

Down with imperialist nuclear blackmail!

US/Britain hands off Iran!



Lockheed Martin

Armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons, Blair, Bush and Chirac (pictured 2001) are today united in condemnation of Iran over reopening of nuclear facility. Right: Iranian student demonstration outside uranium conversion facility in Isfahan, August 2005.



Reuters

No to UN sanctions!

Less than three years after the invasion and occupation of Iraq, US imperialism now has Iran in its cross-hairs. Claiming that Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons, President Bush on 26 January delivered an ultimatum: "Your desires for a weapon are unacceptable" (*New York Times*, 27 January). This is rich coming from the president of a country with a stockpile of nukes capable of destroying the world several times over. The US ruling class is the only one to have used nuclear weapons, incinerating some 200,000 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and the US government today proclaims a policy of "pre-emptive" nuclear attack against any country it deems a threat. For its part the Blair government is in the process of updating Britain's nuclear weapons system, which consists of four submarines, each capable of carrying around 48 submarine-based warheads. One warhead has around eight times the capacity of the bomb which was dropped on Hiroshima.

There is clear agreement across the US bourgeois political spectrum, from the religious fanatics in the White House to the Democratic Party, and among the European capitalist rulers, that Iran has to be "dealt with". In fact, a common criticism of Bush by the Democrats is that the occupation of Iraq has been a distraction from dealing more forcibly with Iran, as well as with the North Korean deformed workers state. In Britain, Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) complains that Iran is being emboldened because North Korea has been getting off lightly! Callinicos says: "my guess is that the top Iranian leaders do intend to develop a nuclear capability. The contrast between the overthrow of

Saddam Hussein, who had no weapons of mass destruction, and the impunity enjoyed by the North Korean regime, which almost certainly has some nuclear warheads, gives them a strong incentive to copy the latter" (*Socialist Worker*, 21 January).

Among the belligerent fanatics arrayed against Iran are Israel's Zionist rulers. The *Sunday Times* (11 December 2005) reports that Israel's armed forces have been ordered "to be ready by the end of March for possible strikes on secret uranium enrichment sites in Iran". And on 21 January, Israeli defence minister Shaul Mofaz threatened: "Israel will not be able to accept an Iranian nuclear capability and it must have the capability to defend itself, with all that that implies, and this we are preparing" (*Spiegel Online*, 23 January).

In the event of military attack against Iran by US/British imperialism or by Israel, or by any other force operating on behalf of the imperialists, we Marxists declare: **The international proletariat must stand for the military defence of Iran against imperialist attack.** At the same time, we give not one iota of political support to the reactionary Tehran regime. Our defence of capitalist Iran is conditional: In military conflicts between an imperialist power and a dependent semicolonial country, our policy is revolutionary defensism. We defend the oppressed country against the oppressor country and promote class struggle in the imperialist centres, as well as in the oppressed

country. Every victory for the imperialists in their military adventures encourages more predatory wars; every setback serves to assist the struggles of working people and the oppressed.

The imperialist bourgeoisies, with their media in tow, are straining every nerve to foment hysteria about an Iranian "threat". They portray Iran's Islamic regime as a bunch of demented fanatics. But the real nuclear crazies are the Christian fundamentalists at the head of US imperialism, who may not feel constrained from attacking Iran by whatever obstacles are in their way. And although the British bourgeois press were quick to condemn Chirac for his dramatic threat to use France's nuclear arsenal for a pre-emptive strike, this is also the policy of the Blair government regarding Britain's nukes. After being elected in 1997 Labour dropped its formal policy of "no first use" of nuclear weapons. In 2002, in the context of a supposed threat from Iraq's chemical and biological weapons, then defence secretary Geoff Hoon made Labour's position abundantly clear, saying: "I am absolutely confident, in the right conditions, we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons" (*Guardian*, 6 June 2002).

The true enemy of working people, minorities and the oppressed in the US is the US bourgeoisie, just as the enemy of working people in Britain is the British bourgeoisie. The ruling classes that are today threatening Iran are the same capitalist classes that have slashed the pensions, health care and jobs of

working people while shredding democratic rights through the reactionary "war on terror".

A letter to the *New York Times* (29 January) by the head of the press section of the Iranian Mission to the UN emphasised, "Iran has no ambition to build nuclear weapons", and noted that Iran's nuclear research work "is completely in accord with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty". The fact of the matter is that in the context of threats by the nuclear-armed imperialists, Iran desperately needs nuclear weapons and adequate delivery systems to defend itself. In today's world, possession of nuclear arms has become the only real measure of national sovereignty. The counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state in 1991-92 removed the primary military and political counterweight to US imperialism. Since then, the US rulers have developed a policy of using their overwhelming military might, which dwarfs that of even the rival imperialist powers, to prevent the rise of any perceived challenge to US dominance.

A letter to the *New York Times* (17 January) aptly noted in response to an editorial by the paper:

"You write that 'no one has yet come up with any very good ways of deflecting Iran from its nuclear course.' But it is obvious that Iran seeks a bomb principally to counter the barely concealed ambition of Bush administration hard-liners to force 'regime change' there.

"After seeing what has happened in Iraq, and listening to the 'axis of evil' rhetoric,

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Send the Sex Offenders Register!

Young Spartacus

Anti-sex witch hunt of teachers and students

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Iran...

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any patriotic Iranian military leader must be advising his government that only a bomb will deter the United States."

The reactionary nature of Iran's mullah regime does not in any way diminish the duty of proletarian revolutionaries to stand on the side of Iran against US imperialism. When Mussolini's Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935, Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky addressed the concerns of proletarian militants who objected to defending Ethiopia because of Haile Selassie's reactionary regime, which maintained slavery in that country:

"If Mussolini triumphs, it means the reinforcement of fascism, the strengthening of imperialism, and the discouragement of the colonial peoples in Africa and elsewhere. The victory of the Negus, however, would mean a mighty blow not only at

Italian imperialism but at imperialism as a whole, and would lend a powerful impulsion to the rebellious forces of the oppressed peoples."

—Leon Trotsky, "On Dictators and the Heights of Oslo" (April 1936)

Iran today needs nuclear weapons to fend off an imperialist threat no less than Ethiopia in the 1930s needed Mausers to fend off the Italian imperialists. **Britain, US and all imperialist powers: hands off Iran! For the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British and all imperialist troops and military bases from Iraq, Afghanistan and Central Asia!**

For class-struggle opposition to imperialism!

The only nuclear-armed state in the Near East today is key American ally Israel, whose rulers have repeatedly made clear that they are prepared to use

nuclear weapons. The demented Zionist rulers have a policy—dubbed the "Samson Option" by journalist Seymour Hersh—of plunging the whole region into nuclear holocaust if Israel were threatened with military defeat. In 1986 Israeli nuclear technician Mordechai Vanunu proved to the world that Israel had nuclear weapons—over 200 nuclear warheads at the time, many of them aimed at the Soviet Union. For his act of courage, Vanunu spent nearly two decades in Israel's dungeons.

While Britain, the US and Israel openly threaten to use their nukes, the current Iranian regime has said that the use of nuclear weapons is contrary to its Islamic beliefs. A 1989 book, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*, by Dilip Hiro noted that when Ayatollah Khomeini was approached by Iranian military officials about launching chemical weapons in response to Iraq's extensive use of such during the 1980-88 Iraq-Iran War, "he reportedly reiterated his earlier refusal based on the argument that Islam prohibits its fighters from polluting the atmosphere even in the course of a jihad, holy war". At the end of the war, which was reactionary on both sides, United Nations investigations turned up no evidence that Iran used chemical weapons. In contrast, after Germany used poison chlorine gas during World War I, France and Britain responded with their own poison gas attacks. Thus Iran has credibility in a way the imperialist powers do not.

The drive to war, including with nuclear weapons, stems not mainly from whether a particular government is dominated by "crazies", but from the irrational, anarchic, profit-driven capitalist system that has been made even more irrational in this epoch of imperialist decay. Mass slaughter is the concentrated expression and ultimate logic of the "normal" brutal workings of the capitalist system, which daily condemns countless numbers around the world to death by malnutrition, lack of medical care and industrial murder.

What is necessary in Britain is class-struggle opposition to imperialism by the multiethnic proletariat. The primary obstacle to this course is the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracy, whose acceptance of the capitalist profit system and promotion of British imperialism's interests internationally chain the working class to the class enemy. The working class needs revolutionary leadership. If there is to be a future for the working class, minorities and youth other than one of grinding exploitation, joblessness, repression and war, if the impoverished masses of the world are

to have a future other than starvation and imperialist subjugation, then this whole system must be torn up by its roots through socialist revolutions and replaced by a rational, planned economy internationally. The Spartacist League in the US fights to build a revolutionary workers party that will lead the American proletariat in a fight to sweep away the bloody imperialist system and establish workers rule; the Spartacist League/Britain fights to build such a party here, part of a reformed Fourth International.

Defend China!

Imperialist sabre rattling against Iran also poses a serious threat to China. Having emerged victorious from the Cold War against the USSR, the imperialist powers now have as a strategic target the Chinese deformed workers state, where capitalist rule was overthrown through the 1949 revolution. The US and European imperialists have pursued a two-pronged strategy for capitalist restoration in China: economic penetration and military pressure.

An *Asia Times* (2 December 2004) article noted: "Increasingly, the image of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a sort of front line state in a post-Cold War global lineup against US hegemony is becoming prevalent among Chinese and Russian foreign-policy thinkers." China gets 14 per cent of the oil for its growing economy from Iran. In late 2004, China signed a \$70 billion deal with Iran for oil and natural gas for some 30 years, under which China's state-owned oil company Sinopec will get a 51 per cent stake in Iran's Yadavaran oil field and its estimated three billion barrels of reserves.

US imperialism has placed military bases in Central Asia, aiming towards a strategic encirclement of China as well as enhancing US efforts to control oil resources against both capitalist Russia and the Chinese workers state. While the US has been bogged down in Iraq, it has pursued a "containment policy" against China, including by strengthening military ties with Japanese imperialism—for example, through last year's US-Japan pact to defend capitalist Taiwan against Red China. Last year, the US agreed to provide nuclear-armed India with additional nuclear technology in an attempt "to improve ties with India, in part as a counterweight to China" (*New York Times*, 19 July 2005). Simply put: It's OK for allies of US imperialism to have nukes, but not for so-called "rogue states".

As Trotskyists, we fight for the unconditional military defence of the

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TROTSKY

International Women's Day

International Women's Day, 8 March, originated in 1908 in the struggles of women garment workers in New York City. As Marxists we understand that the oppression of women is rooted in capitalist class society, particularly in the institution of the family. We fight for women's liberation through socialist revolution, led by a proletarian vanguard party which acts as a tribune of all the oppressed. Our

articles published under a Women and Revolution masthead uphold the tradition of the Russian Bolsheviks' Rabotnitsa (Working Woman), which fought to draw women into the communist movement as active fighters in the struggle against capitalist exploitation and oppression. The following excerpt is translated from the first issue of Rabotnitsa, which appeared on International Women's Day, 1914.

Bourgeois women advocate their special "women's" rights; they always oppose themselves to men and demand their rights from men. For them, contemporary society is divided into two main categories: men and women. Men possess everything, hold all the rights. The question is one of achieving equal rights.

For the working woman, the woman question becomes quite different. The conscious working woman sees that contemporary society is divided into classes. Each class has its special interests. The bourgeoisie one, the working class another. Their interests are opposed. The division between men and women does not have great importance in the eyes of the working woman. That which unites the working woman with the working man is much stronger than that which divides them. They are united by their common lack of rights, their common need, their common conditions, which are the exploitation of their labor, their common struggle and their common goals. "All for one, one for all!" This "all" means the members of the working class—men and women alike. The "woman" question for working men and working women is a question of how to organize the backward masses of working women, how best to explain to them their interests, how to make them comrades sooner in the common struggle. Solidarity between working men and working women, common activity, common goals, a common path to these goals—such is the solution of the "woman" question among workers. The struggle for women's rights against those antagonistic to women's rights—men—is the solution to the "woman" question among the bourgeoisie. The journal *Rabotnitsa* will seek to explain to the insufficiently conscious working women what their interests are, to indicate the communality of their interests with the interests of the entire working class. For this every incident in the life of working women will be used to make a close connection with the general conditions of capitalist production, with the general conditions of the entire country. *Rabotnitsa* will elucidate everything occurring in the country from the point of view of the interests of the working class. It will awaken in working women the consciousness of the great liberating task of the workers movement and will call for a struggle for these great goals.

