him and a couple of harmless questions. He called for transit workers to rally outside the negotiations that afternoon, announced an Executive Board meeting for that night and declared the meeting over.

At the hastily called protest that afternoon, about one thousand transit workers rallied against the MTA. There we again urged workers to condemn Toussaint's moves toward a sellout and to demand the Executive Board set a strike date for definite demands that night, where Brother Goodman was again ready to raise such a motion. But Toussaint again succeeded in preventing any motions from being heard.

With just hours to go before the contract deadline, the MTA offered some concessions, including reform of the hated disciplinary system. But it had not budged from its wage freeze demand and was refusing to discuss the question. Toussaint held a press conference to announce that he remained hopeful that a deal would be reached and promised that he would do everything to avoid the "catastrophe" of a strike. By this time, the writing was on the wall: no matter how hard the MTA pushed, Toussaint would refuse to call a strike. As TWU negotiator Basil Paterson revealed in an interview with the *New York Post* (Dec. 17), Toussaint's strike talk had been more intended to trick transit workers into thinking he was serious about a strike than it was to pressure the MTA. In an article entitled "Strike Talk Was Hollow Threat, Says Negotiator," Paterson is quoted explaining:

No one ever said, "I'm getting the hell out of here." It might have come close [to a strike] in the public's eye, but never in the room. The strike card was never played. ... The MTA always believed Roger was serious, but never serious about a strike.

Accordingly, before the contract expired, Local Secretary-Treasurer Ed Watt announced that the union had "stopped the clock" and would negotiate past contract expiration without a strike.

On the evening of December 16, thousands of transit workers and supporters gathered at MTA headquarters in Brooklyn and then marched over the Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall. Confusion reigned, as rumors of a sellout circulated; yet hopes continued that Toussaint might break from the negotiations and call a strike. Our second *RTW* in 24 hours proved very popular. Under the headline "No Sellout Deal! Forward With the Strike!" we again urged workers to pressure the Executive Board to reaffirm the union's contract demands and call a strike.

But soon after, Toussaint and MTA Chairman Kalikow emerged from negotiations smiling and announced that a deal had been reached. In a disgusting display, Toussaint even hugged the boss in front of the media – the same man who had lodged Taylor Law charges against every union member. Toussaint announced that the deal laid the basis for a new era of cooperation between the union and management. Late at night at union headquarters, the Executive Board passed the sellout contract by a vote of 31 to 9, with 2 abstentions.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SELLOUT

The LRP and *RTW* immediately moved to build the broadest possible campaign against the sellout, and were the first to sound the alarm that Toussaint's giveback of the union's no-layoff clause was the key to the contract. We attended a meeting of union officers opposed to the contract initiated by *Rank and File Advocate* supporters. But *R&FA* was horrifyingly soft on the contract. The deal should be voted down, they said, but it was wrong to call it a sellout – it was just that the bad things in the contract outweighed the good. As if Toussaint breaking his promises of no zeros and no concessions was not a sellout. As if a contract with some improvements that laid-off workers would never enjoy was not a sellout!

Worse, it was clear that *R&FA*'s most senior leaders were intent on simply going on the record against the contract rather than launching an all-out campaign against it. Our arguments succeeded in pushing them to place more emphasis on the giveback of the no-layoff clause. But they rejected our call to launch a committee to organize workers against the contract, and Steve Downs and Tim Schermerhorn announced that they were going on a short vacation!

While *R&FA* conducted much of their opposition to the contract in the media, the LRP and *RTW* swung into action. Josephson attended numerous union meetings to denounce the sellout and argue for a No vote. All supporters were mobilized to distribute 10,000 copies of a new *RTW* opposing the contract throughout the system. We received an overwhelmingly supportive response from workers eager to read a knowledgeable discussion of the decisive question facing their union.

Josephson then joined with Marty Goodman to sponsor the founding meeting of Transit Workers Against the Contract (TWAC). *R&FA* boycotted the meeting, slandering it as an attempt to build an LRP front group. Despite their efforts, about thirty workers attended. TWAC's first meeting featured a long discussion of the contract, with a Toussaint representative trying to defend it. But the overwhelming majority of workers present voted to form the committee and adopted a statement against the contract and of no confidence in Toussaint, of which thousands were distributed in the coming week.

Directly through *RTW*, and with other militants through TWAC, we did all we could to defeat Toussaint's sellout. But not enough militant transit workers had been won to the task of building an alternative leadership in the union, one that could win workers' confidence to take the struggle forward if the contract was defeated. Toussaint thus succeeded in ramming through the contract, but the struggle continues.

