

PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION



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**Re-create the
Fourth International!**

Supplement to No. 81, Summer 2008

No Support to Capitalist Parties!

In the face of spreading economic crisis and the interminable horror of the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, millions across the United States and billions across the globe hope the current presidential elections will bring them relief.

The bitter truth is that those hopes will be dashed. Despite their differences, the Republicans' John McCain and the Democrats' Barack Obama share a common loyalty to the capitalist system and to the interests of the American imperialist ruling class in particular. They can offer the working-class and poor people of the world only more wars, oppression and exploitation.

The world's current economic downturn is no ordinary cyclical recession to be suffered through on the way to another boom. For decades, stagnating industrial profit-making at the heart of the capitalist system has been covered by speculative bank loans and stock market investments. This year, hundreds of millions of people face outright famine because of escalating food prices. In the United States alone, several million working-class families – including about one-third of all Black and Latino homeowners – will lose their homes through foreclosures. As well, the upward rush of oil prices has shaken economies of many countries, rich and poor.

Meanwhile, Wall Street and financiers around the world are discovering that their mortgage-based holdings aren't worth the paper they're printed on. The deepening crisis threatens to spur more conflict internationally, as the world's major powers look to carve out and defend competing spheres of economic domination. The U.S.'s drive to control oil distribution is behind not only the Iraq war (see for example "Stop U.S. Imperialist War on Iraq!" in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 65, Fall 2002); it is also the background to U.S. ally Georgia's reckless and brutal assault on separatist South Ossetia in the Caucasus. Imperialist Russia's devastating counter-attack and semi-occupation of Georgia exposed how battered U.S. power and prestige have become.

At home, with the guidance and support of whoever wins the presidency, the capitalists will seek to make the working class sacrifice to try to maintain their profits. The strategy of whoever



Barack Obama embracing John McCain. The two major capitalist candidates' agreements on major policies are far greater than their differences.

wins the imperial presidency will include wholesale attacks on jobs, wages and social services. And as always, the ruling class will foster divide-and-conquer racism and national chauvinism to ensure that those attacks target Blacks, Latinos and immigrants most of all.

NO ELECTORAL SOLUTION

Today's widespread illusions in electoral solutions will over time give way to the realization on the part of the working class that they can only rely on their own power to defend their living conditions. Mass struggles against imperialism and capitalist exploitation will rise in the neo-colonial "third world." In protests, strikes and rebellions, the class struggle will also return with a fury to capitalism's heartland in the imperialist powers. Those mass struggles will put on the agenda the only possible solution

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LRP Supporter Wins Transit Union Post

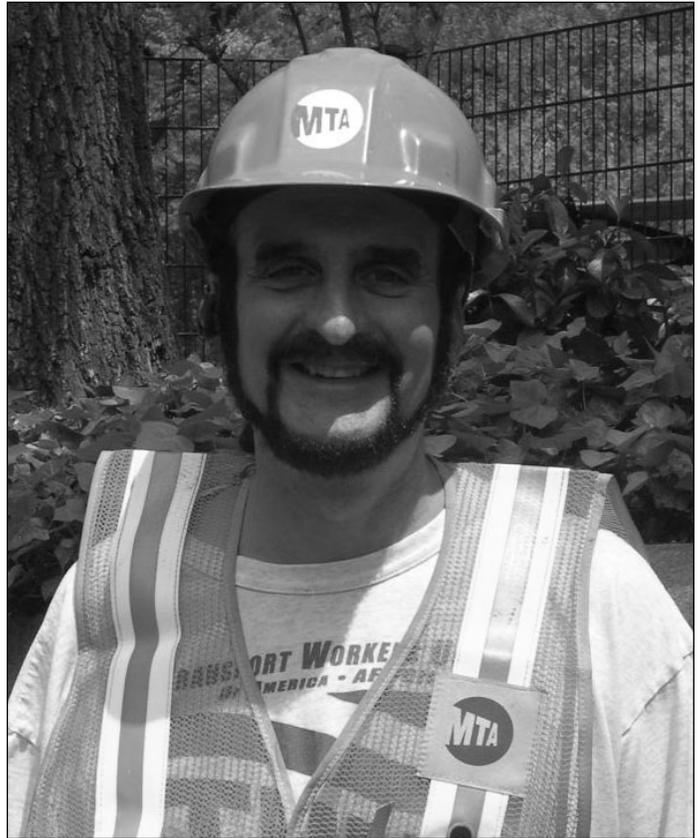
In June, track worker Eric Josephson was elected Vice-Chair of the Track Division in Transport Workers Union Local 100, the powerful union of New York City's subway and bus workers. Josephson is well-known in the union as a consistent fighter for workers' interests. He is also widely known for his revolutionary socialist views and his support of the League for the Revolutionary Party and the newsletter it sponsors, *Revolutionary Transit Worker*.