—Nadezhda Krupskaya, *Rabotnitsa* (1914)



LENIN

WORKERS HAMMER

Marxist newspaper of the Spartacist League/Britain

For a federation of workers republics in the British Isles!
For a Socialist United States of Europe!

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"Communism has collapsed", our newspapers and TV declare. It is a fact that should have every socialist rejoicing. — Socialist Worker, 31 August 1991



Der Spiegel photos

SWP rejoiced over capitalist counterrevolution in the USSR. The result: devastation for working class, women — triumph of religious reaction. Left: Russian Orthodox priest on Yeltsin's barricades. Right: Russian women rummage through rubbish heap, post-counterrevolution.

SWP wanted the post-Soviet world, now they've got it

In August 1991, when Boris Yeltsin's counterrevolutionary forces backed by George Bush Sr seized power, every capitalist ruling class on the planet was triumphant. They loudly proclaimed this to be the "death of communism", hoping to bury the prospect of working-class revolution that the Soviet Union represented. Equally jubilant was the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), whose front page trumpeted: "Communism has collapsed" followed by "Now fight for real socialism". The article described this as "a fact that should have every socialist rejoicing" (*Socialist Worker*, 31 August 1991).

We of the ICL fought with all our resources against counterrevolution. While the SWP was "rejoicing" for Yeltsin, our comrades in Moscow distributed by the thousands a leaflet dated 27 August 1991 titled: "Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!", which said:

"The working people of the Soviet Union, and indeed the workers of the world, have suffered an unparalleled disaster whose devastating consequences are now being played out. The ascendancy of Boris Yeltsin, who offers himself as Bush's man, coming off a botched coup by Mikhail Gorbachev's former aides, has unleashed a counterrevolutionary tide across the land of the October Revolution."

—reprinted in Spartacist pamphlet, *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled* (1993)

Our leaflet emphatically stated that, although Yeltsin & Co then saw their way clear to implement the reintroduction of capitalism, *the outcome had not yet been definitively decided*. In calling on Soviet workers to defeat Yeltsin-Bush, we said that "Soviet workers are facing a disaster of catastrophic proportions: every gain for which they, their parents and grandparents sacrificed is on the chopping block." In the ensuing months the Soviet working class did not mobilise in resistance to the encroaching capitalist restoration and thus counterrevolution triumphed. Due to decades of Stalinist lies and misrule, the working class was atomised and bereft of any leadership that opposed capitalism.

It also lacked any consistent socialist consciousness and was sceptical of class struggle in the capitalist countries.

What we said at the time has been overwhelmingly confirmed by subsequent events. The political landscape around the world today is still conditioned by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991-92. The final undoing of the world's first workers state ushered in a global offensive against the world's working class and oppressed by the imperialist ruling classes. The programme that the ICL upheld—that of Trotsky's Left Opposition and of the Bolshevik Party that led the October Revolution—was proven correct. We fought to the end for unconditional military defence of the Soviet Union and the East European deformed workers states against imperialist attack and internal counterrevolution, while fighting for workers political revolution to oust the parasitic Stalinist bureaucracies and replace them with regimes based on workers democracy and revolutionary internationalism. This is the programme we apply today to the remaining deformed workers states—China, Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam.

In sharp contrast, the SWP got what they wanted in 1991. They rejoiced in Yeltsin's triumph because it represented victory for what their tendency has stood for since it came into existence: the notion that imperialist "democracy" is preferable to Stalinism. In this post-Soviet ideological climate, which is dominated by the widespread belief that "communism is dead", the SWP projected there would be a radicalisation. This was pure fantasy. Having contributed to this climate throughout the Cold War, and having spent the past 15 years trying to cash in on it, long-time SWP hack John Molyneux has criticised the party leadership because the SWP is not getting the pay-off. At a January SWP conference Molyneux stood as an oppositional candidate for election to the Central Committee on a

document exposing the fact that, even according to the SWP's vastly inflated figures, "somewhere during this period of radicalisation and outward success the party appears to have lost up to 5,000 (50%) of its membership (without acknowledging that this was happening)" (from "Why I intend to stand" by John Molyneux, published in *Weekly Worker*, 5 January).

While Molyneux wants to bring the SWP's expectations into line with today's political climate, he firmly upholds the SWP's support for counterrevolution—the SWP's very own contribution to that climate. Molyneux writes:

"A key problem, in my opinion, was our estimation of the effects of the collapse of Stalinism. We were right to identify this as fundamentally historically progressive and to argue that internationally it created a space for genuine socialist ideas to get a hearing. However we seriously underestimated the extent to which it was perceived by millions, indeed hundreds of millions as the defeat of socialism. This led to what was a major characteristic of the 90s and is still with us today: namely a yawning gap between the large numbers who could be mobilised against various things (pit closures, the criminal justice bill, the nazis, 'capitalism', war) and the small number who could be recruited for active revolutionary socialism."

—*Weekly Worker*, 5 January

Molyneux's statement that the collapse of Stalinism was "fundamentally historically progressive" is a declaration of support to the SWP's political perspective that the restoration of capitalism was preferable to Stalinism. Well, Molyneux and the SWP got what they wanted. For anyone not blinded by anti-communist loyalty to "democratic" imperialism, the restoration of capitalism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was a *defeat of historic proportions for the working masses of the whole world*. In the former Soviet Union alone, from 1991 to 1997 gross domestic product fell by over 80 per cent; according to (understated) official statistics, capital investment dropped by over 90 per cent. By the middle of the 1990s, 40 per cent of the Russian population

was living below the official poverty line and a further 36 per cent only slightly above it. Millions were starving; unemployment was massive; life expectancy plummeted. Life for women was drastically altered for the worse, and there was a resurgence of religious backwardness, both Russian Orthodox and Muslim.

This followed the devastating consequences of the tide of counterrevolution that had swept the former deformed workers states in Eastern Europe and led to the capitalist reunification of Germany in 1990. In the "one-superpower" world, US imperialism's military might allows it to dominate the world and to rape and plunder neocolonial countries such as Iraq. All the imperialist powers feel they have free rein to grind the working class at home and are trying to reverse historic gains for workers, as seen in the Blair government's attacks on wages, pensions and welfare provision. However it is not the repercussions of counterrevolution for the working masses of the world that bothers Molyneux, whose only concern is that the SWP's numbers have plummeted.

The significance of the Russian Revolution

Historically the destruction of the Soviet Union through counterrevolution in 1991-92 represented the final undoing of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. A defining event of the 20th century, that revolution was the greatest victory for the working people of the world. For the first time in history the programme of proletarian revolution became flesh-and-blood reality under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolshevik Party. The young workers state was a beacon of liberation: it decreed land to the peasants; pulled Russia out of the imperialist war; eliminated laws discriminating against women and homosexuals and recognised the right of self-determination for oppressed peoples. Production was collectivised and planned according to need—for jobs, housing, health care and education.

Under conditions of imperialist encirclement, extreme scarcity and social backwardness, a bureaucracy coalesced around JV Stalin. The proletariat had been decimated by the imperialist war and by the Civil War of 1918-20 against internal counterrevolutionary forces that were backed by invading armies of 14 capitalist countries. The failure of the German revolution in 1923 was a decisive factor in the isolation and resulting degeneration of the Soviet state. The Stalinist bureaucracy usurped political power in 1923-24 and later adopted the nationalist dogma that socialism could be built in one country (ie Russia). This was a renunciation of the Marxist understanding that socialism is a classless society based on abundance, requiring an international division of labour, which in turn requires proletarian revolution in several advanced capitalist countries.

The SWP rejected the programme of Trotsky and the Left Opposition, who systematically fought against the degeneration of the Soviet Union, seeking to maintain it as a bastion of world revolution. Trotsky defended the Soviet Union because it remained a workers state based on the planned, collectivised economy while fighting against the bureaucratic misrule of the Stalinists. As he pointed out in *The Revolution Betrayed* written in 1936, the fact that within a decade the country had been transformed from a backward peasant-dominated country into an industrial

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SWP..

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powerhouse demonstrated the power of the planned economy, despite the bureaucracy. These gains included the collectivised economy that enabled the Soviet Red Army to smash the Nazis and liberate Eastern Europe and allowed the USSR to develop the military might to act as a counterweight to US imperialism. Despite Stalinist degeneration, the fundamental gains of the October Revolution remained until the triumph of capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92. Whereas Trotsky insisted that the Stalinist bureaucracy was an unstable caste, the SWP adopted the "theory" that the Soviet Union was "state capitalist" and that the bureaucracy was a new ruling class.

Korea and the Cliff group

The SWP originated out of a capitulation to the anti-Soviet hysteria that accompanied the Korean War of 1950-53 by its founder, the late Tony Cliff, who broke from the Trotskyist Fourth International on the question of defence of the Soviet Union and other workers states. Cliff's break from Trotskyism was precipitated by the anti-communist Cold War hysteria that accompanied the outbreak of the Korean War. He reneged on the Trotskyist position of unconditional military defence of the Chinese and North Korean deformed workers states against imperialist attack, which took place under the auspices of the United Nations. This was a cowardly capitulation to the British bourgeoisie and to the Labour government that dispatched British troops to Korea.

As we wrote in "The Bankruptcy of 'New Class' Theories" (*Spartacist* no 55 [English-language edition], Autumn 1999):

"The 'new class' theories of these renegades from Trotskyism like [1939 renegade from Trotskyism in the US, Max] Shachtman and Cliff were an attempt to justify their betrayal of the class interests of the proletariat and their own reconciliation with capitalism by denying the working-class nature of the Soviet degenerated workers state and the post-WWII East European deformed workers states. In reality these 'theories' were nothing but attempts—dressed up in pseudo-Marxist terminology—to conceal their real program of capitulation to anti-communist bourgeois public opinion and the renunciation of a proletarian revolutionary perspective....

The article further noted:

"While clinging to their threadbare theories, the Cliffites and their ilk are oddly modest about their real contribution. The restoration of capitalism in the USSR and East Europe was the implementation of their program. Like Shachtman, who supported Washington's Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, Cliff & Co. did their utmost to seek to bring victory to U.S. imperialism in the Cold War, lusting for the bloodying

of Soviet forces in Afghanistan, championing the 'trade union' credentials of Solidarność—instrument of the Vatican, Wall Street and Western social democracy for capitalist counterrevolution in Poland—and vicariously dancing with the black marketeers, monarchists and yuppies on Yeltsin's barricades in 1991."

Political consciousness in the post-Soviet world

In many countries of the world, hundreds of thousands have taken to the

generation that has been politicized by hatred of 'global capitalism' and opposition to the war against Iraq is for the most part far removed from historical materialism and a proletarian perspective, and these youth confront a world in which Marxism is widely portrayed as a relic of the past" (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] no 58, Spring 2004).

The SWP's answer to the retrogression of consciousness is to adapt to it by

working-class formation. From the outset SWP leaders made sure that no formal commitment to "socialism" appeared in its programme and voted down a motion calling for the abolition of the monarchy. Within Respect, the SWP tailored their demands to the mosques, abandoning the struggle for women's liberation or gay rights in all but name, and they have not publicly disagreed with Galloway on abortion, which he opposes. A recent article in the SWP's press attacks Richard Dawkins, a leading defender of atheism and of science against religious obscurantism. *Socialist Worker* (21 January) complains that Dawkins "can only view religion in an abstract sense—as a set of ideas that need to be fought". Marxism is based on dialectical materialism and atheism and therefore regards every religion as a set of ideas that need to be fought. Religion serves as a kind of consolation for material oppression and degradation, and therefore Marxists explain that for the masses to reject religion requires overcoming the material conditions that give rise to it.

Respect purports to represent Britain's Muslims, who are among the poorest sections of the population and are foremost targets of the government's racist "war on terror" at home. Far from representing the interests of any oppressed minority, Respect is based on a bald-faced acceptance by the SWP of racist British capitalist rule, based on the monarchy, the House of Lords, the established Protestant churches and parliament. Respect certainly does not represent the interests of the working class, minorities or women. It ought to repel young activists who want to fight to overthrow the racist system of capitalist exploitation and to liberate women from the yoke of oppression and religious reaction—whether it comes from church, temple or mosque.