In the coming months the MTA will undoubtedly take

advantage of its contract gains and escalate its attacks on the union. Toussaint's betrayal of the struggle underscores the importance of building a new leadership for the union. We will be ready to join with every worker committed to fighting for mass action to defeat the bosses' attacks. We expect that militant workers who joined with us in TWAC, as well as others who have become sub-

scribers and distributors of *RTW*, will want to work more closely with us in the future. For our part, we will also work to convince our fellow workers that the only perspective that can really answer the demands of the struggle is that of building a revolutionary socialist party leadership to lead not just transit workers' struggles to victory, but those of the entire working class.●

Left Strikes Out in TWU Struggle

A transit strike in New York City could have shut down the center of world capitalism at a time of growing anti-working class attacks here and intensifying imperialist aggression abroad. Therefore the struggle around the TWU contract presented a decisive test of those groups in the city that lay claim to the banner of revolutionary socialism.

A number of socialist groups have supporters in the ranks of Local 100. But of those, the LRP is the only one that openly promotes revolutionary socialist politics. The Solidarity socialist organization, for example, is the force behind the *Rank and File Advocate (R&FA)* group, but they keep their socialist views a secret and act purely as trade unionists. This helps explain why, as we show in our main article on the struggle, they not only fail to be revolutionary socialists but are also particularly cowardly trade unionists. While Solidarity prefers to hide behind a trade unionist facade, other more ostensibly radical socialists in Local 100 prefer to hide under their beds when it comes to the real class struggle.

Outside of the ranks of Local 100, a number of other socialist groups, mostly at the last minute, commented on the transit workers' struggle. Their views were also tested by the events. We will show that they failed to offer any real alternative to Toussaint's road of class collaboration.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANIZATION

The International Socialist Organization (ISO) likes to hide behind its reportage about the rank and file struggles without making its own views clear. They prefer to cheerlead struggles and tail their leaders rather than battle against the trade union bureaucracy. By doing so, they opportunistically reason, they will best impress their mostly student audience. But this time the ISO couldn't decide just whom to tail after.

Covering the October 30 TWU rally, the ISO's *Socialist Worker* wrote: "Many transit workers...expressed support for the new leadership and sensed a strike might be necessary to win a

good contract." Thus the ISO backhandedly expressed its support for Toussaint. Then, in a typically rank-and-filist way, it endorsed the leaderships' hollow call for the union members to take action themselves:

Now, union leaders are calling for members to take "direct action against" the MTA in all locations and workplaces. The rank and file need to act on this call by organizing now to enforce the present contract and prepare workplace-by-workplace to fight for the kind of contract they deserve. (Nov. 8.)

No mention that Toussaint & Co. were keeping mum about how the union should fight and were not preparing for a possible strike. This would have been a set-up for blaming the workers for any defeat suffered under Toussaint – except that the ISO then changed horses.

In its December 13 issue, *Socialist Worker* distanced itself from Toussaint and moved closer to the *R&FA* oppositional faction: **TWU Local 100 President Roger Toussaint was elected after criticizing the old-guard union leadership for failing to stand up to management threats – and he hasn't ruled out a strike. But Toussaint has also backed away from his earlier militant positions – and he's under serious pressure from city officials to accept a concessionary contract.**

...A network of transit workers, called Rank and File Advocate, distributed a leaflet at the mass meetings arguing the union should prepare to strike and begin electing picket captains in each workplace and set up a strike headquarters immediately. These are the kinds of activities that can prepare the rank and file for a walkout – but the network needs to grow much more.

Yes, these were the type of actions that could have prepared the way for a strike. But the question was not the size of the *R&FA* network but whether *R&FA*'s supporters would fight in the mass meetings to win the ranks to this perspective. The ISO doesn't

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mention that *R&FA* is not just a network of workers but a substantial section of the union leadership. It was thus better placed than any other group to fight Toussaint's denial of the ranks' democratic rights and to fight for motions committing the leadership to back such actions. And as we have shown, they did no such thing.

Following Toussaint's sellout, the ISO encouraged workers to "vote no...and send union leaders back to the table." But the argument that the same sellout leaders should simply be sent back to renegotiate the contract could inspire no one. *Socialist Worker's* article on the contract (Jan. 3) explicitly raises the question, "Why did TWU leaders back down?" But it doesn't even bother to provide an answer, not even a wrong one. The ISO's proposal on the way forward was: use the Vote No campaign to build *R&FA* "on the shop floor" – the very group which failed to fight Toussaint's betrayal of the struggle, didn't build a real Vote No campaign and even rejected our proposal to build an organization of the rank and file opposed to the contract.