Josephson's election campaign literature highlighted immediate demands of struggle for track and all transit workers such as the fight for safe working conditions, preparations for the upcoming contract struggle and for democracy in the union. It also prominently championed revolutionary socialism as the alternative to increasing misery under capitalism and raised a perspective of union action over a range of issues from racist police brutality and anti-immigrant attacks to the imperialist occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Josephson won election to the same post previously, in 2000, running against both the old-guard bureaucracy and the "New Directions" caucus which at the time had a reputation among the ranks as a militant opposition. This time Josephson did not face competition from other opponents of the incumbent leadership. His electoral victory by a 2-to-1 margin over a supporter of incumbent Local President Roger Toussaint certainly expressed a protest by many against Toussaint's betrayal of the union's 2005 strike and his increasingly dictatorial rule over the Local. But it also indicated the support Josephson enjoys as a well-known fighter against the bosses and the willingness of many to back his proposals for action.

It is a sad truth that the standard practice of socialists in the unions is to hide their true views and pretend to be nothing more than militant unionists for fear of alienating less politically radical workers. Josephson's election demonstrates the potential for revolutionaries to openly promote their socialist views while winning support from their fellow workers based on a proven record of taking forward a united struggle against the bosses.

Not surprisingly, the election of an open revolutionary socialist to union office gathered quite a bit of attention, including a prominent article and interview in *The Chief-Leader*, the civil service newspaper widely read by workers in New York, whose coverage can be found at www.thechief-leader.com/news/2008/0613/news/015.html.



Eric Josephson's election in New York transit union shows dissatisfaction with leadership that betrayed 2005 strike.

While it is clear that most workers are not yet won over to our overall revolutionary perspectives, we aim to convince our fellow workers based on the shared experience of coming struggles. Only a leadership which is absolutely committed to building a revolutionary party for the overthrow of the capitalist system will reliably defend our class against the bosses' attacks and champion our class interests. Building a revolutionary opposition in the transit union is part of the job of building a revolutionary party against the system altogether. ●

How to Reach Us

COFI Central Office & LRP New York

P.O. Box 1936, Murray Hill Station, New York, NY 10156
212-330-9017

e-mail: lrpcofi@earthlink.net; website: www.lrp-cofi.org

LRP Chicago

Box 204, 1924 W. Montrose, Chicago, IL 60613
773-759-1340

COFI Australia

League Press, P.O. Box 539, North Melbourne, Vic. 3051

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Capitalist Parties

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to capitalism's descent toward barbarism: working-class revolutions that seize state power from the capitalists, overturn the system's drive for profit and set about building a communist world of abundance and freedom for all.

In the U.S. today, only small numbers of workers and youth see through the lies presented by both bourgeois political parties and sense the need for a revolutionary solution. But such politically far-sighted workers and youth have to join together now to lay the foundation for the revolutionary party leadership the working class needs to show it the way to victory. The League for the Revolutionary Party is dedicated to building this leadership through a combination of Marxist study and analysis and intervention in the struggles of our class. Our goal is the re-creation of a revolutionary Fourth International, a world party of socialist revolution, and the construction of a revolutionary party in the U.S. as a section of it.

