

PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

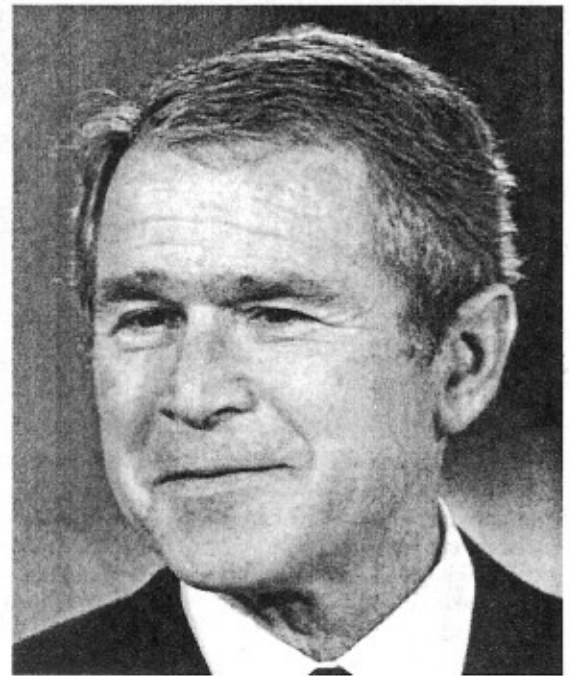


Re-Crete
the Fourth International

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Bush's Bloody Empire



by Sy Landy

George W. Bush's accession to the throne of the world's greatest imperialist power was widely greeted by the ruling-class media with ill-concealed smirks. Whether or not they had supported his election, they thought of him as a mental lightweight. But they figured the United States would survive his reign because he would be advised by the supposedly superior brains in his inner circle.

After the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, however, Bush ceased to be treated as "Dubya," the dim bulb. He was born anew as a majestic, deeply concerned, tough-

minded heavyweight. The less restrained tabloids crowned him the representative of God on Earth who now led the civilized world in its all-powerful, righteous war of retribution against fiery fiends from hell. Establishment journals gloated that the U.S. was the reincarnation of the old Roman Empire.

Indeed, for the moment, the reborn president is basking in a wave of popularity at home. U.S. workers, already suffering under a faltering economy, felt that they were slammed again by the unexpected terrorist attack. They rallied behind Bush and the Pentagon, swayed by the patriotic "we"-are-all-under-siege appeal.

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LRP/COFI Report

The months since September 11 have been a time of intense activity for the LRP. We immediately responded to the terrorist event with a leaflet, *Behind the Terror Attacks Stands Bloody U.S. Imperialism*. (This and other LRP leaflets are available on our website at www.lrp-cofi.org or from us upon request.)

We identified U.S. imperialism as the world's greatest terrorist power, responsible not only for the conditions of oppression that drive such attacks, but also originally responsible for funding, arming and training the reactionary forces of Osama Bin Laden, whom they said was behind the attacks. With the U.S. preparing to launch military attacks against states and forces in the Third World, we explained that we would stand for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. And we warned that the U.S. ruling class would try to take advantage of Sept. 11 to escalate its war on the working class at home. It would mount racist attacks on Middle East and Central Asian immigrants and it would attack democratic rights. It would launch an attack against all workers in the form of budget cuts, layoffs, giveback union contracts and the like. Other leaflets, including *Stop the Imperialist War on Afghanistan* and *U.S. Out of Afghanistan! Defeat Imperialism! Re-Create the Fourth International!* followed.

These statements of principled opposition to U.S. imperialism provided the political guidelines for our work in the months to come, and received a positive response in anti-war demonstrations in New York and Chicago. But the key to our work was taking our arguments to the rest of the working class. LRP supporters were the target of much hostility in union meetings and other forums when they spoke out against Bush's war drive. And we opposed socialists such as those in the Labor Against the War group who adapted to the patriotic mood by in effect calling for U.S. imperialism to "investigate, apprehend and try those responsible for the September 11 attack." (See our leaflet, *What's Wrong with the "New York City Labor Against the War" Statement?*)

But we knew that the ruling class's moves to attack workers at home would open new opportunities to win an audience for our internationalist communist views. We protested the government's racist offensive against immigrants, campaigned against budget cuts and giveback union contracts, and held meetings on campuses and elsewhere on the rise in police brutality against immigrants, Blacks and Latinos since Sept. 11.

With rising demand for our views, we issued a supplement to *Proletarian Revolution* No. 63 concentrating on these struggles, as well as a new pamphlet, *The Politics of War*, which collected past articles from our press on U.S. imperialism and the Middle East with more recent statements. (See the ad on page 22.)

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM PROTESTS

When capitalists and their ideologues came to New York City in January to toast themselves at the World Economic Forum, the LRP mobilized to join protests that aimed at being the latest in the series of "anti-globalization" protests that began in Seattle in 1999. Our leaflet for the event, *Anti-Capitalist Struggle Needs Revolutionary Strategy and Leadership*, concentrated on the crisis of leadership the struggle faced. Past protests had been headed by liberal reformers and union leaders who sought to use them to leverage their way onto the bargaining table with the imperialists. Since Sept. 11, most of these reformists rallied to the flag in one way or another and stayed away from the protests. We argued that this betrayal by the pro-capitalist leaders was further evidence for why revolutionary communist leadership is needed for the struggle against the capitalist attacks at home and abroad.

With the established reformist leaders running from organizing mass protests, the first to step into this vacuum was the Workers World Party front, ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism), which unilaterally declared its own protest against the events. Then a rival group, AWIP (Another World Is Possible), was formed and called its own competing protest. This shameless sectarianism by two groups with no fundamental differences divided and confused the forces who wanted to protest the WEF, and we campaigned loudly for united protests. This sectarianism continued to divide protests against the war on Afghanistan and in solidarity with Palestinians under attack. Our leaflet to the WEF protests proved very popular, with many readers requesting literature and more information about us.

STUDENT ANTI-WAR WORK

LRPers were active on working-class college campuses in distributing our revolutionary perspective. At City College in Harlem, LRPers joined with other left groups and students in the
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Argentina: Working Class vs. IMF



Barricade built during Buenos Aires protest, December 20, 2001. Powerful struggle of Argentine masses has already toppled two governments, but proletarian revolutionary party must be built to overthrow capitalism.

by Evelyn Kaye

We go to press over four months after the popular uprising which ousted the Radical Party government in Argentina. In this period the LRP issued a statement in which we criticized the main parties of the far left. Our main point was their failure to propose an explicitly working-class strategy to build the revolutionary party. We reprint this statement below, together with correspondence which followed.

As of now, the U.S., the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and their bourgeois lackeys on the home front continue their war against the masses. The Duhalde government is licking the boots of its imperialist master, which has been notably belligerent in its demands, even compared to the brutal treatment normally given to other oppressed nations. But there are some formidable obstacles to imperialism's designs.

STRUGGLE CONTINUES

On April 23, armed police encircled Congress in order to protect legislators from furious protestors opposed to the so-called "Bonex" Bill. Under this last-ditch effort to save the banking system from collapse, the accounts of small savers, already frozen for months, would have been converted into low-interest government bonds.

Popular pressure wrecked this plan and forced the resignation

of the Minister of the Economy. (Of course the "new" economy minister is coming up with a "new" plan not much different.) Four months ago, the previous economy minister, Domingo Cavallo, had been run out of office, signaling the downfall of the de la Rúa regime. Much of the ruling class has tried to circle its wagons around Duhalde in the name of stability. But there is also a current pressing for new elections.

THE CAPITALISTS' POLITICAL CRISIS

The Duhalde presidency had been characterized by indecision, with new announcements of measures and countermeasures virtually every day. Now the walls are closing in. For the President, between the demands of imperialism and the masses, there is very little room left for maneuver. All in all, the capitalists are aware that there is an even bigger obstacle in their path than the middle class protests which have tended to dominate the scene – especially in the city of Buenos Aires.

Whatever stop-gap measures and whatever bourgeois face is put in office, the fundamental question is whether or not more can be extracted from the working class. The bourgeoisie needs to pay its debt to the imperialists to live to see another day. It can't do this only by stealing the accounts of the small holders, laying off even more massive numbers of state workers and making the lower and



Protester bangs pot lids. Cacerolazos – “pots and pans” demonstrations – have been a feature of Argentina’s struggle.

middle classes poorer. It can’t just cut apart health care, education and every other human need. It must devastate the working class as a whole. If Duhalde can’t do the job, then sooner or later the ruling class will find some one and some way who will – if the working class doesn’t take power first.

WORKING CLASS HELD BACK

The fundamental problem for the capitalist rulers is that the working class, and the mass struggle as a whole, has not been defeated. In fact the proletarian struggle has still hardly begun to take definite shape, because of the absence of large parts of our class from the battlefield. But while Duhalde’s main power base has been the Peronist unions, that ground is shifting. (Given his need for labor support, it is no accident that Duhalde’s recent cabinet shift included the promotion of two long-time trade union leaders into its ranks.)

The employed workers are divided into three major union federations: the openly pro-imperialist CGT led by Daer, the so-called *CGT-rebelde* led by Moyano, and the CTA led by De Gennaro. Only the CTA, which organizes the bulk of state workers, has mounted sizeable struggles in this period, including an ongoing strike by teachers.

Hugo Moyano is head of the “rebel” CGT labor confederation but is nonetheless as treacherous as the traditional Peronist leadership. Now he has announced a limited strike for May 14. He has denounced the government for prostituting itself to the IMF without even charging for it. And he told the conservative paper *La Nación* that “Duhalde doesn’t have much time to live.”