For all the SWP's opportunist adaptations, Respect does not appear to be the get-rich-quick scheme they imagined. George Galloway spent much of January locked in Channel 4's *Celebrity Big Brother* TV show, allegedly trying to "reach a wider audience". This made him and the SWP a laughing stock on the left, gave New Labour a stick to beat him with and didn't go down well with some devout Muslims.

The SWP's capitulation to Islamic forces in Respect is a continuation of their cheering for the victory of the reactionary ayatollahs in the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. This was followed by their support to the US and British imperialists against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, where the Soviet Red Army was fighting a CIA-backed insurgency of mullahs, warlords and tribal chieftains. We said "Hail Red Army!" and "Extend the social gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples!" The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was a prelude to counterrevolution in the USSR itself, which found the SWP rejoicing. Throughout our existence as a tendency, the ICL has placed the Trotskyist programme for defence and extension of the gains of the October Revolution at the centre of our work. As we noted in "The Bankruptcy of 'New Class' Theories", all the "state capitalist" and "new class" theories of the USSR "were predicated on the search for an illusory 'third camp' between capitalism and Stalinism, which always proved sooner or later (mainly sooner) to be firmly situated at the side of their 'own' ruling class. We take pride in having fought to the limits of our ability to defend the remaining gains of October against imperialism and counterrevolution."



Workers Hammer

Above: SWP-led mass demonstration in London in protest against attack on Iraq, 28 September 2002.

Right: George Galloway "getting the message across" to "a wider audience" from the *Big Brother* house as Rula Lenska's "pussy cat".



Guardian

streets in protests against the Iraq War and there have been significant mobilisations in opposition to "globalisation". But to win elements from these protests to revolutionary Marxism requires recognising that counterrevolution has been accompanied by a massive regression in political consciousness. As we stated in a report of the ICL's fourth international conference of Autumn 2003: "the political worldview of the

moving further to the right, increasingly abandoning their erstwhile claim to be the "socialist alternative", which only ever amounted to pressuring the Labour Party to pressure British imperialism. Accepting the framework of "democratic" British capitalism, their programme amounts to unashamed class collaboration, which is amply demonstrated by the Stop the War Coalition (StWC) and Respect. The StWC is a cross-class bloc of leftists (the SWP, Socialist Party, Workers Power and others) and union bureaucrats in coalition with elements of bourgeois parties (the Greens) as well as Christian and Muslim organisations. Its purpose is to unite with all the forces who uphold the capitalist status quo, but disagree with Blair over Iraq. This is in flat contradiction to the Marxist understanding that opposition to war must be linked to a struggle against the capitalist system that gives rise to war. In Britain such a struggle must be premised on the need for workers revolution to overthrow British imperialism.

The Respect coalition is the SWP's most blatant acceptance of the British imperialist status quo to date. Led by maverick MP George Galloway, this coalition makes no pretence to being a

The Bankruptcy of "New Class" Theories

Spartacist no 55
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Scrap the Sex Offenders Register!

Anti-sex witch hunt of teachers and pupils

It is a sign of the reactionary times in Blair's Britain that Education Secretary Ruth Kelly was almost hounded out of her job in January for being "soft" on so-called "sex offenders". A member of the sinister, ultra-right-wing Catholic sect Opus Dei, Kelly is currently preparing Blair's latest attack on secondary education. Yet even she was placed on the defensive by a hysterical media frenzy about "sex offenders" in schools, one of many such moral crusades that have been detonated by the Blair government's 1997 Sex Offenders Act. Passed just weeks after coming to power, this act (re-enacted as the Sexual Offences Act in 2003) required those branded as "sex offenders" to register with the police. This register is a witch hunter's charter.

The issue of "sex offenders" is a political football that has been used repeatedly to ignite often violent public campaigns against those who end up on the register, which currently contains roughly 24,000 names. The term "sex offender" grotesquely and wilfully equates heinous acts such as the brutal murder of Soham schoolgirls Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman with harmless activities like teenage sex, or looking at pornographic images. People's names can be placed on the Sex Offenders Register even if they've never had sex with anyone!

The latest witch hunt was started by the "liberal" *Observer* running a scare-mongering piece that "sex offenders" had been cleared to teach in certain schools, igniting hysteria that might make one think child-rapists and murderers were lurking in the classrooms. The pretext was that, until now, not everyone on the Sex Offenders Register was automatically banned from teaching or working with children. Such a ban was restricted to those on List 99, the government's official blacklist, which numbered 4200. A tiny number of those on the register had been permitted by the education department to teach. This "loophole" was seized upon for a muck-raking media vendetta in which the "respectable" BBC, *Guardian* and *Independent* joined the rabidly right-wing *Daily Mail*, particularly targeting two people who had been cleared to work as teachers. What "sex crimes" had these two people committed? William Gibson, a former maths teacher, had been placed on the register for a *consensual*, long-term relationship that began in 1980 when his girlfriend was a 15-year-old pupil, with whom he went on to have three children during a 19-year marriage! Paul Reeve, a popular Norfolk PE teacher, received a "caution" three years ago because his credit card details were found on a US pornography website!

Reeve was forced out of teaching and became the victim of a police dragnet codenamed "Operation Atlas", a trawl through a list of "paedophile suspects" by Norfolk police. The list came from the National Crime Squad, a unit specialising in searching for people using porn websites, known as "Operation Ore". This trawl was launched in 2002 when the American FBI provided British police with the credit card details of 6500 people in Britain who accessed an American website called *Landslide*, resulting in an invasion of privacy by the state on a mass

scale. Hundreds of computers have been seized and a staggering 3500 people arrested, including Who guitarist Pete Townshend. Some have been convicted and jailed; even those who are merely "cautioned" are automatically placed on the Sex Offenders Register. Not surprisingly, Operation Ore has contributed to a vast increase in the number of people cautioned for possessing child porn images. In the last decade there has been an increase of 2692 per cent in cautions for this! (*Guardian Unlimited*, 16 January).

We vehemently oppose such police

sex, we oppose the reactionary 'age of consent' laws and we have a long record of defending against persecution organisations such as the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) and the British Paedophile Information Exchange, whose leaders were jailed in 1984 for advocating the right of youth under the 'age of consent' to have sex with adults."

—*Workers Hammer* no 174, Autumn 2000

We also oppose the criminalisation of those who look at child pornography which, like all pornography, is simply



Ruth Kelly (top right) fuelled hysteria against "sex offenders". Reactionary protests on the streets of Portsmouth in 2000 (bottom right) recalling seventeenth-century witch hunts such as in Pendle, Lancashire in 1612 (left).

surveillance which is an outrageous intrusion by the state into people's private lives. We call for an end to all laws against "crimes without victims" such as prostitution, drug use and pornography; we oppose the existence of a legal "age of consent", which gives the capitalist state the right to determine at what age youth can engage in consensual sexual activity. And we utterly reject the practice whereby looking at porn is equated with violent crimes such as rape, sexual assault and even murder. **Down with the "age of consent" laws!**

State out of the bedroom!

For us the guiding principle for sexual relations is that of *effective consent*, meaning mutual agreement and understanding, as opposed to coercion. We believe that as long as those who take part agree to do so at the time, no one, least of all the state, has the right to tell them they can't do it. Determining what effective consent is can be difficult, and particularly in sexual relationships between youth and older adults such as teachers, there will always be grey areas. As we wrote in an article titled "Labour's witch hunt against 'sex offenders' unleashes vigilante terror", published during a media-generated frenzy over "paedophilia" in 2000 that resulted in lynch mobs on the streets:

"Paedophilia" simply means sexual desire towards children. To equate this with child murder and rape is grotesque and partakes of the same reactionary bourgeois bigotry which declares all sex other than heterosexual monogamy to be 'deviant'. We oppose the persecution of those who engage in consensual intergenerational

images and words designed for pleasure. This was the subject of *Capturing the Friedmans*, a documentary depicting the true story of how two innocent individuals were framed up, jailed and had their lives destroyed by false accusations of raping dozens of children, simply because the father had received images of child pornography through the post!

Ruth Kelly has proposed new measures that will ban anyone convicted or cautioned of any so-called "child sex offence" or "serious offence against adults" from ever working in schools. Ominous noises are now being made about "sex offenders" lurking in the NHS as well!

Dozens of teachers have been hounded out of their jobs and even jailed for nothing other than consensual sexual encounters with teenagers. This was the subject of the November 2005 Channel 4 documentary *Sleeping with teacher*. Among others it featured Scottish music teacher John Forrester, whose partner was a student when the relationship began and both were shown as a happy couple expecting a baby; Lucy Hayward, who was jailed for two years and placed on the Sex Offender's Register for a fling with a 15-year-old pupil (who seduced her) who wasn't even attending the school where she taught at the time. There was *no* suggestion that these relationships were anything other than consensual.

Criminally, the National Union of Teachers has endorsed Ruth Kelly's new measures, saying they are "fully in line with the NUT's approach". The reformist left—the Socialist Workers

Party (SWP), Workers Power and the Socialist Party—have refused to utter a word against this reactionary moral crusade that made front-page news for days on end. In April 1998 the SWP denounced paedophilia as a "sick product of a sick society", while at other times doing some liberal handwringing over "innocent" people being caught in the web. But today the SWP's alliance with the mosques in Respect precludes even that. According to *Weekly Worker*, Salma Yaqoob, a prominent leader of Respect, actually welcomed the government's crackdown on "sex offenders" as a "positive move" on the BBC's *Question Time* (quoted in *Weekly Worker*, 26 January 2006). The bottom line for reformists (and bourgeois liberals alike) is that they look to the capitalist state—the butchers of Iraq and Afghanistan—as protectors of children.

Marxists oppose these puritanical witch hunts by the state, which are the latter-day version of Christian fundamentalist crusades against "sin", but are today dressed in "secular" and even "liberal" and "human rights" garb. A case in point is Labour's proposals to crack down on prostitution which is being marketed as "protecting women from exploitation". The purpose of these morality drives is to regiment the population and to bolster the repressive powers of the state. The state is not a neutral arbiter, but the instrument for the suppression of the exploited by the exploiters. As such it plays a key role in enforcing the oppression of women (and youth) alongside organised religion and the patriarchal family, which remains the central instrument for the subjugation of women under capitalism. The family is critical for the ruling class to pass on its property to "legitimate" heirs and to instil obedience to bourgeois codes of morality.

For women's liberation through socialist revolution!

In capitalist society, one of the main functions of the family is to impose on the working class the burden of rearing the next generation. In Britain today the shift from an industrial to a service economy has drawn unprecedented numbers of women out of the home and into the workforce, where they are often concentrated in the lowest-paid part-time jobs. The dramatic increase in the number of one-parent households has been met with reactionary crusades against "absent" fathers and "lack of role models". This reflects the fact that the nuclear family is expected to play a conservatising role in the upbringing of children. Today the working people, particularly women, face the choice of paying for expensive childcare or staying at home to look after the children and thus living in dire poverty. Either way, working-class parents and children face a climate of constant fear, that every minute of the day "the kids are in danger"—of rape, sexual assault, drug addiction and much more.

The supposed mortal threat to all children has been a central theme of repeated moral crusades of the past decades: the truly bizarre tales of "Satanic ritual abuse" in the 1980s and early 1990s that originated with evangelical Christians in the US and were swallowed by social

continued on page 11



Canada: IS upholds anti-woman religious courts

The following article is adapted from *Spartacist Canada* no 147 (Winter 2005/2006), newspaper of the Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste, Canadian section of the International Communist League.

What kind of “socialists” would actively back state-sanctioned Islamic *sharia* courts? That is exactly what the International Socialists (IS [affiliated with the British Socialist Workers Party]) are doing in taking up the cudgels for what they call, aping the language of the Christian right, “faith-based arbitration”. It is mind-boggling that self-styled leftists would champion a campaign by the most reactionary, anti-woman forces in the Muslim community to have their religious law backed by the authority of the capitalist state.

Sharia is the 1300-year-old body of Muslim canon law that regulates every aspect of life. In Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, it is synonymous with barbaric punishments such as stoning “adulterers” and homosexuals to death. In Muslim personal law, women are inherently unequal (as in all organised religion); indeed they are considered less than fully human. Women may be beaten by their husbands, denied divorce, or arbitrarily divorced by the husband simply repeating three times, “I divorce you.” In many countries, *sharia* codifies the Koranic strictures dictating the seclusion of women. The head-to-toe *chador* (veil), for example, is a walking prison, physically excluding women from society. It embodies the submission of women to men and their imposed inferior status. We solidarise with the countless women who have sought to escape this tyranny, whether in the Muslim world or the imperialist centres.