WHAT THE CANDIDATES REALLY STAND FOR

At first glance there would seem to be great differences between McCain and Obama. The Republican dinosaur McCain seems to represent the worst of the Bush Administration's past. On foreign policy, he plays up his military history and has made wholesale support of the Iraq War a signature issue. On domestic concerns, McCain has made tax cuts and corporate welfare for the bosses his priority. Obama, on the other hand, has cast himself as the candidate of "change." He spoke out against the invasion of Iraq as a "dumb war" – although he has voted to fund its continuation ever since being elected to Congress. And he speaks of the plight of working-class and poor people with more apparent concern than his rival.

But Obama and McCain's agreement on fundamental policies far outweigh their differences:

- both favor keeping American troops in Iraq (and expanding their numbers in Afghanistan) until there is a stable government loyal to Washington, a fantasy that means the bloody U.S. occupation will continue;
- both defend free-trade "globalization," the imperialist strategy of exporting jobs in order to lower wages;
- both favor a phony "path to citizenship" for undocumented immigrants that mask the capitalists' real policy of maintaining a vast pool of super-exploitable labor; both also advocate building an obscenely racist wall along the Mexican border;
- neither advocates a program that could provide decent health care for all, since both defend the profiteering role of private insurance companies.

The only people who may see the change they want from these elections are the U.S. ruling class. Eight years of George W. Bush's Presidency have seen the global power of the U.S. ruling class greatly weakened. Our lead article in *PR* 81 spelled out the needs and fears of the ruling class and the "change" they hope for:

The big capitalists and their agents openly express fear that more of the naked imperialism that defined the Bush years will trigger greater struggles of the oppressed abroad, threatening their investments from the Middle East to South America. They hope the next administration will extract the U.S. from its disastrous war in Iraq without surrendering its domination of the region. They want to see America's image restored by a president who will cover the iron fist of its military power in the velvet glove of a little more diplomacy.

Similarly at home, the rulers worry that the chasm between them and the increasingly desperate working class will spark a return to the protests, strikes and riots that have rocked this country in previous times of war and economic crisis. They hope that a presidency with a "kinder, gentler" image will avoid provoking upheavals – and continue the erosion of working-class incomes and living conditions that feeds their profits. And if workers and youth are convinced that rich and poor alike are part of a movement for "change," all the better.

For these reasons, much of the American ruling class has been throwing its support behind Obama as representing change they can believe in. But Obama's election is far from certain. His victory over Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries was certainly evidence of improved racial attitudes among many white Americans. But racism remains widespread, and a sizable minority of white Americans will never vote for a Black candidate. This anti-Black racism is unfortunately echoed even by some sectors of the Latino population, who are victims of racism themselves.

While McCain pretends to be above stoking racial fears, his campaign continues to do just that, covering references to Obama's race and his father's Muslim religion with attacks on his supposed lack of patriotism and references to Obama as "ambitious" and "arrogant," code words for "uppity."

A more powerful factor threatening Obama's electoral chances, however, is his reluctance to address the concerns of the majority of voters – the working class and poor. For example, *New York Times* columnist and Democratic stalwart Paul Krugman complained of the Obama campaign's "inclination to go for the capillaries rather than the jugular" in attacking the Republicans' economic policies. (Aug. 17.) Of course, Krugman does not want Obama to appeal to the working class to struggle against its exploitation by the capitalists. Rather, he longs for what he calls the "hard-hitting populism" of Bill Clinton, who in his first presidential campaign asserted that "those who play by the rules and keep the faith have gotten the shaft, and those who cut corners and cut deals have been rewarded." Such populist rhetoric echoes the rightful sense of injustice felt by workers and poor people, but it aims to renew faith in capitalism by falsely promising to restore the fairness the system supposedly once had.

The reason for Obama's reluctance to appeal to working class anger is no mystery. Running to be the Chief Executive Officer of the most powerful capitalist ruling class in the world at a time of growing crisis, Obama fears raising the working class's expectations. A close race could force him to adopt a more populist approach. But just how far he is prepared to go to avoid encouraging working-class resentment of the system as a whole can be seen in his efforts to distance himself from the concerns and struggles of Black people, those who most readily identify with his campaign and who also account for many of the most exploited and oppressed workers.