Of course, Duhalde’s time would have been up four months ago if this class traitor, Moyano, hadn’t been busy backing the anti-worker regime, meeting with Duhalde literally every day during the recent week of bank holiday and mass unrest. Also, the CTA has announced a national active strike to take place toward the end of May. And even Daer has had to squawk more about the situation of low wages and unemployment facing his constituency.

Despite every intention of the craven union bureaucrats, a new chapter in the class struggle appears to be opening up. Any

opposition to Duhalde and the IMF raises the opportunities for revolutionaries to fight for mass working-class action.

FOR A GENERAL STRIKE TO REPUDIATE THE DEBT!

We have been arguing all along for a serious fight in the unions and consistent propaganda for a general strike. For revolutionary Marxists, the most ominous political feature in Argentina is that the employed industrial workforce has by and large not been mobilized. It is not unusual for employed workers, at the beginning of a traumatic crisis featuring mass unemployment, to be conservative and fearful.

But the major blame for inaction lies with the labor bureaucracy. A serious general strike today – against a regime that could be the last best hope for preserving Argentine capitalism – is a frightening specter to the bureaucracy. That is why the Peronist labor heads haven’t called anything at all since December 13; in contrast, they were pretty

busy pulling the workers in and out on strike in the years before.

But now, strikes will be harder to limit to one issue. Even an issue like the one the CGT is pushing now – for wage hikes to contend with inflation – can’t avoid raising the big question of the IMF. And with the vast majority of the population palpably opposed to all pro-IMF schemes, to not raise the issue of fighting the IMF is to risk not reflecting mass sentiment. So the bureaucrats are also under pressure at a time when their positions are more shaky than ever.

UNION LEADERS MUST BE CHALLENGED

The Peronist union leaders today don’t want to strike, and they certainly don’t want to strike against a Peronist regime. They desire a serious strike today less than when they did it in 1975, when they were forced into an action that the workers were already taking. For all these reasons – because the union bureaucrats are the masters of inaction, stalling maneuvers and all other conceivable forms of capitulations and acts against the working class – today the fight for the needed working class mobilization must be even more vigorous and sharp.

In the course of propagandizing (and agitating where possible) for a general strike, Marxists are not only interested in challenging the leadership of the bureaucracy. Even when we are addressing the bureaucrats, we are also in dialogue with our fellow workers, trying to get across the main idea that they indeed have this tremendous power. We explain all the advantages of a class-wide action that can unite the workers of the nation, and in fact even build support internationally.

It is not that workers are under illusions that their current leaders are these heroic figures. Far from it. In many cases these union leaders are rightfully despised by workers. But the workers by and large still accept them as all powerful.

This misconception reflects the fact that they have been miseducated, by these same bureaucratic criminals, into believing that there is no other class alternative. This contradictory consciousness can only be altered through mass struggle that shows what is possible and demonstrates that what revolutionaries say is true.

The workers have proved time and again their loyalty to every strike they are called out on. However they haven't yet really seen their own class power and the fact that they don't have to be stuck forever with these miserable misleaders. Only when workers do recognize their own class power will the current leaders become fully exposed and their days really be numbered. We raise the conception of a powerful general strike as a path that the workers can begin fighting for now, in order to build a new leadership out of the best militants through the course of struggle.

PIQUETEROS SOLD OUT

The Argentine working class contains an ever-growing army of the unemployed and a shrinking sector of employed workers. In the absence of decisive action from the organized working class, militant unemployed workers took leadership in the class struggles in recent years. Unemployed "piqueteros" (picketers) used organized roadblocks to foul up transport. Lately they have added frequent actions demanding food at supermarkets, participation in assemblies and mass marches.

The unemployed movement in Argentina has been exceptional in its duration, its militancy and its creativity. Its potential for even more was demonstrated at a national assembly in October 2001, where a motion was passed to build unity with the employed workers. But subsequently a split occurred in the *piqueteros'* movement because the CTA union bureaucrats who had become part of the leadership did not want to go any further or call another assembly.

The CTA leadership, which controls one wing of the *piqueteros*, along with the Maoist "opposition" closely aligned to it, have signed a deal with the government. Under this, heads of households are promised subsidies of only 150 pesos per month in exchange for "workfare" jobs, which will be used as another divisive tool against the workers. The *piqueteros'* actions have often already produced temporary jobs and food distributions on the spot, but these were seen as part of a continuing struggle. The real sellout here is the legitimization of a governmental plan of crumbs to serve as a barrier to any continued fight for real jobs. The CTA *piqueteros* bureaucracy will be integrated into the National Consultative Council that will administer the scheme; they will sit at the table with the already comfortable CGT labor bureaucrats, business and clergy representatives. They have made it into the big time.

POPULAR ASSEMBLIES

Another important feature of the Argentine struggle has been the popular assemblies. They consist mainly but not exclusively of middle-class neighbors, getting together on a regular basis to discuss and pass motions ranging from community or local-based problems to the big national issues of the debt and the banking disaster. For four months they have engaged in weekly *cacerolazos* (pot-banging demonstrations), both small and large assemblies, and mass marches.

The persistence of this self-activity of the middle class is notable, and so is its insistence on the leading battle cry: "*que se vayan todos*" – "out with them all." It means that all the politicians should get out, reflecting the fact that the middle class has become disenchanted

with the political parties and promises they once supported. *But the slogan also shows that the middle class has absolutely no answer to the political crisis in the country.* And how could they? Middle-class *cacerolazos* and perpetual self-activity is hardly what the bourgeoisie wants, but by its very nature the middle class does not represent a threat to state power.

Nevertheless, the middle class presents the regime with a real problem: simply put, modern bourgeois democracy depends on having some fat in the system to buy off middle layers as well as a labor aristocracy. But now the cash drawers are empty and other divisive ploys are not yet in place. Duhalde, at least as of yet, has not been able to divide the bulk of the middle class from its current sympathies with the workers and the poor, which has to be a critical part of any bourgeois strategy.

The popular assemblies have welcomed *piqueteros* as well as striking teachers and other public employees into their ranks. But they haven't lost their overwhelmingly middle class character. Above all, the constituents of the popular assemblies remain united in their disgust with the politicians over one overwhelming matter: everybody is owed money and is angry about it.

Within the constituency of the popular assemblies, there are activated white collar government employees (which include both working class and middle class layers). There are the small shop keepers and other small savers who have long accepted downward mobility but now can't get their hard-earned funds from the thieving bank system at all. Up the ladder, we find more well-off elements including yesterday's wheelers, dealers and managers of the finance markets and the multinationals, the middle-class layers born and bred during the numerous industrial privatizations and infiltrations of foreign capital in past decades. They want their wealth back.

It is very possible for the working class to win the bulk of the middle class to its side. The working class is the only class capable of resolving Argentina's crisis. But the current unity of the popular assemblies only conceals the lines of fracture that definitely do exist. The "middle class" is not and can never be a unified class. The current scene shows that Duhalde has not been able to make good use of them.



Unemployed workers blockade road in protest against mass unemployment, January 21. Piqueteros have been at forefront of struggle so far.

OUR DEBATE

Our document *Argentina: Crisis and Revolutionary Program* was written in response to the initial events of last December and January. We received a critical letter from a self-identified Trotskyist leader, Vicente Balvanera. We considered his letter valuable in that it defended and echoed the substantive political line of the major "Trotskyist" groups in Argentina. It allowed us to sharpen our polemics on the need for an authentic revolutionary party and the need for a mass strategy to oust the union bureaucracy. His letter and our two-part reply also appear below. (Our statements have been slightly trimmed here to save space; they appear in full on our web site and are also available by mail upon request.)

A main point of contention is our insistence that revolutionaries must do revolutionary work in the CGT trade unions – as opposed to the widespread notion that the iron control by the Peronist labor bureaucrats are a reason to evade that fight. Other arguments have been raised by political activists we have talked with. The main one is that the two CGT's now represent only a small section of the class. Since much of the economy has shifted to the service and finance sectors rather than classical industrial production, therefore new methods of struggle, like the *piqueteros*' roadblocks and factory takeovers by militant locals, have made obsolete the traditional Trotskyist strategy of fighting to oust the bureaucracy from within.

Only a dogmatic loon would deny the changes in the working class in Argentina and many other countries. But our argument is that much of the far left is in opportunistic denial about the power that these labor bureaucrats still hold over the class.

WORKING CLASS MUST LEAD

Our document argues that centrists are following the yellow brick road of trying to glue the workers to the middle class rather than offering communist working-class leadership. It is necessary instead to advise our fellow workers of the need to smash the capitalist state and make the revolution itself, to build a federation of workers' states in Latin America. If the Argentine working class

can find the leadership they need to wage a resolute struggle against imperialist capitalism, then they can count on winning support from a large portion of the middle class, as well as the working class and poor of the region.

Look at the political environment on the continent as a whole. Just recently the workers in Venezuela rapidly confronted an attempted coup backed by the U.S. There are growing struggles in Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil and other nations. As revolutionary-minded workers everywhere celebrated the passage of our international May Day holiday, stories abounded of the explosions against imperialism in the Middle East and the growing polarization in Western Europe as well.

Despite all its adversities and misleadership, the Argentine working class is a powderkeg. This is a working class with an abundantly militant history and a tremendous capacity for struggle right now. It will surely take its place in the vanguard of the world revolution. — May 2, 2002

***Stop the Cutbacks and Job Losses!
Unite the Employed and Unemployed Workers!***

***Real Jobs, Not Workfare Plans!
Jobs for All at a Living Wage!***

General Strike to Repudiate the Debt!