PLP: REVOLUTIONARY RHETORIC

The Progressive Labor Party (PLP) plays no regular role inside Local 100. But outside, PL did pay some attention to the transit workers' struggle at the end.

PLP habitually combines stormy rhetoric with mildly reformist proposals, and this struggle was no exception. The leaflet they distributed at TWU workers' demonstrations in December – despite its blaring headline, "Fight for Communist Revolution!" – said nothing about the decisive strike issue but only that "Workers must organize a fight to try to force the bankers and the rich generally to give up some of the profits they steal off our backs." (*Challenge*, Dec. 18.) What about a strike? Does "generally" imply a general strike? PLP does not say. After this vague idea, they more or less suggest a concrete proposal for dealing with the city's huge debt to the banks: "What if a moratorium were declared on this debt, stopping payments to bondholders for a year or two?" Real communists would advocate repudiating the debt for good, not just for a moment. Nice of PLP not to be too hard on the capitalists.

In their newspaper *Challenge* (Dec. 18), PLP did speak positively of a strike:

A strike of the 30,000 mostly black and Latino transit workers to enforce safety measures could give leadership to all NYC workers during the bosses' new fiscal crisis.

Very true, but why on earth does PLP suggest a strike on these issues rather than the main contract demands? In any case,

they then dampened their call:

But with the bosses rejecting all union proposals, the contract expiring Dec. 15 and no strike preparations to date, chances for a sustained struggle against the MTA aren't good.

There was some truth in this negative assessment, but people who call regularly for communist revolution ought to be able to propose ways to overcome those problems. That's what revolutionary leadership means. For all its rhetoric, PLP never has a clue how to get from today's actions to the consciousness and actions that a revolutionary program demands. This time they showed they don't know how to take a strike struggle forward.

WORKERS REARGUARD

The Spartacist League has several supporters in Local 100, but you'd never know it. They hide their socialist views and play absolutely no role in Local 100 or any other union; their excuse is that if the government found out about them they'd get purged. Of course, fighting the bosses' attacks rather than hiding from them is the real revolutionary perspective. But to cover their abstention, the SL does have a lot of militant-sounding things to say about transit workers' struggles...from the safety of their newspaper office.

The November 29 issue of *Workers Vanguard* proclaimed:
What transit workers need is a class-struggle leadership that fights for the complete and unconditional independence of the union from the capitalist state and its politicians.... [T]he enormous power of New York City's transit workers must be mobilized on behalf of all working people and the oppressed.

But for all that, the Spartacists didn't even call for a strike! SLers derided our motion to strike as "economist." But when we asked them where their much more revolutionary motion was, they fell silent. Eventually they declared that they were "for the right to strike," still declining to offer an opinion on the key issue the transit workers were facing at that moment. When we asked whether their supporters in the union were planning to take a stand for a strike that day, they finally responded, "we're telling workers to build a workers party."

But in the next *Workers Vanguard* (Dec. 13), the Spartacists came out "For a Solid NYC Transit Strike!" – a week after the workers had made their attitude unanimously clear.

After the contract was signed, the Spartacists advocated voting it down. A couple of senior SLers even showed up at the founding meeting of Transit Workers Against the Contract – but refused to go in and just hawked their paper outside! When asked

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what their supporters in Local 100 were doing to build a strike, what they had done in the mass membership meetings and what they were doing to oppose the contract, their answer was always the same: they said they didn't know. Of course they did know: not a damn thing.

One thing the Spartacists got right: "workers need a class-struggle leadership." They forgot to add: "But don't look to us."

IG: PLAYING AT CLASS STRUGGLE

The Internationalist Group (IG) is a split-off from the Spartacist League, with much the same politics and method of habitually slandering opponents on their left. A number of newer IG members had expressed interest in the LRP's work in the struggle. So for the December 16 rally, the IG dashed off an 8-page manifesto featuring attacks against the LRP and *RTW*.

The IG bulletin said: "It's not surprising...that the latest *RTW* paper says nothing about the Local 100's alliance with the Democratic Party, or about the imperialist war on Iraq. There's nothing revolutionary about the *RTW*." As the IG could easily check on our web site, *RTW* has printed special issues against the war in Afghanistan and the looming war against Iraq, as well as numerous articles against Toussaint's support for the Democratic Party, thousands of copies of which have been distributed to transit workers. What's more, at a union meeting where Hillary Clinton spoke, *RTW* supporter Eric Josephson was physically expelled by a Toussaint goon squad for distributing an edition of *RTW* attacking the Democrats.