OBAMA, RACE AND RACISM

Few can believe that Barack Obama's meteoric rise to prominence means that the days of racism are over – far from it. The fact that America may well elect its first Black president is without doubt a sign of improved racial attitudes among broad numbers of whites. In a country built on the idea that Black people were the less-than-human property of whites, and in which racism is still wielded by the ruling class to divide and conquer the working class, it is an extraordinary development. But the gains won by Black people were not gifts generously bestowed by enlightened whites. Blacks have had to fight for their rights – and for

their very humanity to be respected – through countless uprisings, from the days of slavery through the civil rights movement to the ghetto rebellions and Black Power movement of the 1960's.

However, concessions from America's capitalist ruling class have proved to be double-edged. The rise to local power of Black Democratic politicians, in particular as mayors of major cities beginning in the late 1960's, was in part an expression of the gains that Blacks won through struggle, made possible because Black people had become politically mobilized as never before. But it was also key to ending those struggles. First, the Black movement was turned away from the power of strikes and protests to the powerlessness of the voting booth; then the pro-capitalist Black elected officials betrayed their working-class constituents. They proved themselves trustworthy tools of the racist capitalist system. Indeed, the ruling class quickly learned to appreciate the role that Black officials could perform in defusing explosive protests movements, calling for calm and insisting on sacrifice in hard times. (For more information, see our pamphlet *The Democratic Party: Graveyard of Black Struggles*.)

This experience of Black Democratic politicians is one reason the ruling class can look with little fear to the prospect of a Black president. Another is that the mass struggles of Black people and other people of color, as well as those of the working class in general, have been so successfully quelled: at times of mass struggle the ruling class would have reason to fear that the election of a Black president would raise expectations of justice too high.

Nonetheless, in seeking to become the elected leader of the bloodiest, most rapacious ruling class in history, Barack Obama has been anxious to distance himself from connection with Black people's struggles and to find opportunities to blame Blacks for their disproportionate suffering of poverty and other social ills. Our article in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 81 detailed many ways in which Obama denies racism when he can and downplays it when he can't.

Since then Obama has further distanced himself from Black concerns. The most notable instance came in response to the media-generated frenzy over remarks by his friend and pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright. The main target was a speech Wright gave soon after the September 11 terrorist attacks, in which he railed against racism in the United States and stated the obvious truth – that U.S. imperialist policies in the Middle East had inspired the terrorist attacks. Obama refused to challenge the racism of the media's attack on Wright and rejected Wright's correct denunciations of racism and imperialism. Instead, he denounced him and ultimately cut all ties with Wright and his church.

Then came Obama's Father's Day speech in a Chicago church, in which he echoed some of the worst racist stereotypes of Black men in the spirit of Bill Cosby's speeches of recent years blaming Black people for their problems. (See *PR* 74.) Labeling Black fathers as somehow uniquely absent and irresponsible, Obama let the system off the hook. He never demanded that the government take responsibility for providing jobs, living wages and quality education and health care, nor did he offer any specific proposals to address all the ways institutionalized and de facto racism keep Black people down. This speech even angered

the senior Black leader Jesse Jackson, who said of Obama (in a whisper picked up by a TV crew's microphone) that he wanted to "cut his nuts off" because he was "talking down to Blacks."

Obama's policy is not simply an election-year tack but a preview of how his administration would address racial oppression. Most Black people will undoubtedly give Obama the benefit of the doubt and vote for him overwhelmingly in November. But it remains the duty of working-class revolutionaries to warn that he cannot be trusted any more than any other bourgeois politician.

THIRD CAPITALIST PARTIES

Revolutionaries oppose any kind of support to capitalist parties like the Republicans and Democrats, no matter how "progressive" they style themselves. In the current election there are several "third-party" candidates for president, two of whom are on the left, broadly speaking: Cynthia McKinney and Ralph Nader. Neither of them represent working-class parties in either their program or their constituency.