***Nationalize the Banks and Corporations
Under Workers Control!***

***Return the Cash of the Small Money Holders!
Cheap Credit to the Small Shop Owners!***

Arms to the Working Class of Argentina!

***Masses Need a New Leadership!
Fight to Build the Proletarian Revolutionary Party!***

***Socialist Revolution is the Only Solution!
For a Socialist Federation of Latin America!***

***Re-Create the Fourth International —
World Party of Socialist Revolution!***

Repudiate the Imperialist Debt!

The Argentine economy is being strangled by an international debt of over 150 billion dollars. Under the military reign of terror from 1976 to 1983, the debt exploded from \$8 billion to over \$45 billion. Much of it was due to the regime's arms purchases and its "neo-liberal" economic policy, easing foreign acquisitions and investment. Since then, under bourgeois-democratic governments supervised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other imperialist agencies, the debt has tripled. Most of that increase came from new loans contracted to repay the older debts.

Argentina has already paid over \$200 billion to the imperialist financiers; its current obligations are over \$25 billion annually. Without this burden, Argentina would not be facing the terrible economic crisis it is now in, with unemployment near 25 percent, nearly half the urban population living under the poverty line and the gross national product expected to shrink by 5 to 10 percent.

Until recently, Argentina was in the vanguard of neo-liberal "success" stories. During the 1990's, it privatized its public assets and opened its financial markets to imperialist investors more than any other country. The resulting flow of U.S. and European funds initially boosted the economy. But this was accomplished by sharply increasing imports of capital goods and de-industrial-

izing much of the economy. Argentina's capitalists have dumped the burden of their looting onto the working and middle classes. Workers in Argentina and the U.S. should stand up to the imperialists and fight for a repudiation of the imperialist debts.

Argentina's current government has declared its inability to pay the debt; this amounts to the largest debt default in history. But no bourgeois government will dare take the step of repudiating it. The Argentine rulers need to stay on good terms with the financiers. No bourgeois class can survive independent of world markets and world finance. Debt renunciation defies capitalist principles and their imperialist enforcers. It will take either a workers' revolution or the bourgeoisie's fear that a fighting working class is after its neck.

The working class can free itself from the national divisions that imperialism uses to keep workers apart. Hostility to the IMF in Argentina is seething and massive. A campaign for a general strike to repudiate the debt in Argentina would speak to the mass anti-IMF hostility. It would answer the burning needs of the workers and impoverished and point to the path of an international struggle of workers and oppressed peoples. It is the only way out of the debt morass.

Argentina – *Crisis and Revolutionary Program*

Statement of the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP-U.S.), February 26, 2002

1. The World Crisis and the Revolt in Argentina

The potentially most revolutionary class struggle in the world today is taking place in Argentina. In December, mass uprisings overthrew the De la Rúa government. Divisions within the Peronist party, under pressure from all sides, forced the ouster of the replacement government of Rodríguez Saá. Protests have continued under the new regime of Duhalde, as have a range of attacks on the masses.

The latest weapon for these attacks is the devaluation of the peso, which signifies a drastic drop in the wages and living standards of employed workers. Side by side with this, the brutal increase in unemployment continues. As well, the bourgeoisie and their banks continue to clutch onto the small holdings of frightened petty-bourgeois and middle-class people via a freeze on withdrawals (*el corralito*).

Behind these attacks is the mounting crisis of profitability, which is eating away at the heart of the world capitalist system and compelling the ruling-class exploiters to drain the workers and other toilers of the oppressed nations at a vicious pace. Nowhere has this been more true than in Argentina. Imperialist investment, from Europe as well as the United States, is the subjugating force within the economy. Of course, the domestic bourgeois parties carry out the subjugation. The Duhalde regime entered the scene with the largest international debt in history. In order to pay it, a necessary precondition for obtaining desperately needed new credit from the imperialist banks, the bourgeoisie now wants the masses who are already suffering so much to pay even more.

It was inevitable that the working class of Argentina would rise up. The current period of nationwide upheaval was sparked by a wave of highway shutdowns launched by the unemployed *piqueteros*, a new and critical feature of the class struggle. The eruption has also included eight tightly controlled “general strikes” in the past two years, as the union bureaucrats have sought to let the powerful organized working class let off steam. There have been factory occupations and other quite militant actions by workers as well. The storming and looting of supermarkets by unemployed and underemployed workers, as well as lumpen elements, further demonstrated that the most oppressed layers of society are rising up. And in the end, the middle classes, facing bankruptcy, joined in with *cacerolazos* (protests typified by the banging of pots and pans), emphasizing their tremendous frustration and anger. The climactic confrontations with the police on December 19 and 20 at the Plaza de Mayo included middle-class residents, students, leftists, and individual workers, with only a few small union contingents at best.

Certainly, none of these forces have been pacified by the current political setup. Duhalde is a Peronist who reflects the outlook of an important sector of the industrial bourgeoisie in the province of Buenos Aires. They needed to lower the price of their exports in order to compete on the world market. As well, he has



Protest in Buenos Aires, December 20, 2001, was the final straw that brought down the government.

strong ties to the Peronist trade union bureaucracy, which in turn is tied to these industries. He depends heavily on the union heads, with their proven ability to slow down, divide, derail and betray the working class. To ward off a total political collapse, he has also glued together a “national salvation” government composed of the main ruling-class parties.

But today there are a multitude of conflicts and contradictions within and between the bourgeois parties. As well there is the absolute inability to satisfy the needs of the working class and middle class layers. The regime has no lasting solution and is therefore essentially weak.

Today more than ever, “third world” governments act as local enforcers overseeing the increasing drain of surplus value created by “their” workers and flowing into the imperialist coffers. Witness the ruling parties’ slavish adherence to the “free-market” austerity

policies demanded by the IMF. Even with the threat of greater instability, even with the inevitable mass anger over increasingly desperate conditions, indigenous rulers today can only momentarily appear as nationalists and populists. They are on a short leash.

With the increasing immiseration of the masses of Argentina, Latin America and the world, Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution is confirmed in the negative. Nationalism, no matter how radical in form or action, can not achieve real national liberation from imperial power. All sectors of the indigenous bourgeoisie are at this point tied hand and foot to imperialism. The petty bourgeoisie and the modern middle-class layers inevitably follow pro-bourgeois politics unless the working class poses its own alternative. Only the socialist revolution, with the proletariat in the leadership of the ranks of the other oppressed classes, can carry through the struggle to end imperialist domination. Only the revolution can end scarcity and open the path to prosperity and equality for the exploited and the oppressed. For the achievement of socialism, the revolution must be internationalist. And therefore it can only be led by a proletarian vanguard party which is a section of a re-created proletarian Fourth International.

As Trotsky taught, essential to this whole perspective is the intervention of authentic working-class revolutionists in the immediate struggles of the masses, always fighting for the path which will link the current battles to the need for the party and international socialist revolution.

2. The Prime Task: Fighting for the Party of Socialist Revolution

Given the depth of the economic crisis, the ruling class's inability to find a stable government to resolve the political crisis, and the continuing mass mobilizations, the situation remains pre-revolutionary. The essential limitation on the situation is the crisis of leadership which Trotsky stressed over 60 years ago. Simply stated, the working class must have its own party, representing the highest degree of class consciousness. The proletarian party is the only vehicle by which the class can fully assert its independence as a class, assert its leadership over the struggle of the impoverished masses of other classes, and fit itself to take state power.

The material basis in Argentina is more than ripe for the building of such a party out of the struggles of today. The Argentine working class is powerful and organized, with a militant tradition – despite the tremendous setbacks it has suffered since the mid-70's. But for over half a century, it has been tied to Peronism, a populist bourgeois nationalist current. Under Peron's rule workers had initially won significant concessions (unionization, wage and social benefit increases) as the national economy developed. In recent decades, however, there has been a growing disenchantment with what Peronism has meant in practice – particularly since the regime of Menem.

History tells us that if the working class does not exert decisive revolutionary leadership, the petty bourgeoisie and

middle classes, now in turmoil, will eventually flock to the right. Either the working class poses a hard alternative in time or a crushing alternative will come from the right. The revolutionary proletarian party is needed in order for the workers to fully assert their class independence, their leadership over the struggles of the impoverished masses as a whole, and to fight for state power.

Such a party will only fulfill its function if it is based on a clear revolutionary program. The program must speak directly of the need for workers' socialist revolution and the smashing of the bourgeois state. The fight for the party takes place within the working class itself; it is not a private activity of intellectual saviors who keep from the workers what they say to themselves, behind closed doors, about the necessity of socialist revolution. This essential method conditions our approach to party building within the working-class vanguard layers as well as in the mass work that must occur today.

From what we can see, the major "Trotskyist" organizations have failed to plant the pole for the proletarian revolutionary party. For this alone they must be condemned. It is no accident that along with this they have also failed to advocate a mass action strategy that can actually lead the proletarian struggle forward.

3. An Authentic Trotskyist Strategy for Mass Action in Argentina

Writing from afar, we obviously do not have an intimate knowledge of the scene in Argentina. But as internationalists we still can and must advocate a clear overall revolutionary strategy where we see one dangerously lacking.

Right now the calls for the International and the party in Argentina are chiefly propaganda slogans; they are aimed at a layer of advanced workers. There is no expectation that the great masses of workers will quickly change their minds on the matter, although they will over time. A mass action strategy designed to address the needs

of the immediate situation, hallmarked by key slogans and demands, is also absolutely critical. The working class has to defend itself, starting from where it is now, saddled with the leaderships it has now, in order through the process of struggle, with the intervention of revolutionary workers, to transform itself into a class fit for revolution and with a revolutionary party fit to lead it. Our fight for a revolutionary party has nothing in common with those sectarians who want to preach from a mountain top. We not only openly say what is, i.e. that the working class needs its own party, but we fight to prove it in action, through the struggle itself.