In late 2003, the Canadian Society of Muslims announced plans to establish *sharia* courts in Ontario that would function under the 1991 Arbitration Act introduced by the then NDP [social-democratic New Democratic Party] government. Like the Ontario Jewish rabbinical courts, the *Beit Din*, *sharia* courts would deal with family law — marriage, divorce, inheritance — where the subjugation of women is most brutally enforced. Decisions would be binding and upheld by the

Sharia “socialists”

International Socialists’ press (24 September 2005) champions reactionary *sharia* tribunals in Canada.



provincial courts unless coercion was shown. This plan sparked a huge outcry, including internationally, and after over a year of protest, on 11 September 2005 Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty announced, “There will be no religious arbitration in Ontario.” His government has now introduced a law to that effect.

The plan for *sharia* courts with official legal standing was an outrage that could only deepen the isolation and oppression of Muslim women. As revolutionaries, atheists and fighters for women’s liberation, we were unalterably opposed to them from the start. We wrote in *Spartacist Canada* (no 142, Fall 2004):

“We are against all intrusion of religion into an already deeply unjust legal system that exists to defend capitalist private property and is driven by Christian thirst for vengeance and punishment. Religion ought to be a private matter in relation to the state. People should be free to practice their religion without the state persecution and religious bigotry which has spawned centuries of repression and bloodshed. But these religious tribunals are not a matter of private religious practice. Their rulings will have the force of law, making them part of the legal machinery of the capitalist state which in turn is to be the enforcer of religious obscurantism.”

Furious they can no longer claim the state’s blessing for their rulings, various mullahs and rabbis howled in protest. Joining this reactionary outcry, the IS sneered against “abstract ‘secularism’”

and trumpeted their participation in a “spirited demonstration” in defence of the woman-hating *sharia* tribunals (*Socialist Worker* [Canada], 8 October 2005).

The IS’s pro-*sharia* friends include the arch-Zionists of B’nai Brith, who also denounced the government’s decision. They want to buttress support for the *Beit Din* and are happy to see Muslims, especially women, ghettoised and oppressed by “their” religious leaders. In Orthodox Judaism, where women’s oppression is profound, a divorce is only final when the husband has served the *get* (writ of divorce) and it is endorsed by a rabbinical court. Should no *get* be served, the woman cannot be divorced. She is left in a horrific state of limbo known as *agunah*, a Hebrew word meaning “chained woman”. As columnist Anna Morgan wrote, “When asked to comment on the fate of the *agunah*, one Orthodox woman told me, ‘Are you crazy? If I speak out, no one will allow their children to marry mine’” (*Toronto Star*, 9 October 2005). The anti-*sharia* campaign helped crack this code of silence, putting a spotlight on the suffering of women at the hands of the rabbinical courts. It is very good that religious tribunals will no longer have legal standing in family law.

Of course, McGuinty’s Liberals and their ilk are hardly champions of women’s liberation. In racist capitalist Canada, Muslim women already face multiple hurdles. Often denied access to jobs, services and language classes, many live in intense isolation, making it very difficult to break out of the web of religious oppression. Those who do so face the threat of brutal coercion or are ostracised, cut off from family, friends and community. The imams already dispense “justice” from the mosques, but if *sharia* had become part of the state’s legal machinery, the vicious, age-old, anti-woman practices which it codifies would have been legitimised and the hold of religion increased.

IS gets religion

The IS’s defence of *sharia* rests on a stunning apology for Islamic reaction. The 24 September 2005 *Socialist Worker* [Canada] featured an article (first posted on Marxmail.org) by Richard Fidler praising former NDP attorney general Marion Boyd’s government-commissioned report in favour of *sharia*. With contemptible

indifference to women’s oppression, Fidler positively quotes Boyd’s statement that “There is no evidence to suggest that women are being systematically discriminated against as a result of arbitration of family law issues.”

This prettification of Islam was embraced by *Socialist Worker* [Canada] editor Paul Kellogg. “All religions are contradictory”, Kellogg averred, “Why aren’t the opponents of the use of the arbitration act highlighting those aspects of Islamic law which say it is the man’s responsibility to share in the cleaning and cooking, that gives women, along with men, the right to divorce, that mandates child-support from the estranged husband?” (8 October 2005). This is a cruel mockery of the brutal reality of women’s oppression. For women from huge swathes of Asia, Africa and the Near East, it is not a matter of who does the cleaning, but of the right to be considered fully human, not a chattel of first father, then husband.

Contrary to Kellogg, the contradiction in religion lies in the fact that human beings created religions, only to have their creations rule over them like a Frankenstein monster. It is obscene to have to debate with ostensible Marxists whether clerical reaction should be supported. Marxists regard all modern religion as an instrument of bourgeois reaction that defends exploitation and befuddles the working people.

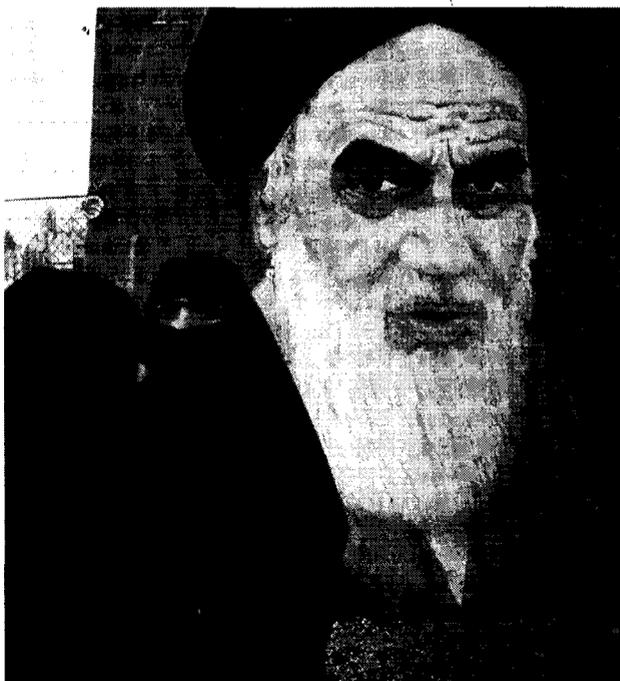
Not so the IS. Echoing the outraged mullahs and rabbis, Kellogg declares that “These third-party arbitrations have always existed, especially in religious communities, where it is often to the Priest, Minister, Iman [sic] or Rabbi that people turn when confronted with family or marital issues.” The IS *accepts* this domination, seeking to give it legal force.

Down with anti-Muslim racism!

The IS invokes the ruling-class “war on terror” to cover its embrace of *sharia*. But for the racist Canadian rulers there is no contradiction between attacking Muslims as terrorists and nurturing the most oppressive forces in the Muslim community. Both reinforce the grip of capitalism by scapegoating and regimenting immigrants.

This is the central purpose of official “multiculturalism”. Promoted heavily by the Liberal Party as an expression of tolerance for all cultures (which is why right-wingers hate it), multiculturalism is designed to encourage the “voluntary” cultural and racial segregation of the population, ghettoising immigrants while elevating petty-bourgeois “community leaders”. It is thus a conservatising force for policing minorities and maintaining social peace. But the Muslim community, like the rest of society, is class-divided. The struggles of immigrant and other minority workers for rights, jobs and unions necessarily require throwing off the debilitating grip of religious and other community leaders.

Socialist Worker [Canada] smears the opposition to *sharia* as “involving more than a hint of anti-immigrant and racist prejudice” and claims that leftist opponents of *sharia* are “lining up with reactionaries”. To be sure, some right-wing journalists and politicians seized on the *sharia* debate to inflame anti-Muslim racism. But Marxists’ opposition to *sharia* (and all religious law) is conditioned not



Abbas Gammal-Lalson

1979 seizure of power by Iranian mullahs was bloody disaster for women, workers and leftists.

by the character of others who may oppose it, but by what advances the class interests of the proletariat.

Moreover, the central organisers of the protests against official *sharia* courts in Ontario were not pro-imperialist reactionaries, but women leftists from the Worker-communist Party of Iran (WCPI)—refugees from the bloody mullah regime in Iran. The No Religious Arbitration Coalition, which includes the Ontario Federation of Labour and many women's organisations, explicitly condemns Islamophobia and opposes *all* legally binding religious arbitration, not only Muslim. We have serious differences with the WCPI, anti-clerical reformists who all too often present the institutions of Western capitalism as potential allies against Islamic reaction (see "Iran and Women's Liberation", *Spartacist Canada* no 141, Summer 2004). But to paint the campaign against *sharia* as a reactionary crusade that promotes anti-Muslim racism, as the IS does, is a slander in the service of religious reaction.

For separation of religion and state

In a 15 September 2005 Marxmail.org polemic on *sharia*, Fidler writes: "The traditional left speaks a language that is to a large degree alien to the cultural experience of these huddled masses. It is the language of the white European Enlightenment, redolent in abstract concepts such as 'separation of church and state'." This is a bald-faced repudiation of Marxism and its origins. The radical-democratic principles of the bourgeois Enlightenment were the ideological reflection of historic material advances over a backward, feudal society. Hardly an abstraction, the demand for separation of religion and state was vital to this social progress. Today it is an essential part of educating the proletariat as to its true class interests.

Hostile to religion, Marxism seeks to lay bare its deep social roots, which are today to be found, as Bolshevik leader VI Lenin wrote, in "the socially downtrodden condition of the working masses and their apparently complete helplessness in face of the blind forces of capitalism" ("The Attitude of the Workers' Party to Religion", 1909). In fact, the full separation of religion and state has nowhere been fully realised by the bourgeoisie for the simple reason that religion has great value for the ruling class in its struggle against the proletariat.

Religious wars, persecution and obscurantist oppression are endemic to *all* religions and all serve to buttress the patriarchal family, ruling class authority and the particular sexual and moral codes of their respective societies. The institution of the family, today fashioned to serve the needs of capitalist class rule, is the main source of women's oppression. It is the mechanism for transmitting property from one generation to the next and raising new generations of workers. Family law is tightly bound up with defence of private property and women's inequality is always reflected in the legal and social codes of society.

Anti-woman bigotry for the glory of God marks Christianity and Judaism as much as Islam. Just look at the Catholic Church's crusade against abortion rights, the attacks on evolution and science by the Protestant right, or the anti-Palestinian barbarism of the theocratic Zionist state of Israel. But while in general Christianity and Judaism had to conform with rising industrial capitalism and the emergence of bourgeois nation-states, Islam did not, largely because it remains rooted in those parts of the world where imperialist penetration has reinforced social backwardness as a prop to its domination.

Today the imperialists fulminate against



Trotskyist League speaker at September 2004 anti-*sharia* rally, Toronto. Right: Women confront Islamic fundamentalist bigot at Toronto protest, September 2005.



Muslim fundamentalism, but for decades they consciously fuelled the growth of Islamic reaction. In their drive to prevent social revolutions and destroy the Soviet Union—the state that emerged from the victorious October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia—the imperialists allied with indigenous forces of religious and social reaction against godless Communism.

We implacably oppose the imperialist impoverishment and exploitation of the masses of the neocolonial Third World, and defend immigrants from such countries against persecution in the imperialist centres. But we are not cultural relativists who prettify the horribly oppressive status quo in the Near East and elsewhere as quaint "traditions" of the oppressed. Does the IS, in the name of siding with the Third World oppressed, defend hideous "customs" such as female genital mutilation or *suttee*, whereby a Hindu widow self-immolates on her husband's funeral pyre? Modern bourgeois law is an advance over the tribal law of the desert, or the feudal system in which the European populace was once virtually enslaved to temporal lords and priests. Put another way, what regime best facilitates struggle by the working class and oppressed—one based on the European Enlightenment or one based on 7th century religious obscurantism?

IS: "God is Great" socialists

Where does the IS's grotesque embrace of *sharia* come from? Most immediately, it dovetails with their political conciliation of the Muslim clerics whom they have repeatedly promoted on protests against the Iraq war and occupation. But their portrayal of Muslim fundamentalism as "anti-imperialist" and even "revolutionary" is longstanding. It is a direct outgrowth of their anti-Communist hostility to the former Soviet Union and other societies where capitalism had been overthrown. The IS's British parent group was founded in 1950 by forces breaking from Trotskyism who refused to defend the North Korean and Chinese bureaucratically deformed workers states against a bloody assault by the US, Britain and Canada. This was a direct capitulation to the "democratic" pretensions of British imperialism (and its then Labour Party government).