Nader has run for president three times before, most notably in 2000 when he got almost 3 million votes on the Green Party ticket. As always, Nader's is a left capitalist campaign. As he said in 2000, his aim is to "save American corporate capitalism from itself." (See our pamphlet *The Nader Hoax* for details on his anti-immigrant and overall anti-working-class positions.)

His attitude towards the U.S.'s imperialist wars is indicative. In 2004, his "solution" in Iraq was to support the occupation, although he preferred it be handed over to United Nations auspices rather than run solely by the U.S., which just means imperialist rule in disguise. This year he calls for impeaching Bush on grounds including the "criminal war of aggression" in Iraq – but he does not denounce the Afghan war in similar terms. At all times his position has amounted to backhanded support for imperialism.

McKinney, who has the Green Party nomination this year, was the first Black woman elected to represent the state of Georgia in Congress, and served as a Democratic legislator for over a decade. In that time she represented the far left wing of the Democratic Party, promoting minor legislative reforms, most of which were killed by her Democratic colleagues. But she always kept to the prerogatives of U.S. imperialism: she voted to fund the U.S. war against Afghanistan in 2001; and in voting for the U.S. to withdraw from Iraq, she emphasized that she agreed with other Democrats in not favoring an immediate withdrawal without plans for it to be "orderly." While McKinney now says she favors a complete withdrawal of the U.S. from both Iraq and Afghanistan, she does not specify an alternative. But her Green Party clearly favors the authority of the United Nations, an equally imperialist solution.

Thus McKinney has always pursued a strategy of trying to push the Democratic Party to the left. After finally being ousted from Congress by conservative Democrats, her Green campaign has the same hopeless aim, this time from the outside. Thus in an open letter to Barack Obama available on her campaign website, she congratulates Obama on winning the Democratic nomination and politely encourages him to adopt a host of policies he has already declared himself opposed to, from universal healthcare to complete withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. McKinney's candidacy, like Nader's, represents an attempt to revive hope in reforming the Democratic Party and the imperialist capitalist system it represents.

"SOCIALIST" ALTERNATIVES

Among organizations in the U.S. that call themselves socialist, the Communist Party is habitually the most openly pro-capitalist in its electoral strategy. Before the collapse of Stalinism, it

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supported the fake-communist bureaucratic capitalist ruling class of the Soviet Union which helped prop up the entire imperialist system. (See our book, *The Life and Death of Stalinism*.) It attempted to maintain a left image while actually resisting any real challenge to capitalism. Thus the CP insisted on achieving the completion of democracy under capitalism as a necessary stage before working-class independence could be contemplated, much less a working-class struggle for power. This perspective was its excuse for supporting Democratic nominees for over half a century, inevitably arguing that the Republicans were the far greater evil if not outrightly fascist. Today the CP functions as little more than a liberal pressure group on the Democrats.

Some far left parties run their own candidates on openly socialist platforms. One such group is the Party for Socialism and Liberation. The PSL is running a nominally socialist campaign with many left demands, including the “immediate withdrawal of all U.S. and foreign forces from Iraq” (why not Afghanistan?).

But the PSL is Stalinist: its history includes the shameful legacy of supporting Khrushchev’s crushing of the Hungarian working-class revolution in 1956 and the Chinese ruler’s merciless slaughter of worker and student protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Today, it hails the “pro-socialist government of President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela,” which beneath its socialist rhetoric is in fact an anti-working-class government of a capitalist state. (See our article “No to Chávez, Yes to Socialism!” in PR 81.) To support the PSL means building a party whose record stands for the smashing of working-class struggle, not socialist revolution.

The largest would-be revolutionary group in the U.S. is the International Socialist Organization. The ISO claims to follow the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky in arguing against the notion of a necessary reform stage, but its practice betrays those claims.

Lenin and Trotsky understood that the class consciousness of workers develops in great leaps in the course of mass struggles, so long as a revolutionary party leadership fights for independent working-class struggle, refuses to support capitalist candidates, mercilessly exposes reformism and draws out the revolutionary lessons of each struggle. The ISO, on the other hand, believes that liberal reformism is a necessary stage for workers on the way to revolutionary consciousness. While it distinguishes itself from the CP by opposing support for the Democrats, it favors leftist third parties even if they support capitalism.