From what we can see, the major "Trotskyist" organizations are failing on the level of their mass work as much as on the propaganda front for the revolutionary party. What we have today is a popular anti-government struggle that is undifferentiated by class and unclear about its methods and aims. The point for a vanguard should be to fight to raise consciousness of the iron-clad need for working-class independence and hegemony



Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky demanded a relentless fight for revolutionary party leadership of working class struggle.

is exactly aimed at pointing the way forward on these essential questions. We suggest action proposals, slogans and demands as revolutionary tools to point the way forward to our fellow workers in common struggle.

4. General Strike to Repudiate the Imperialist Debt

A call for a general strike must be at the heart of any working-class mass action strategy for Argentina. The general strike, or mass strike, is a classical weapon in the armory of Marxists. It is designed to put the working class into action as a class, show the class its own strength, exert leadership over other classes and make the workers conscious of the need to fight for state power.

The general strike we advocate is in total contrast to the recent so-called "general strikes" called by the labor bureaucracies. A serious general strike is not a quick protest display and it is not a strike of only some sectors, or a strike settled over narrow issues while the major attacks continue. Rather it is determined to last until it achieves significant goals which will qualitatively alter the balance of class forces; we mean a general strike of indefinite length.

A serious general strike stops the entire nation from functioning, paralyzes industry and transportation and chokes off profits – the be-all and end-all of capitalism. It creates through the prolonged struggle a dual power situation which poses the question of state power – which class, the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, shall rule. In contrast to the sporadic and restricted general strikes which have been called by the union bureaucrats, no left group has posed this kind of general strike. As well, while some left groups called for a general strike to bring down De la Rúa, and at times for other purposes, they have used it as a peripheral demand rather than as the central call for mass action. In this they have simply accepted the limits on the struggle imposed by the labor bureaucracy, as if nothing more were possible from the major unions.

The mass movement that brought down De la Rúa was mainly powered by the unemployed workers and the middle classes. Employed workers, including union workers, participated as individuals and in small groupings. But under the control of the bureaucrats, the trade unions themselves stayed on the sidelines. A number of barriers to united working class struggle must be transcended. 1) The working class must be united – employed and unemployed. In fact this unity can only be built in action against the bourgeoisie, which is what the general strike does. 2) The working class needs to show such strength that its authority to lead the struggle is established and it can swing much of the ranks of the middle class behind it in support. Without a powerful class action like a general strike, the tendency for the middle class to dominate becomes inevitable.

Every worker in Argentina knows that the central immediate problem is the debt owed to imperialism. That is the first and foremost reason that they are being squeezed right now, to pay back the debt. Therefore, the foremost demand of the general strike must be to "Repudiate the Imperialist Debt!" Such a demand is obviously necessary and clearly in the interest of all workers, employed and unemployed. As well, it speaks to the beleaguered petty-bourgeois and middle-class elements. At the same time, repudiation is in contrast to a moratorium or a default, both of which are just delays of payment. When the imperialist creditors accept only a delay, they still retain priority rights over others in obtaining state payments. And in today's crisis, the U.S. Treasury Department has in fact advocated the present default as a way of



Argentine President Eduardo Duhalde and World Bank President James Wolfensohn agree to make masses pay for foreign debt. Revolutionaries say: General Strike to Repudiate the Imperialist Debt!

getting an edge on its European rivals, who are at the moment more heavily invested in Argentina. Repudiation is a direct attack on property rights and the world banking system.

After all, the enormous debt has been incurred by the bourgeois governments' accepting the imperialists' right to siphon profits out of the country. It is not an obligation that the working class accepts. Default, renegotiation and devaluation of the peso are weapons of the bourgeoisie designed to further reduce working-class living standards as a way of alleviating the capitalists' crisis.

As a campaign to end the debt becomes more serious, it must also take a hard look at the interrelationship between imperialist debt and "local" debt, championing the needs of workers as well as the middle class and petty bourgeoisie in reference to killer interest payments from the banks. Local or imperialist in name, there is one system which is choking the ability of the masses to thrive.

The ability of the betraying bureaucrats to keep the unions out of the struggle to depose De la Rúa, and to try to derail the unemployed workers as well, is ample testimony to the need to concentrate fire on these labor lieutenants of capitalism. The left has failed to challenge the bureaucrats to call an indefinite strike over the debt and other attacks. It does not campaign for such a fight against the union tops within the unions.

This form of demand on the bureaucrats was always a critical part of Trotsky's action proposals where the unions were under non-communist control. Either they will be forced to actually carry it out or they will stand exposed before the ranks if they refuse. If the labor bureaucrats do accede to mass pressure and call such a strike, revolutionary workers must continue to warn that the union leaders will inevitably seek to betray the strike. They must be open about the fact that only a revolutionary leadership will go all the way in the fight for proletarian interests, and therefore it is urgent to build this party leadership.

The only way to overcome the union bureaucracy is to make the fight within the unions for action and for leadership. The bureaucracy can't be side-stepped. Tied to the call for a general strike is the need to call for workers' strike committees to conduct the strike. Such committees will develop as the arena for a struggle for an alternative leadership to displace the bureaucrats as workers see their own power. As well, we point out that they can be the embryo for workers' soviets or councils, institutions that are



Argentines protest banks. Revolutionaries can prove need for revolution through fight for transitional demands like "Nationalize the Banks and Corporations Under Workers' Control!"

unambiguously proletarian.

The general strike demand should also be placed on other existing formations and organizations of the masses; besides the unions, this would mean chiefly the organizations and groupings of the unemployed. Action committees or strike support committees can be formed among the unemployed to continue strategic shutdowns and other massive protest acts, to be coordinated with the strike. Joint rank and file committees of employed and unemployed workers are already a necessity of the struggle and will be vital if the general strike is to succeed.

As well, action committees should be formed in the neighborhoods and non-urban areas, to coordinate the delivery of food and essentials to the populace – as well as to build protests and actions. All evidence points to the fact that the middle class is generally dominating the existing popular assemblies in the neighborhoods and other locales, even though workers are also often present. Middle-class layers, especially the lower and middle layers, are needed and welcome to the struggle. But they can't be the leading force if the struggle is to take a serious anti-capitalist direction.

Revolutionaries are not able to give ultimatums to our fellow workers; we only try to convince others as to what our common aim should be. Nor is the general strike we advocate counterposed to the existing struggles of workers. Rather factory occupations and other ongoing militant actions by workers whose jobs or wages are threatened must be defended, while we fight to extend the struggle into a general strike. And limited "general strikes" called by the bureaucrats are also a situation wherein revolutionaries agitate to turn it into an indeterminate general strike, a general strike to repudiate the imperialist debt.

By itself the general strike doesn't answer the question of state power; the proletariat can only come to power via the seizure of state power led by the revolutionary party. However, by showing the mass of the mobilized, fighting workers how powerful they are, and by raising the question of which class should rule, it can help transform the idea of building the revolutionary party into the realm of practical mass action.

As well, a general strike to repudiate the debt raises another key necessity of revolutionary strategy, the need for international proletarian unity. The Argentine unions must be pressured by their members to call on, and campaign for, union federations

throughout the world to strike for cancellation of the debts of their countries to the imperialist banks and states. This would help answer the fears of Argentine workers that a unilateral cancellation by Argentina would devastate their job situation. If other oppressed and exploited countries were forced by mass struggles to cancel their debts, that would be a massive body-blow to imperialism. Revolution would be on the agenda around the world.

The sight of a powerful working class like that of Argentina leading the way toward refusing to pay off the imperialists could spread the fight like wildfire. For starters, the Brazilian CUT could be forced to follow suit, and the rest of Latin America could not remain far behind.

5. The Method of the Transitional Program

Revolutionary and transitional slogans are not a laundry list of all good things. Repudiation of the imperialist debt is objectively key for a country like Argentina; no start on solving other critical problems faced by the masses can be made unless this immediate chokehold on the economy is ended. But other demands are inescapably linked to this call. High among these is the demand to "Nationalize the Banks without Compensation." This is another form of repudiation of the imperialist death-grip on the national economy – and a necessary step toward taking hold of the financial resources needed to prioritize the needs of society and run a productive economy. The banks must be nationalized without compensating the exploiters who are now using them as weapons to suck the blood of the masses who are the only productive force.

The large number of privatizations, wherein vital industries have been sold off to high-bidding foreign imperialist interests – who have turned around and laid off masses of workers – must also be addressed. The demand here is "Re-nationalization of Privatized Industries without Compensation." Other failing industries which are shutting their doors and throwing workers onto the streets, are also vital to society and must be nationalized as well: "Nationalize the Failing Industries."

The scourge of mass unemployment is devastating the working class. The wages and conditions for still employed workers are plummeting too. Nationalization and re-nationalization of major industries is of course a key way to protect jobs, save industries and sectors – as well as to further repel the imperialist penetration. Also integral to resolving the mass unemployment is the demand for "Jobs for All at a Living Wage." Alongside this, we put forward the demand for an "Escalating Scale of Wages and a Sliding Scale of Hours," to show how all the available jobs can be shared among all the available workers. These demands join employed and unemployed workers in a common struggle, since it is clear that such a re-organization is the only way to satisfy the needs of the whole class.