In 1979, joining with the rulers in Washington and Ottawa, the IS openly took the side of a CIA-bankrolled Islamic insurgency in Afghanistan that fought to keep women as chattel slaves. They railed against the Soviet Red Army, which had intervened to support a besieged left-nationalist Afghan government that had introduced substantial reforms—like educating girls and reducing the bride price—to this terribly backward country. We Trotskyists declared "Hail Red Army!" and called to extend the gains of the October Revolution to the

Afghan peoples, especially women.

Criminally, instead of fighting to win, the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow withdrew the Red Army in 1989, paving the way for the victory of Washington's brutal religious fanatics. And the IS was ecstatic. Hailing "the importance of the defeat of the Russian army", they claimed this would "spur the struggles of the oppressed nationalities in Eastern Europe" (*Socialist Worker* [Canada], March 1989). By this they meant movements like Poland's clerical-reactionary *Solidarność*, another pro-imperialist outfit backed to the hilt by the CIA and Vatican. *Solidarność*' rise to power later in 1989 brought devastating capitalist counter-revolution to Poland, which meant anti-Semitism, mass unemployment and the brutal rollback of women's rights.

The current period of ascendant political Islam opened with the rise to power of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran in 1978-79. The IS, like many reformist leftists, criminally lauded the ayatollahs' "mass movement" which overthrew the blood-drenched US-backed Shah, headlining "The form—religion, The spirit—revolution" (*Workers Action*, February 1979). We declared: "Down with the shah! No support to the mullahs! For workers revolution in Iran!" We put particular emphasis on the struggle for women's emancipation, declaring "No to the veil!" We were not about to capitulate to Khomeini over the bodies of Iranian women! The IS's support for the "Islamic Revolution"—a bloody disaster for women, the working class and the left in Iran—was a monstrous betrayal.

But the horrors of the Iranian regime didn't faze this crew. In 1998 the Trotskyist League, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and others joined with the WCPI to drive out representatives of the Iranian regime who had been given a stall at the Toronto International Women's Day fair, from which they handed out propaganda supporting the stoning of Iranian women. Contemptibly, the IS opposed this action,

calling such protest "a concession to anti-Islamic scapegoating coming from the ruling class" (*Socialist Worker* [Canada], 25 March 1998). Then, as now, for the IS *any* left-wing protest against anti-woman Islamic reaction can only be racist and pro-imperialist.

Women's liberation through socialist revolution!

The Trotskyist League intervened actively in the protests against the proposed *sharia* courts. We addressed meetings and rallies, and sought to mobilise left, gay and lesbian groups. Throughout, we made clear that the fight against *sharia* is inseparable from opposition to Canada's brutally racist "justice" system and, especially, the government war on immigrants and the anti-Muslim racist backlash.

For us, the defence of immigrant rights, including the call for full citizenship rights for everyone in this country, has tremendous significance. A class-struggle fight to defend the rights of Muslims and all immigrants and minorities against the racist capitalist state is in the interest of all the working class. The eradication of racial oppression requires a revolutionary struggle, centred on the power of the proletariat, to uproot capitalism and liberate humanity from poverty and want.

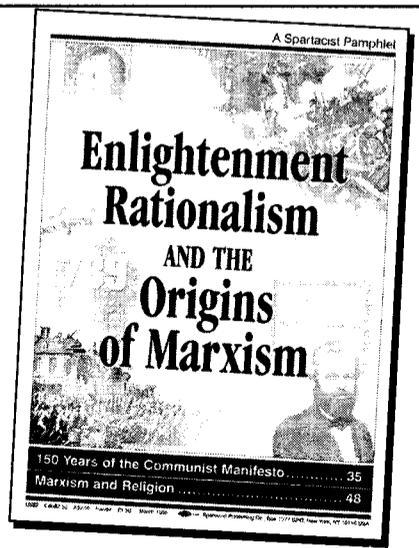
The liberation of women is inextricably linked to the workers' struggle to build an egalitarian communist society of material abundance. This alone will make it possible to replace the institution of the family, key source of women's oppression. We are dedicated to freeing workers from religion's yoke—not strengthening it, as the IS would do. As Marx said, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world.... It is the *opium* of the people." In the future socialist society, the Bible and the Koran, with their bloody misogynist proscriptions, will be nothing more than historical artifacts, their power to torment women obliterated by victorious workers revolution. ■

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

In the retrograde climate of post-Soviet reaction, the struggle to reassert the validity of the programme and purpose of revolutionary Marxism is crucial for our fight for new October Revolutions.

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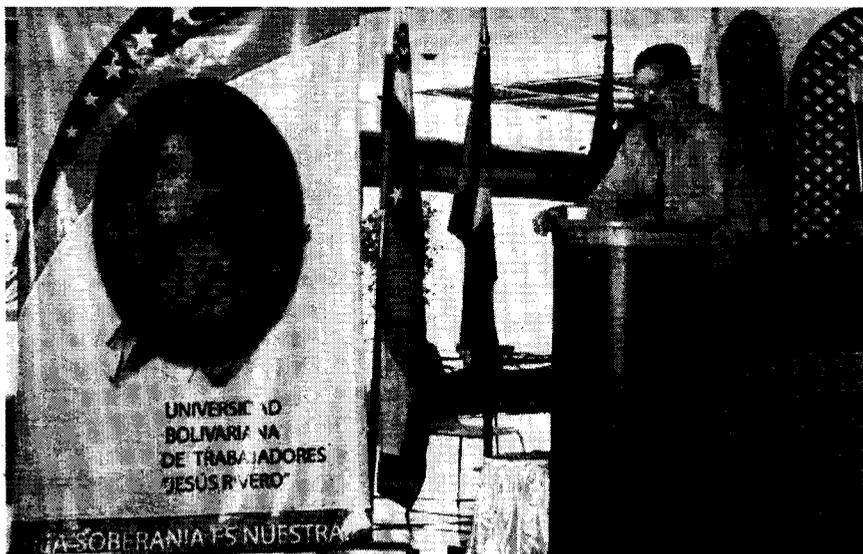


Venezuela...

(Continued from page 12)

problem” of the country’s faltering oil profits, the lifeblood of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie. He moved immediately to discipline the oil workers union and to otherwise increase the efficiency of the state-owned oil industry, while pressing the OPEC oil cartel to jack up prices. It was for such efforts, and to enforce political stability, that Chávez was initially *supported* by much of the ruling class. This included not least his former comrades in the military high command, who were instrumental in restoring him to power after the 2002 coup. As oil prices climbed, Chávez did siphon off some of the enormous profits to finance a series of social measures: tripling the budget for education, setting up free health clinics and free food distribution programmes for the poor, etc. But the aim of such measures is not to effect, but rather to *deflect*, a social revolution — by binding the dispossessed masses more firmly to the Venezuelan state.

However much the lily-white Venez-



April 2005: Fake-Trotskyist Alan Woods, chief left booster of bourgeois-nationalist “Bolivarian Revolution”, speaking at solidarity conference in Venezuela.

century socialism” is “not in contradiction with private companies, it is not in contradiction with private property”.

Indeed. And so long as capitalist private property prevails, the masses will remain subject to exploitation and

Under ordinary conditions, the Castroite rebels would have followed in the footsteps of countless similar movements in Latin America, wielding radical-democratic rhetoric to reassert bourgeois control. It was only as a result of exceptional circumstances — the absence of the working class as a contender for power in its own right, hostile imperialist encirclement and the flight of the national bourgeoisie, and a lifeline thrown by the Soviet Union — that Castro’s petty-bourgeois government was able to smash capitalist property relations.

The existence of the Soviet degenerated workers state was crucial in this, providing economic assistance and a military shield that helped stay the hand of the imperialist beast just 90 miles away. Unlike the Soviet Union, where the original revolutionary and internationalist programme of October was trampled underfoot by a conservative, nationalist bureaucracy that usurped political control in 1923-24, in Cuba the workers state was bureaucratically deformed from its inception.

In overthrowing capitalist rule, the Cuban Revolution stopped the plunder of the island by the imperialists and the local bourgeoisie. As with the Soviet degenerated workers state when it existed, we call for the unconditional military defence of Cuba and the other remaining deformed workers states — China, North Korea and Vietnam — against internal counterrevolution and imperialist attack. It is the Stalinist Castroite bureaucracy that undermines the defence of Cuba, not least by cosyng up to and providing a “revolutionary” cover for all kinds of anti-working-class capitalist regimes. As we state in the International Communist League “Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program” (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] no 54, Spring 1998):

“Under the most *favorable* historic circumstances conceivable, the petty-bourgeois peasantry was only capable of creating a bureaucratically deformed workers state, that is, a state of the same order as that issuing out of the political counter-revolution of Stalin in the Soviet Union, an anti-working-class regime which blocked the possibilities to extend social revolution into Latin America and North America, and suppressed Cuba’s further development in the direction of socialism. To place the working class in political power and open the road to socialist development requires a supplemental *political* revolution led by a Trotskyist party. With the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state and consequently no readily available lifeline against imperialist encirclement, the narrow historical opening in which petty-bourgeois forces were able to overturn local capitalist rule has been closed, underscoring the Trotskyist perspective of permanent revolution.”

Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, confirmed by the Russian Revolution, holds that in those countries where capitalism emerged belatedly, the tasks historically associated with the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries can only be carried out under the class rule of the proletariat. No matter how radical-sounding their political representatives, the bourgeoisies in the backward countries are too weak, too fearful of the rising proletariat and too dependent on the imperialist order to resolve the problems of political democracy, agrarian revolution and independent national development.

In its own way, it is rather appropriate that the capitalist demagogue Chávez idolises Simón Bolívar, a man described by Karl Marx in a February 1858 letter to Friedrich Engels as “the most dastardly, most miserable and meanest of blackguards”. As Marx makes clear in a contribution on Bolívar written for *The New American Cyclopaedia* of 1858, the founding father of Latin American nationalism embodied many of the attributes of the late-emerging semicolonial bourgeoisie of South America. He was venal, corrupt, cowardly and imperious. He repeatedly deserted his troops under fire, stabbed his comrades in the back and relied on the forces of British imperialism for his victories. Following his first triumph in 1813, he allowed himself to be publicly honoured, drawn in a carriage by 12 young ladies from the first families of Caracas, and proclaimed himself “dictator and liberator of the western provinces of Venezuela”.

The Bolivarian “Marxists” of the IMT turn permanent revolution on its head, arguing that if a bourgeois formation is *really* committed to fighting for democracy, it can somehow overcome its historic limitations and achieve not only democracy but even socialism. Thus IMT spokesman Jorge Martín writes, “The central idea of the theory of Permanent Revolution is that in colonial and ex-colonial countries the struggle for the bourgeois democratic tasks, if it is pursued to the end, must lead (in an uninterrupted or permanent manner) to the socialist revolution.” The programmatic essence of permanent revolution is the struggle for the *class independence of the proletariat* from *all* wings of the semicolonial bourgeoisie — no matter how “progressive” or “anti-imperialist” their proclamations. That struggle can be realised only through forging a revolutionary, internationalist workers party in opposition to all variants of bourgeois nationalism.

Reform versus revolution

The task of Marxists is to rip the “socialist” mask off the Chávez regime, to warn that he represents the class enemy. If the IMT’s opportunist competitors do not simply fawn over Chávez and his “Bolivarian Revolution”, they nevertheless join in depicting the left-talking *caudillo* as a potential, albeit partial and unreliable, ally of the working class. Thus Peter Taaffe’s British-based Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) lauds Chávez for launching a “debate on the development of socialism” that is “crucial for the further development of the Venezuelan revolution” but complains that, “unfortunately”, Chávez “has no perspective of spreading a socialist revolution to other [!] countries of Latin America” (“Venezuela: Socialism Back on the Agenda”, 6 October 2005).