In this spirit, ISO leader Alan Maass declared at the ISO’s recent “Socialism 2008” conference in Chicago that “we unreservedly welcome the comeback of liberalism.” This is not surprising, considering all that the ISO has done to bolster the liberals. One need only recall the headlines in the ISO’s *Socialist Worker* decrying “Bush’s War” and calling on people to “Fight the Right,” which contributed to the myth that the wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq were the crimes of Republicans alone rather than the two major parties of imperialism.

The ISO’s stagist approach helps it to recruit radical liberals on college campuses by posing as the most militant wing of liberal reformism. But in a fashion typical of opportunists who sacrifice the strategic aims of struggle in pursuit of short-term successes, it ignores the fact that this approach helps left-liberal pro-capitalist leaders into positions of influence that they will use to betray the coming struggles and stop them from challenging the system.

Thus all the talk of “fighting the right” has flowed naturally into illusions in the Democrats as a real alternative to the Republicans, and it helped undermine the ISO’s own preference for liberal third-party campaigns. With the upsurge in support for Obama, the fair-weather sailors of the ISO have shown little enthusiasm for Nader or McKinney. They have so far withheld an open endorsement but are urging people to vote for either of them.

BUILD THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY OF THE WORKING CLASS!

It is a tragedy that in this election the working class is confronted yet again by a choice between two anti-working class imperialist parties and no revolutionary working-class alternative. Elections focus attention on political questions, and we in the League for the Revolutionary Party wish we could participate ourselves. A revolutionary campaign would not promote illusions in reforming the system but would instead expose pro-capitalist policies, support the independent struggles of workers and the oppressed and rally wider numbers to the task of building the revolutionary party leadership that those struggles need.

We warn that a Democratic presidency will oversee further imperialist attacks on the masses of the world and escalating attacks at home. While the LRP opposes any vote for either party of the U.S. ruling class, we do recognize that, given that a capitalist candidate is going to take office, a win by Obama would provide more opportunities to expose illusions in the Democrats than the continuation of a Republican regime. Most people will shed their illusions in Obama or other Democrats only when they are able to confirm, through their own experiences, that what we say is true.

The other articles in this supplement – on the support our politics received at the recent anti-war conference in Cleveland, and on our victorious electoral campaign in the New York City transit workers’ union – are two examples of the work we do. We urge working-class people to learn more about the LRP, to discuss with us the ideas in this article, and to join the fight against capitalism of all stripes and for an end to racism and exploitation through socialist revolution. ●

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Anti-War Conference

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The American working-class scene demands a commitment to patient propaganda, trying to convince the most politically advanced workers and youth of the need to oppose imperialism, and of the importance of this struggle to their own conditions. Of course, revolutionaries also look for opportunities to agitate for action by sections of the working class, but such openings exist today generally only over the most immediate demands of workers' own situation. (See our report on the New York City transit workers' union in this issue, for example)

That does not mean that revolutionaries do not fight to change the level of class struggle. But we must focus this fight on the crisis of leadership and on building an alternative revolutionary leadership. The Democratic Party – and those leaders of the working class and oppressed who support it – are responsible for suppressing the class struggle over decades. The current low level of resistance allows both anti-worker and racist attacks at home, and is closely related to our class's passive acceptance of imperialist adventures abroad.

The Democratic Party stranglehold will only be broken when the working class regains its confidence, learns that it has the power to fight in its own interests and comes to see through its own experiences the material link between exploitation and oppression at home and imperialist war abroad. Therefore revolutionaries and all serious opponents of imperialist war should do their part to take on the pro-capitalist misleaderships of the unions and of Black and immigrant organizations at every opportunity. At the same time, it is also important to fight in the arenas that exist to build the best possible actions against the war that are possible today, as we did in Cleveland.