The vitality of these and other key slogans can only be realized in struggle, with the intervention of genuine revolutionaries in dialogue with the masses. Trotsky's aim was to raise transitional slogans that linked the most pressing needs of the working class today to the overall necessity for socialist revolution and a workers' state. The Transitional Program aimed to put the theory of permanent revolution into practice, rejecting the notion of a separate fight for bourgeois democracy now to be followed by a fight for proletarian revolution only at another stage in the future.

Instead, the Transitional Program provides tools by which revolutionaries can win their fellow workers to a common fight today – in order to use the struggle itself to convince those who do not yet believe that capitalist rule has to be overthrown. For example, on the

question of debt repudiation, we take into consideration that the majority of workers do not yet realize that the imperialist debt burden is not a result of bad capitalists pursuing bad policies. Revolutionaries argue that it is an inescapable function of the system itself. We openly say that debt repudiation, like the other transitional demands we raise, is an impossible demand for any section of the bourgeoisie to fully accept. But since we understand that many workers are not yet convinced of this revolutionary view, we propose a joint struggle around these demands. We say that a workers' revolution will be proven necessary to win these demands, but we know that other workers do not agree about that yet. The course of the struggle itself will demonstrate who is right. Our approach to transitional demands contrasts with most of the pseudo-Trotskyist left, who use the Transitional Program as an excuse for not saying, even in their material addressed to advanced workers, that it is necessary to smash the capitalist state and replace it with a workers' state. (For more on our understanding of the Transitional Program, see "Myth and Reality of the Transitional Program" in *Socialist Voice* No. 9.)

6. Arms to the Working Class

The left in Argentina is failing to arm our class politically. It doesn't raise the party as central nor do they raise a challenge to the labor bureaucracy for the mass action of a general strike. On top of this, we are stunned by the virtually suicidal absence of slogans for armed working-class defense. It is already crucial in Argentina today to raise the call for "Arms to the Working Class!" This is not only a lesson to be learned from history. *Piquetero* demonstrations, factory occupations and the struggles to obtain food from the supermarkets have already been met with state and thug violence. More than 30 people were killed by police and the army in the December uprisings.

In a number of situations the *piqueteros* and others have made spontaneous attempts at self-defense. However, in any situation where there is a potential attack or confrontation with the armed forces of the state, the masses need the best trained fighters and an organized plan of action. The demand for the trade unions to put all their resources into forming and training workers' defense guards is an inescapable necessity. We call for workers' defense guards to be formed in the workplaces and factories, industry by industry. This provides the natural basis for serious organization. There must be coordination with defense guards to be erected by the *piqueteros* as well as with neighborhood and other efforts.

The defense units today will defend the working class against the police, who are the class enemy but who can be neutralized by the armed workers. As well, these defense units could be the embryo for the future workers' militia – the only way to avoid another military bloodletting regime. The military's current restraint is a function of the mass hostility to the army because of its murderous history in power. Nevertheless, a military coup is very likely in the future if no revolutionary alternative is built. Short of that, increased armed repression under Duhalde (or successor civilian regimes) is a certainty.

The military threat is already lurking in the background. It can only be ended if the masses are armed and organized into workers' militias. A mobilized defense against the forces of repression, which are aided and abetted by imperialism, cannot be created without serious planning and training. That is why we have to start today

with the basic agitational demand for armed workers' defense guards, along with the explanation of the necessity of the workers' militia.

The military question can not be separated from other questions of political strategy. Arming the working class in Argentina is key. An international campaign to defend the Argentine workers against repression will be another vital part of the effort to hold back the internal and external forces of repression.

7. Reformist and Cross-Class Demands of the Left

For most of the larger as well as many smaller left groups, the key slogan that frames all their programmatic demands has been the call for a constituent assembly. What does that mean in reality? A constituent assembly is a multi-class body elected according to the most democratic possible bourgeois rules to decide a country's form of government.

The slogan for a constituent assembly is appropriate in a situation of governmental crisis where the masses are focussed on democratic demands. That is not the case in Argentina. It has been very useful where the rights of national or racial minorities are forefront issues for the revolutionary struggle. But such democratic issues are not central in Argentina now. In Russia in 1917, before the Bolshevik Revolution, the demand spoke to the peasantry in a vital way. Today in Argentina it only serves to build up illusions among the masses of workers and even the middle class – precisely at the time that they are fed up with bourgeois governments and elections.

Indeed, the call for a constituent assembly implies a passive electoral (if not immediately parliamentary) road forward, not one of mass action. The left clings to its electoralist leanings by doggedly advancing this slogan as central, despite the fact that it doesn't fit the situation. Revolutionaries must clearly explain to the workers that the road forward must be the road of mass struggle, not electoralism. Through its actions, the working class has been ahead of the left on this in any case.

To crown the struggle with the mass slogan for the constituent assembly rather than the general strike can only signify a stagist conception. The elitist left has decided to keep the goal of socialist revolution to itself; all that should be discussed now and posed for



Soldiers patrol streets of Buenos Aires following 1976 military coup. Workers paid dearly for lesson in need for mass armed self-defense as dictatorship smashed their movement, killing tens of thousands. Fake socialists ignore this lesson today.

the struggle is a change to a more democratic but still bourgeois form of government. Not even in their material addressed to advanced workers do they raise the need for a workers' state instead of just a change in government. The vanguard workers are to gather that the fight for state power is to be postponed until another whole stage of history.

The constituent assembly call also runs contrary to the vital need to establish the independence and leadership of the working class. In the same spirit, the Argentine left has chronically called for "people's assemblies," which exist today mainly as middle-class formations with some workers in them. And left groups have frequently raised the call for a "Workers' and Peoples' Government" – another slogan that blurs the class line. These slogans, together with the framing use of the constituent assembly demand, show that the "Trotskyist" left in Argentina is burying authentic working-class Trotskyism in the mud.

A key document by PO leader Jorge Altamira, entitled "A Government Without Solutions Usurps the Sovereignty of the People" (Dec. 30, 2001) concludes:

We call on all leftist organizations to set a strategy that can lead the revolution underway to victory. Today's slogan is: Down with the political continuity of bankers and bankrupt capitalists. Popular assemblies. Out with the agents of the hated regime. For a sovereign Constituent Assembly in the nation, provinces and municipalities.

This is a left populist program. All leftist organizations (which includes those that are openly class collaborationist) should set a common strategy that gets rid of the bad capitalists and puts in instead a sovereign constituent assembly.

A month later, the PO came out with a statement "Bush or the Popular Assemblies" (Jan. 31), which ended:

There is a complete crisis of the capitalist system and its political regime. In this framework, the Duhaldes can only lead us to an ever-greater misery. The slogan of the coming struggle is: "Out with them all" and "Not a single one should be left." We must multiply the Popular Assemblies and fuse them with the *piqueteros'* struggle. We must strengthen the authority of the Popular Assemblies and the *Piqueteros'* Assemblies in order to turn them into organs of power of the exploited people. A Popular Constituent Assembly, called by the mobilized people, should take into its hands the social and political reorganization of the country on new bases.

Here we see that the PO has moved to the left. A bit of class consciousness has taken hold; now the *piqueteros*, the unemployed segment of the working class, is to be "fused" with the middle-class-dominated Popular Assemblies. This time the Constituent Assembly should be "popular" (and apparently no longer sovereign). And through a magical method of revolutionary exhortation (multiply the Popular Assemblies, strengthen the authority of the Popular Assemblies), these assemblies are to be transformed into "organs of power." How these bodies become fit to take power without the organized working class centrally involved is left a mystery. The fantasy continues: all "the mobilized people" should somehow handle the "social and political reorganization of the country on new bases." But how to get this reorganization without a social, i.e. socialist, revolution is another mystery.

The PTS stands to the left of the PO. It wrote, in a flyer distributed on 12/31/01 and available on their website:

The revolutionaries of the PTS struggle for a workers' and peoples' government. The majority of the population doesn't see it this way yet, but millions are demanding "All of them must go.

We don't want any of them!," the slogan shouted in Plaza de Mayo. To them and to all workers, combatants and human rights organizations, to political parties that call themselves democratic, especially those on the left, we propose to increase the mobilizations aimed at stopping any antidemocratic or anti-popular pact or solution to the crisis. The most democratic solution is a free and sovereign Constituent Assembly, where we can discuss and decide in favor of the majority of the population, which would have to combine legislative and executive powers. That would put an end to the Supreme Court – that caste of corrupt judges – and determine the election of judges by the secret vote of the people. The mandates of the members of the Constituent Assembly should be recallable mandates, in order to put an end to the "representatives of the people" who swindle their electors. During the term of their mandate they will receive a salary equivalent to that of an average teacher or worker, to put an end to rich politicians and to make government cheaper.

Thus the call for a "workers' and peoples' government" was used to evade the call for socialist revolution and a workers' state. The PTS's constituent assembly is another conscious fudge: it is depicted in terms that Marxists traditionally use for an organization of workers' power – full executive and legislative powers, recallable delegates, salaries no greater than those of the average worker – along the lines of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Soviets of 1905 and 1917. But calling a bourgeois-democratic assembly a workers' soviet doesn't make it one!

The PTS also turned more to the left with the new year. In an article entitled "They want to clean up the expropriating regime" (*La Verdad Obrera*, Feb. 7), they wrote:

A truly democratic Constituent [Assembly] that gets rid of all the dregs of the old regime and its politicians, and makes it possible that "Not a single one should be left" will be completely achieved only by completing that which was initiated on the 19th and 20th of December, with insurrectionary actions headed by the working class that impose a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly. An instance where the people deliöerate and resolve everything in favor of the majority of the population, concentrating in one chamber the executive and legislative power. That it may eliminate the institution of the Supreme Court and determine judicial elections by the direct vote of the people.