So the IG, which has not done anything around the transit workers' struggle for months, decided to attack us for not making every single revolutionary point in every single issue of *RTW*. (In fact, both Iraq and the Democrats were addressed in *RTW* 15, distributed the day their attack appeared.) Their aim was not to influence the struggle but to manufacture a pseudo-revolutionary attack on us.

Similarly, the IG attacks us for referring to the struggle against unsafe work conditions without, in one particular *RTW*, saying "a word about union safety committees to shut down unsafe operations." This is a particularly obnoxious slander: LRP supporter Eric Josephson is a track worker who has worked the most dangerous jobs in the system for years and, as a shop steward and union officer, has personally shut down unsafe work sites countless times. The creeps who write such garbage are playing at class struggle on paper, not waging it in life.

In any event, the IG's attack on *RTW* having nothing revolutionary about it is quite a stretch, especially considering that while *RTW* consistently argues for the need to build a revolutionary socialist party to lead the unions and the class struggle in general, they couldn't bring themselves to do the same in their statement. Instead the IG calls for a "class-struggle workers party," which can mean many different things, including a militant reformist party.

The IG gibes that our newsletter's name should really be "Reformist Transit Bureaucrat," specifically denouncing us for having called on Roger Toussaint (and his predecessor Willie James) to carry out the programs they promised workers they'd fight for. The IG leaders think they land a knock-out punch when they sum up: "So here we have ostensible socialists calling to carry out the alleged programs of Willie James and Roger Toussaint." The IG also repeats the frequent Spartacist accusation that it was unprincipled for the LRP to give "critical support" to the New Directions slate (including Toussaint) when they ran for office in 2000. "At bottom," concludes the IG, we aim "to pressure the bureaucracy, not oust it."

But here, the IG only exposes a fundamental difference

between our revolutionary approach and their sectarian method that lets the bureaucrats off the hook. First, to paint us as only pressuring the bureaucrats, the IG dishonestly omits that when we raise demands on leaders, we always warn our fellow workers that the leaders will betray their promises. We specify that our point is to prove this in practice and thereby win workers to our aim of building a revolutionary leadership to oust the bureaucrats.

Importantly, any socialist committed to working in the unions and fighting the trade union bureaucracy (rather than just talking about it from outside), knows that a decisive problem is workers' illusions that the leadership will take the struggle forward. Lenin and Trotsky declared political war against sectarian socialists who said the answer was to simply lecture the workers from the sidelines. Rather, they advocated the "united front" tactic, through which revolutionaries challenge the misleaders to a united struggle, warn the workers that they will betray, and then prove it with the experience of the struggle. Trotsky summed up this method as: "With the masses, always; with the vacillating leaders, sometimes, but only so long as they stand at the head of the masses." This is exactly the approach we used, inspiring frenzied attacks on us by James and Toussaint and going a long way to exposing the latter. By rejecting these Leninist tactics, the IG and SL let the bureaucrats off the hook.

NO ALTERNATIVE TO TOUSSAINT

The IG throws in some other lies. They assert that "although the LRP occasionally criticizes New Directions...for suing the unions, it does not reject this class treachery on principle." They quote a *Proletarian Revolution* article saying that such measures can be resorted to only in "exceptional and extreme" situations. You'd never guess from the IG's statement that the quote is from an article in which we argue that it *is* a revolutionary principle to oppose bringing the state into the workers' movement; we were arguing against South African socialists who did just that. You'd never guess that we strongly opposed New Directions every time they brought the courts into the unions; in fact, not once in the history of our organization did we support using the courts in a struggle inside the workers' movement. Instead the IG misleadingly cites our point that there are extremely rare and dangerous times when revolutionaries can consider doing so – for example, when Trotsky used the French police and the Mexican state to deter Comintern assassination attempts against his family and comrades.

Finally, the IG denounces Eric Josephson for telling a TV reporter in 1999 that then-Mayor Giuliani's vicious injunctions against a transit strike were "police state measures, reminiscent of Stalinist Russia or Nazi Germany, and to my mind flagrantly unconstitutional." The IG labels us "Stalinophobic," forgetting that Stalin as well as Hitler used countless illegal police state measures against the working class. The IG adds that the LRP uses "as its measuring rod the bourgeois U.S. constitution!" That too is ridiculous. Does the IG not believe in using the Bill of Rights to defend the working class?