THE DEBATE OVER AFGHANISTAN

The LRP was one of several groups that led the fight to proclaim opposition to the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan. Others included Socialist Viewpoint, the Freedom Socialist Party/Radical Women, and members of the California-based Transport Workers Solidarity Committee, which played a role in the May Day port shutdown. Even the president of the South Carolina AFL-CIO, Donna DeWitt, a featured labor leader at the conference, voted with this bloc. Socialist Action shamefully led the fight *against* the Afghanistan amendments.

As an LRP supporter argued in speaking for our motion:

There are two imperialist occupations going on, not one. There are two imperialist parties in the U.S., not one. The Obama campaign is bending over backwards to show how strong Obama is on 'fighting terrorism.' Obama says the war in Iraq is a distraction from the main task of attacking Afghanistan and capturing bin Laden. To downplay the question of Afghanistan provides cover to Obama, who will in fact continue the occupations of both Afghanistan and Iraq. If this assembly does not proclaim its opposition to the occupation of Afghanistan, front and center, in its own name, then this assembly is failing to fight against Obama's plans to step up the occupation of Afghanistan, and to continue the occupation of Iraq.

This statement was met with long, loud applause from a significant portion of people at the conference.

During a debate about whether to focus on organizing anti-war protests this fall in October or December, Jeff Mackler argued for the December date because "UfPJ, ANSWER, U.S. Labor Against the War, and the Troops Out Now Coalition didn't

want a pre-election demonstration." (We are told that leaders of ANSWER and Troops Out Now protested against this statement privately, but they did not do so publicly at the conference.) The LRP explained that this was another clear example of subordinating the anti-war movement to the interests of the Democratic Party. These comments also received loud applause from the conference, but the December date won the vote.

The co-chair of the conference, Jerry Gordon, made the leadership's attitude even more explicit when he responded directly to our comments: "We're not pandering to the Democrats, we're recognizing reality. The reality is the labor movement won't mobilize before the election, when they're busy electing their candidates. We have labor leaders here, and we have to work with them." In fact, the alliance of the Democratic Party with the heads of the AFL-CIO, Change To Win, and all the unions is the biggest and most dangerous form of political class collaboration that holds back the struggle of the working class today.

THE FAR LEFT IN CLEVELAND

As reported above, we collaborated successfully at the Cleveland conference with several socialist groups and others that we have fundamental political differences with. This was possible because of our tactical agreement on the main practical questions facing the conference. But there were other far left organizations whose role was not constructive.

The Spartacist League and the Internationalist Group came to the Cleveland conference, but not to take part in this struggle against the Democratic Party and their allies. Rather they denounced the entire conference and all its participants, whom they accused of "providing left cover" to class collaboration. The sectarian politics of denunciation from outside, rather than fighting as revolutionary opponents within the current movement, has long been par for the course for these groups.

The far worse role played by Socialist Action was covered up by an article on the conference in the July *Socialist Action* paper:

Whereas Washington's war in Afghanistan was condemned by implication in the original proposal, this was strengthened and made explicit by adding the words "and Afghanistan" to all text where Iraq was mentioned, as well as in the Assembly's own name. The aim was to stress equal opposition to the U.S. wars against Iraq and Afghanistan.

Socialist Action also commented that the amendment on Palestine "strengthened the Action Program's emphasis on the Palestine issue more generally." But at the conference Socialist Action supporters actively *opposed* both the Afghanistan and Palestine amendments that they now praise. This blatantly deceptive account is meant to leave the National Assembly leaders some credibility in order to haggle for influence with the main anti-war organizations.

The likelihood is that the National Assembly is going nowhere. Because the majority at Cleveland defied the organizers over Palestine and Afghanistan, the leadership failed to broker the pro-Democratic compromise it aimed for. The "movement" will remain divided among competing coalitions for the present and will remain dominated by leaders who put the interests of the Democratic Party ahead of anti-war struggles.

We urge all working-class people who are interested in the perspective we put forward for the anti-war movement and the struggle against imperialism to contact us. We want to join together in common practical actions today and to prove the need to build the revolutionary party of the working class to overthrow the obscene warmongering imperialist system once and for all through socialist revolution. ●

Anti-War Conference Clashes Over Afghanistan, Democrats

League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) supporters joined hundreds of other participants in a national anti-war conference in Cleveland on June 28-29, billed as the National Assembly Against the Iraq War and Occupation.