As the PTS explains in the February *Estrategia Internacional*, in the article "Crisis of Bourgeois Rule: Reform or Revolution in Argentina," it faced the problem of distinguishing itself from other left forces, including bourgeois left forces and the PO, who were also raising the constituent assembly, but as a "reform of constitutional type." So the PTS added the "revolutionary" and "insurrectionary" verbiage. But what needs to be done is not to dress up a bourgeois-democratic slogan in revolutionary clothes but to say what is. Calling for a bourgeois-democratic solution can only lead backwards in the Argentine situation.

At a time when the Argentine working class is in the lead of the class struggle worldwide, facing an increasingly bellicose imperialism, it is criminal that organizations which consider themselves proletarian and revolutionary campaign for a bourgeois-democratic program, however revolutionary their phrasing. Proletarian revolutionaries in Argentina have to fight to win over the best elements from these centrist organizations as part of the struggle to build a Trotskyist party, part of the World Party of Socialist Revolution. ●

Comment by Vicente Balvanera

Argentina Solidarity List, March 4, 2002

Comrades,

The statement of the LRP-U.S., "Argentina: Crisis and Revolutionary Program," is a serious, internationalist document written by a serious organization, and greatly enriches the debate taking place among revolutionaries who recognize in the struggle of the Argentine working class and people the anti-imperialist spearhead in the continental and international class war. It struggles to overcome the hysterical preaching of the sectarians: "Our fight for a revolutionary party has nothing in common with those sectarians who want to preach from a mountain top. We not only openly say what is, i.e. that the working class needs its own party, but we fight to prove it in action, through the struggle itself."

However, I am passionately opposed to the conclusions reached, and wish to share the fruits of what is just an initial study of this important document.

1. The first part puts forward what is one of the major lessons of the Argentine situation: that the revolutionary process is born out of and is a maximum expression of the world capitalist crisis, the objective contradictions of capitalism itself. Something those of us who are in the major imperialist powers need to study and comprehend profoundly. Great clarity is achieved through the characterization of the puppet "governments [acting] as local enforcers overseeing the increasing drain of surplus value created by "their" workers and flowing into the imperialist coffers Even with the threat of greater instability, even with the inevitable mass anger over increasingly desperate conditions, indigenous rulers today can only momentarily appear as nationalists and populists."

Excellent too is the mention of the developments in Argentina as living proof of the theory of permanent revolution. This is also an extremely important point we need to see more clearly.

2. Why have the PO and PTS been chosen, and the excellent and serious suggestion made to study the documents on their websites? (<http://www.po.org.ar> and <http://www.pts.org.ar>) The obvious answer is that, to a greater and lesser extent, these are two Trotskyist organizations who undeniably form a major part of the revolutionary leadership in the struggle itself and who are placing their resources at the service of the objective needs of the working class, and who through years of struggle, organization and regular publishing of revolutionary press have earned the right to say that they have long since sunk organic roots into the Argentine working class and its struggles. In this sense, any document written at this juncture which does not highlight the important gains made by the working class, the National Assembly of Workers, its resolutions, program and plan of struggle, already being complied with in actual practice, limits the whole discussion to an excessively abstract plane.

For if we cannot defend the gains of the working class, we are preaching from a very high mountain top indeed. Because if it is true what the comrades of the LRP say in their statement, "A mass action strategy designed to address the needs of the immediate situation, hallmarked by key slogans and demands, is also absolutely critical," we cannot then ignore a historic, working class program and plan of struggle, unanimously voted on Sunday February 17. We cannot ignore the National Assembly of Popular Assemblies to be held March 17th! We cannot ignore the national four-day march, voted as part of the plan of struggle, which will start out from the four corners of Argentina and end in Plaza de



Protest against unemployment, Buenos Aires, 15 March.

Mayo as part of the profound growth of both the struggle and working class forms of action. (See "March 11-15 National March," *Prensa Obrera* 743.) This article, which calls for the occupation of the banks, the railways, etc., says in one paragraph "The only way to break the resistance of this regime is by developing the mass struggle. After all, it is a regime that stays in power only through a police encirclement of the House of Government, the security services and the Gendarmerie" – hardly a long-term electoralist program!

We must base ourselves on the real development of the working class forms of organization, as it really is in its contradictions, movement, development. Neither can we lightly dismiss the Popular Assemblies (for that is what they are called), their Inter-neighborhood coordinating assembly held week after week with thousands of delegates, their plan of struggle and the consequent implementation of this plan of struggle. The statement of the LRP reads "All evidence points to the fact that the middle class is generally dominating the existing popular assemblies in the neighborhoods and other locales, even though workers are also often present." Comrades, I would submit to you that this is a very false assumption:

First of all, are the teachers who fought the police in La Plata just the other day, and very nearly gained entrance to Buenos Aires Legislature, resisting the budget cuts and structural adjustment demanded by the IMF and U.S. Treasury, are these brothers and sisters "middle class"? Are the bank clerks who will start their general strike on March 8, "middle class"? Are state employees, "middle class"? Indeed, are independent workers who exploit no-one, but are ruined in the current situation, "middle class"? Because janitors, office workers, bank-clerks, state workers and office workers, transport workers, etc., all attend the Popular Assemblies. And they would not appreciate hearing the passive attribute of "being present," either. We need to lend scientific rigor and go beyond this term "middle class". Comrades, they are workers too, they are no less revolutionary subjects than any other worker. (I am not ignoring here the overwhelming and qualitative need for leadership on the part of the industrial proletariat, whose lack of direct participation in the process, through the work of the trade union bureaucracy, is precisely what is not taken into account in the LRP analysis.)

Secondly, the Inter-neighborhood assembly, week after week,

enjoys the participation of organized working class delegates (telephone workers, railway workers, etc.) encouraged to participate on an organic level. Also, in each popular assembly, workers involved in nearby conflicts participate. The Brukman textile workers who operate their factory under worker control, have attended practically all of the Inter-neighborhood assemblies, and members of the nearby popular assembly attend their assemblies regularly, for example. So as the factory committees form, they naturally inter-organize with the neighborhood assemblies.

Thirdly, the Popular Assemblies, even though they may have started out in urban centers all over the country, *are now spreading to working class neighborhoods*. And as they do so they spearhead the challenge to the encrusted Peronist party machine. This is the true significance of the dastardly attack against the popular assembly (for that is what it is) of the working class township of Merlo at the hands of Peronist party thugs; and of the overwhelming solidarity of *all* popular assemblies, who massed 1500 specially sent delegates to the regular Friday night meeting of the Merlo popular assembly, on top of the traditional pot-banging confluence in Plaza de Mayo. So, the Popular Assemblies are already being led by the working class, in a very real sense.

Of course, there exist the same bourgeois and petite-bourgeois pressures in the class struggle going on inside the Popular Assemblies. Whole groups emerge, trying to defend whatever illusion of privilege they can muster for themselves, against "proletarian tyranny": the group "Libertarian Socialists," for example, who preach the good word against the "Trotskyist" leadership, forever trying to influence the workers participating against the need for a revolutionary working class party, who spew tons of hate against the PO, the PTS and others, every day; and they are fought every day in the debates of the Popular Assemblies. Because, among other reasons, the PO and PTS have put a maximum of resources into guaranteeing that they grow strong and extend, and coordinate and take on more and more revolutionary tasks (see "What's being debated at the popular assemblies?" by Gabriel Solano, *Prensa Obrera* 74.)

3. The LRP document correctly explains that there is not, as yet, a widespread conscious conviction that capitalism must be destroyed and socialism built among the masses; and that the organized working class has not yet entered on the scene, being controlled by the union bureaucracy. The LRP recognizes: "Right now the calls for the international and the party in Argentina are chiefly propaganda slogans; they are aimed at a layer of advanced workers. There is no expectation that the great masses of workers will quickly change their minds on the matter, although they will over time. A mass action strategy designed to address the needs of the immediate situation, hallmarked by key slogans and demands, is also absolutely critical." It is in this context that the call for a sovereign Constituent Assembly must be understood, which the PO has repeatedly insisted can only come about as part of a continuous general strike. To this end I am in the process of translating an article written by Jorge Altamira over a year ago, which explains this. ("More than ever, for a free and sovereign popular assembly.") Additional explanation is given in the recent "The imminence of "hyper[inflation]" and the new political collapse", *Prensa Obrera* 742, Feb. 21, 2002.

The LRP statement says "The slogan for a constituent assembly is appropriate in a situation of governmental crisis where the masses are focussed on democratic demands. That is not the case in Argentina. It has been very useful where the rights of national or racial minorities are forefront issues for the revolutionary struggle. But such democratic issues are not central in Argentina now. In

Russia in 1917, before the Bolshevik Revolution, the demand spoke to the peasantry in a vital way. Today in Argentina it only serves to build up illusions among the masses of workers and even the middle class – precisely at the time that they are fed up with bourgeois governments and elections."

But the uprising which overthrew De la Rúa was sparked out of demands *democratic* in character before all other considerations! It was the Marshall Law, the State of Siege, which broke the camel's back. Hence the most important slogan heard on the streets that day was not "give us our money back" as the bourgeois media (and not just the bourgeois media, unfortunately) tried to make us believe; but rather "jerks, jerks, the state of siege, shove it up your asses! (*Que boludos, que boludos, el estado de sitio, que lo metan en el culo!*)", meaning only a jerk could believe that the Argentine working class and people will accept another military coup, which is what the "bourgeois democratic" governments are a continuation of. See my post (Jan. 22, 2002) responding to the January ICL article where I explain that the illusions in bourgeois democracy are very high in Argentina, including important sectors of the working class. Therein the importance of the mistrust of political parties, the widespread conviction that at the bottom of it all is a problem of "corruption," a theme so readily managed by the social democrats and reformists. The bourgeois press, too, plays on this mistrust, and in the shadow of its biggest nightmare, that the masses take consciousness of the need for a revolutionary workers party, warn that the popular assemblies (the *La Nación* articles cited on this list) will be "taken over" by Communists and Trotskyists (something criminally echoed by vile sects like the so-called Democracia Obrera).