Then there is the League for the Fifth International (L5I) centred on the British Workers Power group, which titles a chapter in its *Anti-Capitalism: A*

Joseph P Kennedy II carrying fuel oil hose to kick off programme providing cheap Venezuelan fuel to low-income Massachusetts residents, as described in newspaper ad.



uelan oligarchy may detest this upstart junior officer who boasts of his *zambo* (mixed African and indigenous) heritage, Chávez serves the class interests of the Caracas bourgeoisie — and, through that class, world imperialism. While speaking of “restlessness in the boardrooms” over the regime’s populist policies, a *New York Times* (3 November 2005) article headlined “Chávez Restyles Venezuela With ‘21st-Century Socialism’” reported soberly: “So far, no noticeable exodus of foreign companies operating in Venezuela has occurred. Banks and oil companies are making record profits thanks to oil prices that have left the country, the world’s fifth-largest exporter, awash in petrodollars.”

In his Porto Alegre speech, Chávez was quick to assure the Venezuelan bourgeoisie and its imperialist overlords that his is not “the kind of socialism that we saw in the Soviet Union” — ie, a planned, collectivised economy based on the overthrow of capitalist rule — which he denounced as “state capitalism” and a “perversion”. He made it very clear that his friendship with Cuba’s leader did not extend to its collectivised economy, saying, “Cuba has its own profile and Venezuela has its own.” He lauded and identified with Brazil’s Lula, the one-time populist who enforces imperialist-dictated austerity measures. In short, as Chávez declared on his *Alo Presidente* TV show on 22 May 2005, his vision of “21st-

oppression, and economic development will be subordinated to the dictates of the world capitalist market, particularly the imperialist oil monopolies. There can be no permanent amelioration of the plight of the urban and rural poor without the smashing of the capitalist state and the overthrow of the capitalist social order, leading through a series of proletarian revolutions internationally to a global classless order in which all forms of exploitation and oppression have been eliminated.

Trotsky and permanent revolution

This understanding animated the October Revolution of 1917. Led by the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, the workers of Russia — organised around their own class interests and through democratically elected workers councils (soviets) — swept away the capitalist state and replaced it with a workers state. The Bolshevik-led workers stood at the head of all the oppressed, not least the vast army of poor and landless peasants, and saw their revolution as the opening shot of a necessarily international struggle of labour against the rule of capital.

This is a far cry from what happened in the Cuban Revolution, where Castro’s July 26 Movement consisted of peasant guerrillas and declassed petty-bourgeois intellectuals who had become estranged from the bourgeoisie and were independent of the proletariat.

Rough Guide to the Anti-Capitalist Movement (2005) "Hugo Chávez: A New Leader for the Anticapitalist Movement?" Polemicising against admirers of the Mexican Zapatistas who believe that it is possible to effect social change without taking power, the LSI writes:

"Chávez at least shows that genuine reforms cannot come by pleading, which have brought the precious few results for the Mexican peasants, but rather come from seeking to take hold of power. Chávez's faults lie in his unwillingness to destroy all those elements of the Venezuelan state—the judiciary, and police above all—which hamper and frustrate progress."

Chávez will not destroy the agencies of repression that are at the core of the bourgeois state—the judiciary, the police, the prison system and, "above all", the army—because he *administers* the bourgeois state. Sweeping away the dictatorship of capital in Venezuela means sweeping away the bourgeois regime through *proletarian* revolution, not lecturing the capitalist strongman as though he were a wayward apprentice. Indeed, as his left camp-followers complain, Chávez has not even purged many individual recalcitrants from his military and police command, as happens after almost every Latin American coup.

Under its patina of pseudo-Leninist rhetoric, the LSI promotes the essence of social-democratic reformism—the notion that the bourgeois state need not be smashed on the anvil of proletarian revolution but can be reformed into serving as an instrument of social transformation. In Britain, Workers Power's home terrain, this has historically taken the form of slavish loyalty to the pro-capitalist, parliamentarist Labour Party (in which the IMT's British group remains deeply buried). In Venezuela, it means whitewashing the fact that populist strongman Chávez is the class enemy of the proletarian struggle for socialism.

Populism, neoliberalism — two sides of a coin

The popularity of Chávez and his "Bolivarian Revolution" among idealistic young leftists—and wizened opportunists—must be understood against the backdrop of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union. Among radical youth, nurtured by more than a decade of "death of communism" propaganda from the "left" and the right, the October Revolution is widely perceived to have been a "failed experiment". They reject as well the Marxist understanding that the working class is the unique agency for social revolution against the capitalist order. Moreover, capitalism has, by and large, been equated with that particular set of economic policies known as "neoliberalism"—widespread privatisation of public facilities, destruction of social welfare programmes, untrammelled imperialist aggrandisement.

The recent history of Venezuela amply demonstrates that neoliberalism and populism are nothing but two faces of the same coin, sometimes carried out by the same bourgeois regime in different periods. Carlos Andrés Pérez of Democratic Action (AD), for example, is remembered as the president who nationalised oil and mining in the mid-1970s and also as the president who introduced IMF shock treatment. AD spouted social-democratic rhetoric and controlled the corporatist CTV trade union federation. Buoyed by a surge in oil revenues in the 1970s, the bourgeoisie amassed enormous wealth. At the same time, the AD and the bourgeois, pro-Catholic COPEI party,



Rebel army led by Castro enters Havana, Cuba, on New Year's Day, 1959.

which was at different times the AD's rival and its partner, presided over the highest wages for workers anywhere in Latin America, as well as extensive price controls and subsidies for food, transportation, education, health care and other necessities.

But in the 1980s, the oil boom turned to bust and the huge imperialist debt bomb exploded, leading to a plunge in living standards for working people, massive cuts in social services and other stringent austerity measures. The portion of the population living below the poverty line nearly doubled, from 36 to 66 per cent, between 1984 and 1995. As industry and agriculture declined, large numbers of formerly unionised workers and the rural dispossessed were driven into the low-wage "informal economy", trying to eke out an existence as street vendors, servants, temporary workers, etc. The rate of trade union membership dropped from 26.4 per cent in 1988 to 13.5 per cent in 1995, leaving the CTV as the preserve of a relatively privileged layer of oil and other public-sector workers.

In 1989, Pérez introduced his *paquetazo*, the "big package" of austerity measures. This provoked mass protests, the *Caracazo*, which were brutally suppressed. In an essay in *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era* (ed Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger [2003]), Kenneth Roberts writes:

"The combination of social polarization and political detachment proved to be highly combustible after 1989, as Venezuelans turned on the political establishment and threw their support to a series of independent leaders and protest parties. By the end of the 1990s, widespread disillusionment produced a ground swell of support for the consummate political outsider: a former paratrooper commander who captured the popular imagination by leading a failed coup attempt against a discredited democratic regime."

These were classic conditions for the emergence of a populist strongman like Chávez.

Another example of a Latin American populist nationalist was Mexico's Lázaro Cárdenas, who nationalised foreign oil companies and made significant land distributions to the peasantry in the 1930s. He also broke strikes and subordinated the working class through the corporatist CTM labour federation. In a May 1939 article titled "Nationalized Industry and Workers' Management", Trotsky noted:

"In the industrially backward countries foreign capital plays a decisive role. Hence the relative weakness of the *national* bourgeoisie in relation to the *national* proletariat. This creates special conditions of state power. The government veers between foreign and domestic capital, between the weak national bourgeoisie and the relatively powerful proletariat. This gives the government a Bonapartist character of a distinctive char-

acter. It raises itself, so to speak, above classes. Actually, it can govern either by making itself the instrument of foreign capitalism and holding the proletariat in the chains of a police dictatorship, or by maneuvering with the proletariat and even going so far as to make concessions to it, thus gaining the possibility of a certain freedom toward the foreign capitalists."

Bonapartism in Venezuela

In Venezuela, AD founder Rómulo Betancourt, who talked of socialism, governed in league with the military in the 1940s and purged the unions of Communists, turning the CTV into a tame corporatist labour adjunct of AD. Reading from the same script, Chávez advanced social reforms aimed at consolidating a base of support among the plebeian poor. His aim was to use this base as a battering ram not only against his enemies in the oligarchy but particularly against the CTV labour federation, whose top leadership was not only

favour of the UN's International Labour Organization and the pro-imperialist Trades Union Congress tops in Britain. It has also been enthusiastically touted by the fake left internationally, including those groups that offer some tepid criticism of Chávez himself. In particular, such groups hail the occasional plant occupations and the UNT's call for "cogestión" (misrepresented as "workers control") as evidence that the "Bolivarian Revolution" is not simply a product of government policy but is driven by working-class struggle at the base of Venezuelan society.

Socialist Worker (5 August 2005), newspaper of the US International Socialist Organization (ISO), reported rhapsodically that UNT leaders had called for the "formation of a mass workers party that can fight for the socialist revolution in Venezuela". Striking a slightly more critical pose, the Internationalist Group (IG) writes in the *Internationalist* (September-October 2005): "The UNT has adopted socialist language, and even criticizes government plans for 'co-management,' calling for 'workers control.' However, none of the main sectors of the UNT has adopted a revolutionary program aiming at preparing the socialist revolution. Rather they seek to pressure the Chávez government to the left." Particularly coming from the IG, this is a rather mild way of describing a union federation that was established under the wing of the Chávez government.

You would not know it from reading its latest article, but the IG was singing a different tune in a November 2000 article titled "Against Chávez, the Stock Market and the IMF—Venezuela: Mobilize Workers Power to Defeat the Anti-Union Referendum!" That article, which appeared in Spanish on its web-



Hugo Chávez embracing Fidel Castro in Bolívar City, Venezuela, 2001.

part of AD but also tied to the CIA through the AFL-CIO labour bureaucracy in the US.

Under the battle cry of bringing "democracy" to the CTV, Chávez sought to bring the unions to heel. He assumed office in 1998 declaring that the CTV "must be demolished" and tried, unsuccessfully, to ram through a union-busting referendum two years later. For their part, the notoriously pro-imperialist CTV union tops joined with the oil bosses and other anti-Chávez sectors of the bourgeoisie and military in the botched 2002 coup and the lengthy strike/lockout in the oil industry that began later that year.

In April 2003, the Bolivarian Workers Force (FBT) in the CTV and other *chavista* union bureaucrats set up a new union federation under the umbrella of the government. The Unión Nacional de Trabajadores (UNT-National Union of Workers) garnered fully 76.5 per cent of labour agreements signed in 2003-04, according to Chávez's Ministry of Labour, while the CTV captured a bare 20 per cent. The UNT has now won the

site, depicted the Venezuelan populist as simply a stooge of the Caracas stock exchange and the imperialists and played down the dangers of US imperialist intervention, as well as the CTV's organic ties to the bourgeois AD and its historic connections to the CIA's "labour" fronts in Latin America.

What particularly caught our eye at the time was that the IG did *not* describe the CTV as corporatist, an omission all the more remarkable given its use of that label as a justification for *not* defending the Mexican CTM labour federation against government attack. We observed: "Given its history of lining up behind 'anti-imperialist' nationalists from Mexico to Puerto Rico and beyond, one could have expected the IG to cozy up to the nationalist-populist Chávez" ("IG on Venezuela: Opportunism Makes Strange Bedfellows," *Workers Vanguard* no 787, 20 September 2002). Having finally sniffed which way the wind is blowing, the IG is now racing to place itself on the left flank of the Bolivarian

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Venezuela...

(Continued from page 9)

Revolution fan club. The IG now consigns the CTV to the dustbin.

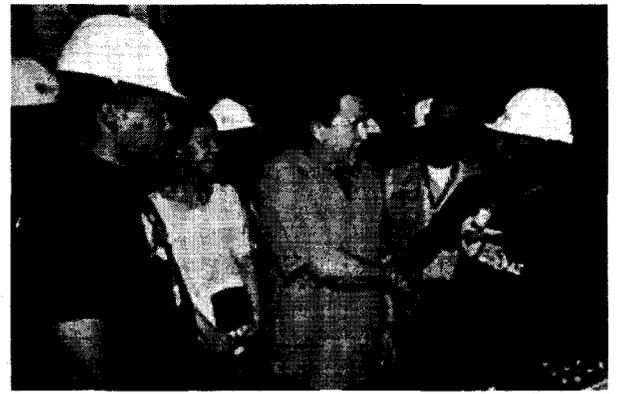
The UNT leaders certainly talk a more radical line than the CIA-connected CTV tops, but they are no less tied to the capitalist government. In September, the UNT and FBT organised a "political education workshop" in Caracas "with the collaboration of the Ministry of Labour", according to a report by Jorge Martin (www.handsoffvenezuela.org, 26 September 2005). A resolution passed there talked of "the historical struggle for the emancipation of the working class", "socialism as the hope of the oppressed classes of the world" and the need to expropriate the means of production. Prefacing all of this fiery rhetoric was an abject promise to "ratify the leading role of our president Hugo Chavez Frias in this democratic and participatory revolution". All talk of socialist revolution and a mass workers party is simply hot air in the absence of a struggle for *the complete and unconditional independence of the proletariat from the capitalist state and its political parties.*

The "cogestión" scam

In trumpeting the scam of "cogestión" (co-management), which is promoted by Chávez and the UNT as "workers control", the reformist left helps strengthen



Rochkind/Polaris



Prensa Presidencial

Left: State-owned Alcasa aluminium mill, where workers elect some managers and directors. Right: Chávez with workers at Invepal paper factory following January nationalisation of bankrupt company. "Co-management" schemes help prop up bourgeois order.

role in the struggle for socialism" (*Workers World*, 5 May 2005).