The anti-war “movement” has been beset by political contradictions from the onset – pro-Democratic Party leaderships and the obvious stamp of a middle-class constituency. But today, despite broad opposition to the U.S.’s bloody military adventures, it exists essentially in name only – anti-war protests are few, far between and poorly attended. It was no surprise, then, that many who attended the conference were anxious to overturn this state of affairs. They wanted to fight for mass protest action against our ruling class’s imperialist occupations of Iraq and of Afghanistan and against both of the parties of U.S. imperialism that support these occupations: the Republicans and the Democrats.

The organizers of the conference, on the other hand, were committed to preventing the movement from raising demands or taking actions that would alienate the Democratic Party. The Democrats, Barack Obama above all, want to restore the U.S.’s declining power in the world by withdrawing troops from the losing war in Iraq, in part to bolster the occupation of Afghanistan. So the conference organizers opposed calling any protests until after the November election. They insisted on limiting protests to the Iraq war and fought against calls to oppose the equally imperialist occupation of Afghanistan. A clash between the conference’s leaders and the more militant, anti-imperialist participants was thus inevitable.

The LRP played a prominent role in fighting for motions to protest against the U.S.’s occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, its threats of attack against Iran, and both of the main imperialist parties supporting these policies. By the end of the conference a clear majority stood opposed to the leadership. It voted to change the name of the body to “The National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations,” and to add “and Afghanistan” to every reference to protesting the war in Iraq in the Assembly’s action proposal. A majority also voted for a motion proclaiming solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle, rejecting the organizers’ more moderate statement on the issue.

LRP/COFI website

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

Visit us at www.lrp-cofi.org

THE ANTI-WAR CRISIS

At the start of the Iraq war, hundreds of thousands of people marched in protest against it. The decline of the movement since then has been rapid. The dominant leadership has been the United for Peace and Justice (UfPJ) group. Consisting of various liberals and reformist socialists, UfPJ has insisted that the answer to the pro-war Republican Party is to build support for the Democrats. But the Democratic Party overwhelmingly supported the initial invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and its legislators in Congress continue to this day to vote in favor of funding the continued occupations. So when the 2004 elections approached, UfPJ avoided building mass protests that would challenge the Democratic Party’s imperialist policies and threaten their electoral chances. The movement was thus demobilized and has never recovered. (See our article “Anti-war Leaders Divert Struggle” in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 69.)

The movement was further damaged by rivalry between UfPJ and two other anti-war groups, ANSWER and the Troops Out Now Coalition (front groups of the more left-wing Party for Socialism and Liberation and the Workers World Party, respectively). This rivalry hit rock bottom in 2005 when UfPJ attempted to hold actions to compete with and sabotage protests previously announced by ANSWER and TONC.

By 2008, the movement had become crippled to the point that no major national protest was organized to mark the fifth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq in March. This crisis provided the opportunity for Jeff Mackler, leader of the Socialist Action group, to seek a more prominent role by offering to mediate the conflict by launching the National Assembly and the Cleveland conference – on a basis acceptable to the pro-Democratic UfPJ leadership.

THE WORKING-CLASS ALTERNATIVE

Can the stranglehold of the Democratic Party on the anti-war movement be broken? It would be unserious to underplay the uphill nature of this battle. We in the LRP fight to build a revolutionary working-class pole in the movement. We know that mass struggles of the working class, especially its most oppressed sections, are key to launching the kind of fight against imperialist war that is really needed, and for which the present forces are no substitute. No one could seriously believe that even impressive demonstrations will alone drive U.S. imperialism out of Iraq and elsewhere. The work stoppage by the International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union (ILWU) that shut down West Coast ports on May Day to protest the war is rightly touted as an inspiring example of the power that could really frighten the ruling class if it was widespread.

But it must be stated frankly that today such working-class anti-war action is the exception. The overall level of working-class struggle is very low, a situation which can not be overturned by even the best agitation by the small numbers of activists today.

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