Also, I want to raise the point that the most revolutionary slogan of all, at the heart of the uprisings in North Salta, whose spreading all over Argentina is at the heart of the *piquetero* movement, is the call for work for all, the classic transitional sharing of all work hours among all the workers via sliding scale of wages and hours, in whatever this is actually voted. This should form the programmatic heart of any call for a general strike, together with non-payment of the debt and other points.

4. Which brings me to a question of method, a question which I have suffered myself over the course of the years. Why do revolutionaries often call for the dissolution of existing revolutionary organizations which are undeniably leading the revolutionary struggle in actual practice, instead of dialoging with these organizations and with their rank-and-file, in unity of action, where disagreements arise? What if various organizations take up your slogan "General strike to repudiate the Imperialist Debt" and work it internationally, and then send a workers delegation to visit Argentina, and debate these questions there? Wouldn't that be a more scientific method (praxis over contemplation)?

Aren't we tired yet, of the method you put forward, abstract and propagandistic to the core, invalidating all that exists as real leadership in the revolutionary struggle itself?:

For the achievement of socialism, the revolution must be internationalist. And therefore it can only be led by a proletarian vanguard party which is a section of a re-created proletarian Fourth International. . . . [VB: who wouldn't agree with that?] Organizations and individuals regarding themselves as communist have an obligation to fight against the dominant stream, to use this opportunity to build a revolutionary party, however small its initial numbers.

We must abandon this class-destructive approach, and in a hurry.

Saludos Revolucionarios,
Vicente Balvanera

LRP Reply to Vicente Balvanera

Part I, March 16, 2001

A major point of ours was that the Argentine left has generally failed to fight for revolutionary leadership and mass working-class action within the major trade union federations, the two CGT's and the CTA. We used the Partido Obrero (PO) and Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS) as prominent examples, even though the problem is more widespread. We pointed to the fact that even where they have been raising the general strike demand, it is not being posed as a challenge to the top union leaders.

In coming to the defense of the PO and PTS, Cde. Balvanera never denies our fundamental criticism. Nor does he attempt to prove that we were wrong. Indeed, he calls our statement "a serious, internationalist document written by a serious organization." He credits us, among other things, with an "excellent" exposition of "the developments in Argentina as living proof of the theory of permanent revolution." But for all that he is "passionately opposed to the conclusions reached."

Balvanera points to the existing popular assemblies and, in particular, the decisions of the recent National Assembly of Piqueteros as the alternative path to what we advocate. He argues that we ignore the gains and value of these struggles. But in fact the opposite is true. It is we who face up to the total picture. These gains are fragile and these struggles remain vulnerable as long as they stay isolated from the unions, which represent the industrial core of the working class, as well as the great preponderance of employed workers in general. In Salta and elsewhere *piqueteros* are beaten and incarcerated. While unemployment, starvation and desperation among the masses is increasing dramatically, the IMF and the U.S. pound away with impunity, demanding more blood money. Meanwhile the media clamors away about the growing danger of "anarchy" in the society – an advance line of political justification for more armed repression to come.

What makes all this possible is the shameful alliance of the unions with the Duhalde government, which is getting stronger all the time. This is the political scene exactly because the big battalions of the working class are not yet on the battlefield. In order to dramatically alter the balance of forces, proletarian revolutionaries must utilize the tactic of the mass united front, as Trotsky advocated, as a challenge on the existing leaderships and mass organizations. The demand on the unions to mobilize their full resources for a general strike against the current attacks is also designed to expose the misleadership. As we pointed out,

This form of demand on the bureaucrats was always a critical part of Trotsky's action proposals where the unions were under non-communist control. Either they will be forced to actually carry it out or they will stand exposed before the ranks if they refuse. If the labor bureaucrats do accede to mass pressure and call such a strike, revolutionary workers must continue to warn that the union leaders will inevitably seek to betray the strike. They must be open about the fact that only a revolutionary leadership will go all the way in the fight for proletarian interests, and therefore it is urgent to build this party leadership.

The campaign for the general strike provides an impetus to the building of the needed opposition within the unions. Were we fortunate enough to have forces in Argentina, now and in the decades leading up to the present time, we would be concentrating

on building a revolutionary opposition within the unions and workplaces; we maintain that this question is central to the Argentine revolution. Cde. Balvanera says "we must base ourselves on the real development of the working class forms of organization, as it really is in its contradictions, movement, development." Today we would be intervening in the *piqueteros'* assemblies for sure; we would be campaigning in these assemblies for our general strike strategy, in addition, of course, to supporting many of the existing demands. (We would also be fighting to win adherence to our strategy in the popular assemblies, where workers and middle class both participate.) But revolutionaries cannot refuse to ground themselves first of all in the unions, the central working-class "form of organization" in Argentina.

Revolutionaries should be trying to convince unemployed workers, as well as those employed workers that come to the *piqueteros'* assemblies, of the need to wage a fight against the union leaders. Simply denouncing them from the outside, and even carrying out exemplary militant local struggles, is not enough. Fighting workers, employed and unemployed, must challenge the unions to mobilize all their resources to defend the working class. Again, we must expose the treachery of the union bureaucrats in practice, right in front of the ranks. This is the only way to win over the masses of workers who are still tied to these leaders and respond only to their calls – that is, the great majority of the working class. It is only through winning over the bulk of workers, not only the minority vanguard of the struggle that is already in militant motion, that the tremendous barrier of the union bureaucracy will be displaced by a new leadership.

The interrelationship between sectarianism and opportunism is demonstrated by the refusal of the PO, PTS and other groups to advocate this strategy among employed and unemployed workers. The sectarian aspect is exactly the refusal to fight for the mass workers' united front. In this way the left's rhetorical disdain for the Peronist union misleadership actually becomes in practice disdain for the mass of workers who are currently following them. The left heralds the militant struggles of the unemployed, and exemplary workers' struggles such as in Neuquen and Cordoba, as well as the popular assemblies that are spreading now. But it is done in a manner that builds illusions that these struggles can grow and unite without directly combating the central union bureaucracy. Instead of



Above: Argentine President Duhalde swears into cabinet union leader Alfredo Atanasof. While the bourgeoisie understands the importance of such bureaucrats in holding back the working class, the left groups make excuses not to fight them inside the unions.

calling for a united front of the leadership and ranks of the mass organizations, i.e. the unions, the left pronounces that the ranks must adhere to the Left call for a general strike and break away from their current leaderships in advance. This is not only a fantasy but a variation of the left Stalinist tactic of the "united front from below," which Trotsky classically fought against in Germany in the early 1930's. The German Communist Party's hostility to the Social Democratic leadership, which led the masses of workers, was catastrophically used as an excuse to reject the only tactic that could actually forge the unity of the communist workers with the workers who still mistakenly followed the Social Democrats.

As Trotsky put it at that time, in the section "It is Not A Question of the Workers Who Have Already Left the Social Democracy, But of Those Who Still Remain With It" in the article "For a Workers' United Front Against Fascism" (Dec 8, 1931):

To say to the Social Democratic workers: "Cast your leaders aside and join our 'nonparty' united front," means to add just one more hollow phrase to a thousand others. We must understand how to tear the workers away from their leaders in reality. There are and doubtless will be Social Democratic workers who are prepared to fight hand in hand with the Communist workers against the fascists, regardless of the desires or even against the desires of the Social Democratic organizations. With such progressive elements it is obviously necessary to establish the closest possible contact. At the present time, however, they are not great in number. The German worker has been raised in the spirit of organization and of discipline. This has its strong as well as its weak sides. The overwhelming majority of the Social Democratic workers will fight against the fascists, but — for the present at least — only together with their organizations. This stage cannot be skipped. We must help the Social Democratic workers in action — in this new and extraordinary situation — to test the value of their organizations and leaders at this time.

So must the Peronist-led workers in Argentina be helped in action to test the value of their leaders at this time.

When the left abstains from waging a political fight against the union bureaucrats, the practical consequence is opportunism. The domination of the labor bureaucracy and labor aristocracy over the whole workers' movement is accepted. (Thus in reality the left's trade-union policy fits together with the more obvious opportunism in its calls for the constituent assembly.)

The argument may be made that it is impossible to fight the Peronist union bureaucracy directly or openly, due to the violent and thuggish control by their apparatus. This is not a question to be taken lightly. But neither can it be said, unfortunately, that such thuggery among union bureaucrats is an attribute of the Argentine labor bureaucracy only. Revolutionary workers around the world face this problem. Flexibility in tactics and proper caution is necessary. But we reject any argument that this bureaucratic apparatus represents an insurmountable barrier to building a revolutionary opposition in the unions.

POPULAR ASSEMBLIES LED BY THE WORKING CLASS?

In order to avoid confronting the weaknesses of the current level of class struggle, Cde. Balvanera must exaggerate the proletarian successes of the current PO strategy. And so, for example, he says that the working class is already leading the popular assemblies "in a real sense!"

True, the popular assemblies are spreading to working-class neighborhoods and militant workers representing existing struggles come to popular assemblies side-by-side with the middle classes. But our point is still valid; these are mixed class formations and workers in the main are not participating in them as conscious working-class representatives. The leading role of the middle class in the popular assemblies poses the growing danger of radical populism rather than conscious working-class politics dominating the movement.