In Marxist terms, workers control is not an institution, nor is it a demand to be raised for implementation by the bourgeoisie. It is dual power at the point of production in a revolutionary crisis — ie, the workers have the power to veto management actions they oppose. It can only end in the workers seizing state power through a socialist revolution or in the capitalists reasserting their power through a counterrevolution. What is being passed off as "workers control" by the cynical pro-Chávez "left" is in fact a scheme to *institutionalise class collaboration* and more tightly bind the workers organisations to the capitalists and their state. There is

of "workers control" is the paper supplies factory Venepal (now Invepal). Formerly employing 1600 workers, by the time this bankrupt company was nationalised in January 2005, only 350 workers remained. The company, in dire straits since 1997, had simply not been able to restart production after supporting the 2002 lockout against Chávez. The workers finally turned to Chávez, who went on to nationalise the company. However, the company was to be directly run initially by the state, and only at a later stage would it be converted to a co-management structure between workers and the state under the direct supervision of Labour Minister María Cristina Iglesias. Six months after the IMT originally cried "socialism!" over the Venepal nationalisation, the Grantites were forced to acknowledge in an Internet article (18 July 2005) that "the leaders of the union have taken the step of disbanding the union and are hoping to buy off the state's stake in the company so that they can be the sole owners and keep any profits from production" (Jorge Martin, "Chavez Announces Expropriation of Closed Factories").

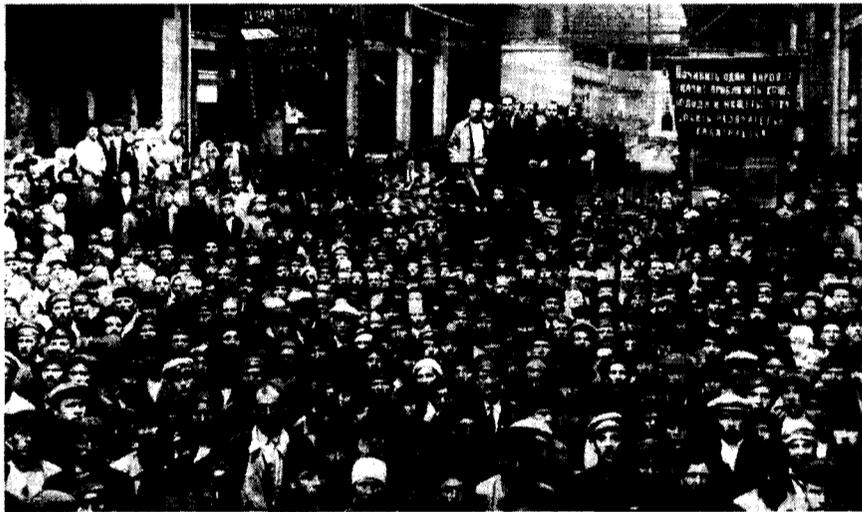
Another example of "co-management" is the ALCASA aluminium mill in Ciudad Guayana, whose board now includes two directors elected by the workers and four appointed by the state, according to a report in the *Militant* (15 August 2005), newspaper of the US Socialist Workers Party. One local leader of the Sintralcasa union said that he was not for wholesale nationalisation, explaining: "We depend a lot on the U.S. economy, so we're not for bringing down the empire." Another said, "Now that we have co-management, the union no longer speaks only of raising wages" and continued, "we have to increase production and lower costs".

The ISO's *Socialist Worker* assures its readers that "cogestion has nothing in common with socialdemocratic co-management". In fact, that is essentially what it is, a variant of what is known in Germany as *Mitbestimmung* (co-determination), implemented through plant councils (*Betriebsräte*) that by law, if not always in practice, include representatives of management. Perhaps even more pertinent to the situation in Venezuela is the example of "autogestion" (self-management) in post-colonial

Algeria in the early 1960s. The Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens (UGTA) organised independent workers' self-management committees in the factories and on the agricultural estates abandoned by the departing French colonialists. Fearful of a challenge to its rule, the very left-talking bourgeois-nationalist FLN (National Liberation Front) regime of Ahmed Ben Bella pushed through the institutionalisation of self-management and ever greater state regimentation of the UGTA. Once the power of the working class had been shackled, the "socialist" Ben Bella was ousted through a palace coup.

A central role in the betrayal of the Algerian workers was played by Michel Pablo, who served as an adviser to the capitalist FLN government. Pablo's pamphlet *World in Revolution* boasted that he "helped codify and institutionalize self-management in Algeria, and draft the Algerian Reform Law and economic and social policy in the country between 1962 and 1965" (see "They Never Learn", *Workers Vanguard* no 86, 21 November 1975). Some years earlier, as a central leader of the Trotskyist Fourth International (FI), Pablo authored the liquidationist programme that was responsible for the destruction of the FI. Today, Alan Woods' IMT, whose political lineage goes right back to Pablo, aspires to play Pablo's role in Venezuela.

History will reserve a harsh verdict for those "leftists" who promote one or another left-talking capitalist *caudillo*. The way forward for the downtrodden throughout the Americas does not lie through painting nationalist strongmen as revolutionaries and populist forays as revolutions. It lies instead in constructing national sections of a reformed Fourth International in the spirit of uncompromising revolutionary hostility to any and all kinds of capitalist rule. South of the Rio Bravo, such parties will have to be built in political struggle against widespread illusions in populism and nationalism. In the United States, the belly of the imperialist beast, a revolutionary workers party will be built in the struggle to break the proletariat from the Democratic and Republican parties of capital and to replace the pro-imperialist AFL-CIO tops with a class-struggle leadership. ■



Viktor Bulla

Working class in power: Putilov factory workers meet to elect representatives to Petrograd Soviet, 1920.

the stranglehold of the capitalist state over the Venezuelan labour movement. In the US, the Workers World Party exults that "Workers Are Taking Control in Venezuela": "Everywhere in Venezuela today workers are forging ahead with new formations of workers' organization. They are taking over factories here, experimenting with co-management there. Workers are challenging the old class relationships and coming to a collective realization of their historic

nothing new in this. In Trotsky's unfinished 1940 article "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay", he wrote:

"The management of railways, oil fields, etc., through labor organizations has nothing in common with workers control over industry, for in the essence of the matter the management is effected through the labor bureaucracy which is independent of the workers but, in return, completely dependent on the bourgeois state."

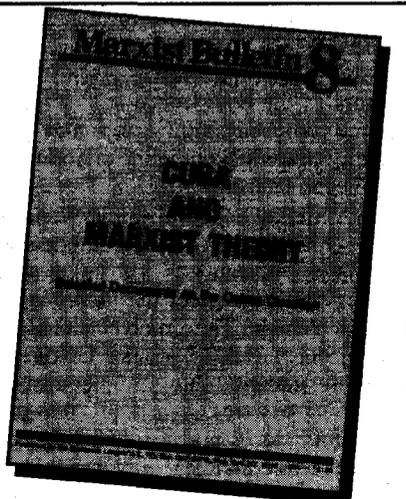
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Iran...

(Continued from page 2)

remaining deformed workers states—China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cuba—against military attack and capitalist counterrevolution. Thus we support China and North Korea's testing and possessing nuclear arms as a necessary deterrent against imperialist nuclear blackmail. China's modest nuclear arsenal is an important measure of such deterrence.

It is vital that China oppose the imperialist drive to disarm Iran. However, while verbally opposing UN sanctions against Iran, the Beijing Stalinist regime is collaborating with the imperialists. Along with Russia, China has just agreed to US and European demands that Iran be hauled before the UN Security Council. Similarly, China helped broker imperialist "negotiations" aimed at stopping nuclear weapons development by North Korea, which last year announced that it had developed nuclear weapons. Beijing's role was particularly criminal given that anything that undermines the defence of the North Korean deformed workers state will redound against the Chinese deformed workers state.

The Beijing Stalinists' policy of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism undermines China's own defence. We fight for workers political revolutions in the deformed workers states to oust the Stalinist bureaucracies and replace them with regimes based on democratically elected workers and peasants councils. Such revolutionary regimes must be guided by a programme of revolutionary internationalism, fighting to extend proletarian rule through international socialist revolution, particularly in the imperialist centres of the US, Japan and Western Europe.

Nuclear cowboys on the loose

Since 2003, Iran has been subject to inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which has found no evidence of a nuclear weapons programme. After Iran announced on 3 January that it would restart its enrichment facility at Natanz, the US and European imperialist powers have referred Iran to the UN Security Council to impose sanctions. Economic sanctions are an act of war. Both the 1991 and 2003 wars against Iraq were preceded and prepared by UN-imposed sanctions.

The Bush White House has embraced many of the positions of the Zionist "neoconservative" think-tank "Project for the New American Cent-

ury", which has long advocated "regime change" in Iran as well as Iraq. Israeli politicians have hinted that Israel, which bombed Iraq's Osirak nuclear plant in 1981, might bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. With the recent Hamas victory in the Palestinian legislative elections, the Zionist rulers will likely further whip up hysteria about "Islamic terrorism" to both ratchet up threats against Iran and step up repression of the Palestinian people. The US, which last year supplied Israel with 500 "bunker buster" bombs, might give Israel the go-ahead to attack Iran. But unlike Iraq in 1981, Iran today has at least nine different facilities, mainly underground, making such an operation far more difficult. Iran has warned that it would respond to an attack by hitting Israel and Western forces in the Persian Gulf, with one Iranian general pointing out, "The world knows Iran has a ballistic missile power with a range of 2,000 km" (*Observer*, 29 January).

There are a number of obstacles to an imperialist assault on Iran. Since Iran sits on 10 per cent of the world's oil reserves, an attack would propel oil prices even higher internationally, likely sparking an international economic crisis. Moreover, the US and British military are severely stretched in enforcing the savage occupation of Iraq. Under such circumstances, the US cannot occupy a country as large and populous as Iran without re-instituting a draft, which would not go down well with a US populace that increasingly opposes the Iraq occupation. Meanwhile, as an unintentional consequence of the US occupation, Shi'ite parties that have historically had close ties with the Shi'ite regime in Iran now hold power in Iraq. An attack on Iran would enrage Iraq's Shia majority and rally much of the Iranian population behind the fundamentalist regime in Tehran. Iranian government sources accuse the British state of launching undercover operations against the Tehran regime from its military base in Basra, claims which are plausible given British imperialism's bloody history of divide-and-rule in the region.

Stop the War Coalition's "axis of peace" goes ballistic

The utter political bankruptcy of the Stop the War Coalition's strategy of looking to US imperialism's European rivals is laid bare over Iran. At the height of the Iraq protests in 2003, speaker after speaker—including George Galloway—on StWC platforms identified with French and German imperialism's opposition to the US attack on Iraq. A resolution passed at the European Social Forum in Florence

in 2002, signed by the entire gamut of fake "socialists" within StWC, notably the Socialist Workers Party and Workers Power, blatantly appealed to the likes of Chirac, saying: "We call on all the European heads of state to publicly stand against this war, whether it has UN backing or not, and to demand that George Bush abandon his war plans" (*Liberazione*, 13 September 2002). This strategy is an obstacle to mobilising the working classes of each country for class struggle against their capitalist exploiters.

France and Germany support the US demand that the UN Security Council "handle" Iran, which could lead to sanctions. Bush has found an ally with the new, right-wing German chancellor, Angela Merkel, who declared at a 29 January press conference in Jerusalem that a nuclear-armed Iran "is not just a threat to Israel, but also to the democratic countries of this world" (*New York Times*, 30 January). Meanwhile, French president Jacques Chirac, who was portrayed as the leader of the "axis of peace" over Iraq, has launched a political storm in Europe by announcing his own doctrine of pre-emptive nuclear war. Threatening "the leaders of states who use terrorist means against us, as well as those who would consider using, in one way or another, weapons of mass destruction", he said that the "response" by nuclear-armed France "could be a conventional one. It could also be of a different kind."