These characters show total disdain for working-class consciousness. Against their left opponents they grab any weapon at all, even when they shoot themselves in the face.

None of the organizations surveyed here consistently called for a strike strategy, despite the transit workers' fighting mood and readiness to go out. Thus none offered an alternative to Toussaint. And none even mentioned the idea of a general strike, the mass-action way for workers to move from the beginning of class consciousness that the anti-worker attacks is awakening, to a fuller understanding of working-class power to politically challenge the state – and thereby prepare themselves for building the proletarian party to achieve the socialist revolution.●

New York: Union Tops Sabotage Transit Struggle

This December, New York City's subway and bus workers of Transport Workers Union Local 100 came close to making history.

At two general membership meetings on December 7, thousands of transit workers voted unanimously to authorize a strike. The capitalist politicians and media responded to the strike vote with a storm of threats of fines and jail if the workers dared to violate the Taylor Law, which bans strikes by New York's public workers. The *New York Times* called for vigorous enforcement of the law, the *Daily News* demanded a "war" to "smash" the union, and the *New York Post* added a typically racist twist, labeling the strike vote a "terrorist threat" and warning that Local 100 President Roger Toussaint was waging a "jihad."

The ruling class was driven to make these threats because they, perhaps better than the workers themselves, understand the tremendous power transit workers have to shut the city down and bring profit-making to a halt. At a time of devastating budget cuts and tax hikes in New York and layoffs and similar attacks everywhere, a transit strike could have sparked a long overdue mass working-class fightback.

In the end, however, the ruling class did not have to follow through on their threats. They were saved from a transit strike by the workers' own leaders, principally Local 100 President Roger Toussaint, who cut a sellout deal with management that was later narrowly ratified by the membership. Following the deal, the *Post* shifted from labeling Toussaint a terrorist to praising him as "worthy of the city's unqualified respect."

TOUSSAINT'S SELLOUT

With the MTA taking a provocatively hard line in negotiations, Toussaint had come under tremendous pressure from the ranks to organize a strike. To maintain control of the situation, Toussaint moved at the decisive general membership meetings to authorize the Local's Executive Board, which he dominates, to call a strike if it decided one was necessary. But this was a trick designed to buy more time to avoid a strike and negotiate a deal. And so it was that Toussaint allowed the contract to expire without a strike and shortly after announced a sellout agreement.

Particularly through our transit workers' bulletin, *Revolutionary Transit Worker (RTW)*, and the work of supporter Eric Josephson,



ABC TV image: hundreds of transit workers brandish placards distributed by LRP and RTW demanding "First Class Contract or Strike!" at October 30 union rally.

the elected Vice-Chair of the Local's Track Division, we in the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) played a prominent role in building the pro-strike movement. But we warned all along that Toussaint would betray the struggle. On the day the contract was set to expire we warned that "Toussaint & Co. are preparing to sell out our struggle." We urged workers to demand that a strike be called and to tell "Toussaint and the rest of the Executive Board that they shouldn't even think of trying to sell us a deal that trades modest improvements on non-economic issues for a lousy wage deal and other concessions." (RTW 14.)

But Toussaint cut exactly such a deal, although its concessions were worse than anyone imagined. The window dressing of improvements in the disciplinary system and maintenance of health care coverage is there, but the givebacks are a potential catastrophe for transit workers.

Most importantly, Toussaint gave up the union's no-layoff clause – at the same time that he granted the MTA the power they need to begin massive layoffs and speedup: unlimited introduction of new technology (like computerized trains that will eliminate conductors, and Metrocard machines that replace token-booth clerks), continued use of non-union contractors without the union having the right to legally challenge such outsourcing, continued use of welfare recipients as sub-minimum wage Workfare slave-laborers in cleaning jobs, and the restructuring of the transit system beginning with the merging of the major bus divisions. The contract also freezes wages in its first year, offering instead a one-time payment of \$1000 to most but not all workers. The three-percent raises in its last two years will not keep up with the combined hits of inflation and the ruling-class politicians' tax hikes. (For more details on the contract, see RTW 16, available from the LRP or on our website.)

The LRP played an even more prominent role in campaigning against the sellout contract. Thousands of transit workers responded strongly in support of RTW's explanation of the contracts' givebacks and its call for workers to vote it down and renew the struggle. Josephson joined with other workers to launch a new group, Transit Workers Against the Contract (TWAC), to broaden the campaign. TWAC produced two leaflets urging a vote

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