But Germany, which trades heavily with Iran, and France, which has large investments there, have also sought to balance US belligerence by pushing "negotiations" and diplomatic pressure. Even the staunchly pro-American British Labour government has declared, in the words of Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, that "there isn't a military option". Hedging its bets, the Bush administration has announced its support for a recent Russian proposal that would allow Iran to operate civilian nuclear facilities as long as uranium enrichment takes place on Russian soil. While not rejecting the proposal, Iranian officials have complained that it is "not sufficient for Iran's nuclear energy needs".

Workers to power!

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who won office in June 2005, is a reactionary who spreads poisonous anti-Semitism. In November he called the slaughter of six million Jews in the Nazi Holocaust a "myth" and said that Israel should be "wiped out from the map of the world".

The 1979 Iranian "Islamic Revolution" that overthrew the CIA-backed Shah was supported by the bulk of the reformist left internationally in the

name of "anti-imperialism". This included the pro-Moscow Tudeh (Masses) party in Iran, which had a base in the country's strategic, heavily Arab oil workers. The International Communist League (then the international Spartacist tendency) uniquely warned from the outset of the 1978-79 upheaval that, absent a decisive break by the working class with the Islamic forces, the struggle would have a disastrous outcome. We said: "Down with the Shah! Don't bow to Khomeini! For workers revolution in Iran!" After taking power, the mullahs enslaved women in the veil, slaughtered thousands of leftists and trade unionists and intensified repression against Kurds and other minorities.

It is the task of the working class in Iran, leading all the oppressed behind it, to overthrow the Persian-chauvinist Islamic regime. Key to this perspective is the forging of a Marxist workers party. Such parties must be built throughout the Near East to unite the proletariat—Arab, Persian, Kurdish and Hebrew, Sunni and Shi'ite, Muslim and Christian—in struggle against imperialism and against the Zionists, mullahs, colonels, sheiks and all the other capitalist rulers. The fight for workers rule in the Near East crucially includes shattering the Zionist garrison state from within through Arab/Hebrew workers revolution. The Stalinised Communist Parties of the Near East, which made a mockery of this revolutionary perspective, share responsibility for the growth of Islamic fundamentalism among the working and oppressed masses. Marxist workers parties are essential to break the proletariat of the region from fundamentalism and all forms of nationalism in the struggle for a socialist federation of the Near East.

The conquest of power by the proletariat does not complete the socialist revolution, but only opens it by changing the direction of social development. Short of the international extension of the revolution, particularly to the advanced, industrialised imperialist centres, that social development will be arrested and ultimately reversed. Defence of those subjugated by the imperialists around the globe demands the pursuit of class struggle in the US and other imperialist centres, and ultimately requires a proletarian struggle for power. If the imperialists are not to plunge humanity into nuclear Armageddon, they must be overthrown through socialist revolutions internationally. This underscores the urgent need to reforge Trotsky's Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution.

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Witch hunt...

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work departments here; the 1990s scare-mongering over children's homes being "infiltrated" by "organised groups of paedophiles", which led to frame-ups and prosecutions of hundreds of care workers. These puritanical crusades are also the thin end of a wedge stigmatising all those whose sexual behaviour differs from the presumed "norm" of one man on top of one woman for life. Human sexuality is complex. No amount of state repression or surveillance will change the fact that children do, in fact, develop sexual attractions towards other children and adults, including their teachers.

We seek to win workers, youth and the oppressed to the perspective of

building a revolutionary workers party that will fight against all aspects of oppression and state terror, as part of the fight to mobilise the working class to overthrow the capitalist system and to establish societies where the workers own and control the means of production. The family cannot be abolished. Under socialism, it will be replaced by communal childcare and housework; birth control, abortions and quality health care will be free and available to all and youth will be able to live independently of their parents. Only then will relations between people in all spheres, including sex, be genuinely free and equal, devoid of any economic or social constraints, and in the words of Frederick Engels, there will be "no other motive left except mutual inclination". ■

Venezuela: populist nationalism versus proletarian revolution

The following article is adapted from *Workers Vanguard* no 860, 9 December 2005.

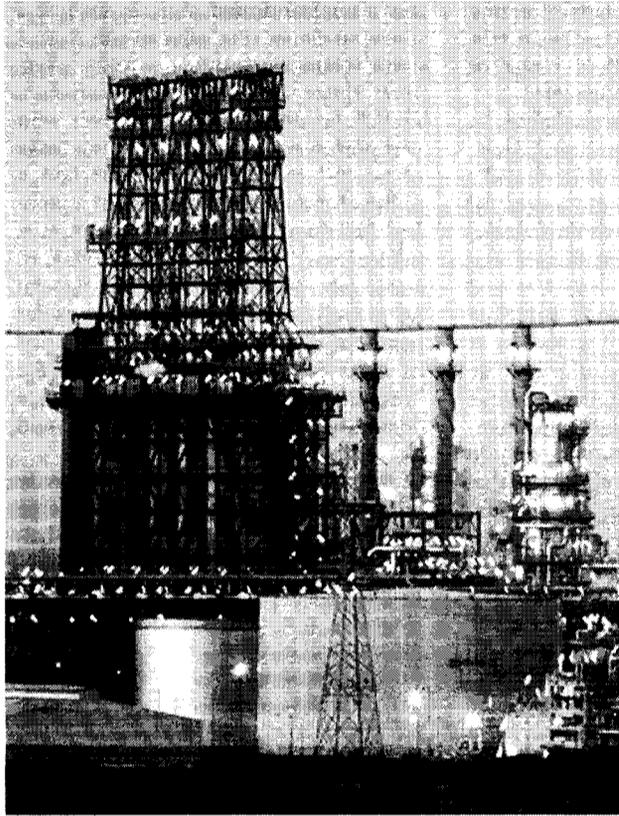
US imperialism continues to pose a clear and present danger to the government of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Since being elected president in 1998, Chávez has survived a short-lived coup (in 2002), a months-long effort by a section of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie to shut down oil production, and a well-financed recall referendum, all backed by Washington. And if it were not bogged down in Iraq, the Bush gang might well have organised further provocations.

The very things that have made Chávez a thorn in the side of the arrogant US rulers have made him an idol for masses of impoverished barrio residents in Venezuela and for large numbers of young leftists around the world. Chávez has called Bush an imbecile (*pendejo*) and ostentatiously embraces Washington's chief nemesis in the Western Hemisphere, Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Chávez has condemned the US occupation of Iraq and denounced the "neoliberal" economic policies promoted by the US in Latin America and elsewhere. He has launched social programmes benefiting the rural and urban poor in Venezuela and embarrassed the Bush administration by offering to provide relief for the dispossessed people of New Orleans. Most recently, through its CITGO affiliate, Venezuela has begun supplying the poor of the Bronx and parts of Massachusetts with cheap gas and oil for heat this winter.

In January 2005, when Chávez, speaking under the auspices of the imperialist-funded World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, proclaimed that capitalism must be "transcended" through socialism, his largely leftist audience burst into delighted soccer-style chants of "Olé, Olé, Olé, Chávez, Chávez". But Chávez is no socialist. A former army colonel now head of the capitalist state, he is an *enemy* of the struggle for socialism—ie, the fight for workers' revolution to expropriate the bourgeoisie. In fact, Chávez is very much in the mould of a string of bourgeois military officers who have come to power on the basis of nationalist populism, from Col Juan Perón in Argentina in the 1940s to Col Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt in the 1950s. In the 1950s and 1960s, as Soviet-backed nationalist movements swept the semi-colonial world, virtually every Third World capitalist demagogue claimed to be a "socialist" or "Marxist-Leninist" of some description. Nasser promulgated "Arab socialism", seized the Suez Canal from the French and British imperialists in 1956 and instituted a series of nationalisations. He nevertheless presided over the exploitation of the Egyptian toilers on behalf of imperialism—breaking strikes, subordinating the unions to the capitalist state, arresting and torturing communists.

In the face of another US-backed

White House vendetta against Chávez



Oil refinery in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela, world's fifth-largest oil producing country. Top right: Populist strongman Hugo Chávez speaks to massive demonstration in Caracas, 2004.

coup, we, as Marxist internationalist opponents of US imperialism, would again call on the working class to mobilise in military defence of the Chávez government (see "CIA Targets Chávez", *Workers Vanguard* no 787, 20 September 2002). At the same time, we politically oppose the bourgeois-nationalist Chávez regime. In regard to the 2004 recall referendum organised by the regime's right-wing opponents, we argued for abstention rather than a no vote, which would have been an expression of confidence in Chávez. As we wrote in "U.S. Imperialism's Referendum Ploy Fails—Populist Capitalist Ruler Chávez Prevails" (*Workers Vanguard* no 831, 3 September 2004): "The immediate perspective that is urgently posed is not only to oppose U.S. imperialist incursions into Venezuela and elsewhere, but to fight to shatter the support of the workers' movement to either Chávez or the opposition, and to forge a revolutionary internationalist workers party to lead the working class to power."

In contrast, the vast majority of self-described socialists and revolutionaries act as the "leftist" marketing department of Chávez's "Bolivarian Revolution". Foremost among these is Ted Grant's British-based International Marxist Tendency (IMT), now led by Alan Woods, author of a paean titled *The Venezuelan Revolution—A Marxist Perspective* (2005). While other opportunists offer the occasional criticism of Chávez, Woods and his outfit actually

boast of being "Trotskyist" advisers to the left-talking *caudillo*. In foisting Chávez off as a champion of the poor and oppressed, *the IMT et al help set workers up for slaughter*. Tying the working class and its organisations to any bourgeois ruler only serves to impede independent working-class struggle. In opposition to groups like the IMT, Marxists seek to prepare the Venezuelan working class to effectively combat the murderous forces of bourgeois reaction, whether led by Chávez or his bourgeois opponents.

Chávez and imperialism

Examining the arguments used by fake Marxists like the IMT to justify their support to the "Bolivarian Revolution" will help clarify the difference between populist nationalism and authentic proletarian Marxism. In a 1 March 2005 article on their website (www.marxist.com) titled "President Chavez Reaffirms Opposition to Capitalism", IMT spokesman Jorge Martin asserts that when he came to power in 1998, "Chavez did not start from a socialist standpoint. He was committed to solving the problems of inequality, poverty, and misery of millions of Venezuelans. But he initially thought that could be done within the limits of the capitalist system." Martin continues:

"Since President Chavez was seriously committed to solving these problems, the oligarchy, en masse, went over to the side of armed insurrection against the demo-



cratically elected government....

"It has been this rich experience of the revolutionary movement, faced with the constant provocations of the ruling class, that has pushed Chavez and many in the Bolivarian revolutionary movement to draw the conclusion that 'Within the framework of capitalism it is impossible to solve the challenges of fighting against poverty, misery, exploitation, inequality'....

"This dynamic of action and reaction of the Venezuelan revolution reminds us in a very powerful way of the first years of the Cuban revolution. In a process of attack and counter-attack, the leadership of the Cuban revolution, which did not start with the intention of overthrowing capitalism, was forced, in order to solve the most pressing needs of the masses, to overthrow capitalism."

Aside from the point that Chávez did not (and does not) "start from a socialist standpoint", every statement in this passage is false or misleading. We will address later in this article the notion that "the leadership of the Cuban revolution" should be a model for Latin American revolutionaries. For now it is enough to show how the IMT's comparison of Castro's Cuba with Chávez's Venezuela twists the facts into a pretzel. When Castro's rebel army marched into Havana on 1 January 1959, the bourgeois army and the rest of the capitalist state apparatus that had propped up the US-backed Batista dictatorship collapsed in disarray. By the time Castro declared Cuba "socialist" in 1961, the Cuban bourgeoisie and the US imperialists and their CIA and Mafia henchmen had all fled and every bit of capitalist property down to the last ice cream vendor had been expropriated. What was created in Cuba was a bureaucratically deformed workers state. In contrast, Chávez came to power and rules *at the head of* the capitalist state, the Venezuelan bourgeoisie is alive and kicking, and the imperialists continue to carry on a thriving business with Venezuela, White House threats and provocations notwithstanding.

Chávez's principal concern upon coming to power was to "solve the

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