Like Cde. Balvanera, we consider teachers, bank clerks, government workers and transport workers to be part of the working class. However significant middle-class forces are at play in the popular assemblies. They cannot be treated as marginal "pressures" or simply identified with tiny petty-bourgeois sects, as he appears to do.

Of course, workers' soviets do not appear by decree or because the left summons them. They are a result of mass struggles like the general strike we propose. But the principle of fighting for working-class leadership and independence, which Trotsky advocated, is reduced by our critic to "preaching from a mountaintop," "abstract propaganda" and the like.

Both Lenin and Trotsky emphasized the necessity of deepening the consciousness of the advanced workers, even when the vanguard is trying to influence the masses. To skip over the task of addressing the most advanced is sheer opportunism and will undermine the vital task of constantly expanding the cadres for the revolutionary party, which is key to everything. Propaganda is precisely the Bolshevik means of reaching the most advanced workers with specific ideas as to the best way to mobilize our class as an independent and leading force. To consider that "abstract" is perilous, to say the least.

In contrast, as a substitute for taking on the unions the PO has for some time celebrated the idea of the "fusion" between "pickets and pots" — that is between the popular assemblies and the *piqueteros'* assemblies — in an attempt to have a more working-class call. We put in the forefront the essential need to unite the employed and unemployed workers. Only that unity can give effective leadership to the distraught middle classes.

PO AND THE GENERAL STRIKE

In the eight-point program passed by the *piqueteros'* assembly that Cde. Balvanera touts, there are calls for more roadblocks, *cacerolazos* and active support for the existing struggles. There is a plan for a big National March. All this is good and necessary but not sufficient. There is no call for a general strike, despite the fact that Cde. Balvanera claims the PO has called "repeatedly" for it!

This is no accident. According to the PTS (a group which Cde. Balvanera also considers "revolutionary," along with the PO), in its article "PO: a diversionary balance sheet" (*La Verdad Obrera*, Feb. 26):

The Polo Obrero [Workers' Pole, the Partido Obrero's labor front] column in the Plaza de Mayo carried a big banner with the general strike slogan. Furthermore, in that same number of *Prensa Obrera* [No. 742], Jorge Altamira affirmed that "the new stage will see the eruption of struggle of the factory movement itself, as the CGT of San Lorenzo and the Neuquen Ceramist Union stated very intelligently in the *Piqueteros'* Assembly last weekend. It may be that in new and explosive conditions the way to the general strike will be opened.

But the Polo Obrero didn't open its mouth in the deliberations about this "intelligent statement," reducing its intervention to upholding the unity of "pickets and pots" and permitting the point of the general strike to be absent from

the resolutions presented by Nestor Pitrola to be voted on. That amounts to a backward step in relation to the resolutions of the Second *Piqueteros* Assembly in La Matanza (of last September).

The PTS goes on to point out that the PO was capitulating to the Communist Party current in the Assembly, which opposes the general strike slogan.

The PTS notes that there are "eight thousand witnesses" to these events. Cde. Balvanera says we ignore the important developments of the assembly. In fact we wrote our document before it met, even though it appeared on our website afterward. And the events of the Assembly prove our point! Not only is the PO not fighting for the general strike within the unions; it is not fighting for it in a real way among the unemployed either.

An attendance of eight thousand is remarkably important. But the fact is that on February 16 and 17 the PO and the PTS, as well as assorted smaller groups, still showed that they are not a substitute for present power of the labor bureaucracy – when it comes to representing forces which can summon the employed working class. It is excellent and necessary that the *piqueteros* have been the vanguard in advancing the need for unity of the employed and unemployed. It is criminal what the union bureaucrats are doing. But does the *piqueteros* assembly, even with the most vigorous and dedicated support of all the left, have the clout to summon the working class to its assemblies, much less to call out the working class on an indefinite general strike? No, the demand must be made on the central union federations to do so.

One possible tactic in this direction would have been for the forces of the Assembly to march on CGT headquarters to demand a general strike. There could have been mass leafleting and other appeals to employed workers to fight for a general strike to repudiate the debt, for secure jobs for all and so forth. Even the forthcoming National March could have been posed as a march to build for a general strike.

To defend the current gains, revolutionaries must transcend the current level of consciousness and struggle, not just cheerlead what is going on. The employed workers, and the unemployed workers as well, have not yet in their majority broken with Peronism. The fight can only be won by thoroughly exposing and therefore defeating their present "working-class" representatives, the treacherous union bureaucrats, once and for all.

Part II, March 25, 2002

We also want to open a deeper discussion of Marxist method, because this will get to the heart of our differences with Cde. Balvanera and the Partido Obrero (PO). The disputes over slogans like the constituent assembly are important exactly because they reflect a root difference between us in how we approach the working class, as we shall see.

In fact, now the *piqueteros* have been taking more blows; the prolonged and extensive struggle in North Salta has been defeated by a rotten deal, enforced by misleadership within the movement as well as repressive attacks against some of the more militant and independent minded combatants. (See for example the report in the PO's *Prensa Obrera*, No. 746.) Other militant struggles, like the prolonged takeover of the Zanon ceramics factory in Neuquen, have also been inspiring; but there too there is the danger of a reversal due to its isolation from the larger forces of the working class. Unionized workers are by and large enduring worsening conditions and wages, and the threat of unemployment, to say the least. The union ranks, along with the bulk of the working class,



Cacerolazo, January 21. Middle class has dominated protests so far. To defeat IMF attacks, working class must lead struggle.

are demobilized. In sum, the majority of the working class now see no way out of the current impasse.

The middle class has been on the move but has not been able to pose its own answer to the crisis. And now the popular assemblies are beginning to flounder. (We say this based on assessments by both the PO and the Partido de los Trabajadores por el Socialismo, PTS, after the first National Assembly of Popular Assemblies on March 17.)

Certainly there are ebbs and flows in the class struggle. But popular assemblies, originally driven by the *cacerolazos* which played their role in the December uprising, could not just continue to grow and grow, simply because of left exhortation. Nor will they be transformed into working-class bodies. Balvanera was already claiming they were, and the PTS has advocated such a transformation as its goal. (See the March 15 issue of *La Verdad Obrera*, No. 98, at their site, <www.pts.org.ar>.) As well, we said that the active layers of the working class, like the unemployed who block the highways and the militants who occupy particular factories, cannot hold out indefinitely on their own. Nor can they look to the popular assemblies for basic sustenance and conclusive political answers.

In response to our advocacy of the general strike, Balvanera basically said: we are already doing it! In fact, yes, the words general strike could be found in print in *Prensa Obrera*, on and off in the period leading to the present. *But note that even where the PO has been calling for a general strike, as in Balvanera's proud citation above, it is using this call for mass action as a*

means for achieving the goal of the constituent assembly! It is using the working class to achieve a bourgeois electoralist solution.

As Trotsky pointed out long ago, a general strike poses the question of which class should have state power. Revolutionaries are therefore obligated to give a proletarian revolutionary answer.

As well, Balvanera was really making a lawyerly point rather than a truly complete one. For the general strike was *not* being put forward as a demand on the central union leaders, which is the only real way for it to occur. And in fact the PO has *not* insistently campaigned for a general strike in the period under discussion. But why should they? Because for them it is a rather subordinate question, subordinate not to bigger revolutionary strategic questions, but to the constituent assembly.

We note that *now*, at the current impasse, the PO has heightened its call for a general strike – “against a coup attempt.” (PO 746.) How long they will stick with it we have no idea. But we know that such a working-class mobilization is still subordinate, for them. Their practical emphasis is on continuous calls for more popular assemblies, *cacerolazos* and marches . . . all toward the overall goal of a constituent assembly.

The PO’s leaflet for the March 24 march (reproduced in PO 746, “Out with Duhalde and the IMF”) states:

The Workers Party calls on everyone to mobilize to repudiate the policy of the IMF and Duhalde’s government, who wish, through a state of siege and repression, to overcome the dead end in which capitalism and its state find themselves. It calls on everyone to mobilize to demand “Down with Them All,” to do away with Duhalde’s bankrupt government so that it may be replaced by a free and sovereign Constituent Assembly in the nation, the provinces and the municipalities.

It is noteworthy that the constituent assembly was *not* one of the slogans passed by the “National Assembly of Workers,” the Third National *Piqueteros*’ Assembly of February 16-17. Then, at the First National Assembly of Popular Assemblies convened on March 17, the majority of attendees voted for the following wording: “a government of the Popular Assemblies, the workers and the *picueteros*, which must convene a Sovereign Constituent Assembly.”

Regarding the motion passed, the PO commented that “This posing of the Popular Assemblies and the picketers’ movement as an alternative for power, is still abstract. For the Assemblies to take power they must be strengthened enormously.” (“Balance Sheet: The National Assembly of Popular Assemblies, PO 746.) In reality, the PO has most consistently called for the constituent assembly itself to take power, which has caused consternation for those on this list [the Argentina Solidarity list] who prefer that the popular assemblies take the power. But neither of these “alternatives” represent workers’ revolution or the path to it.

We still believe that a central campaign for an indefinite – that is, a real – general strike is needed. It fits the actual objective need of class unity in action in Argentina right now. Because it is a qualitative leap of action that is needed, not just a small step beyond what has already occurred. The working class has to show decisive strength, an ability to score victories against the ruling class, in order to prove – even to itself – that it can represent an alternative. The initial victories will have to be defensive in nature, in line with the current conjuncture and the escalating attacks. But the very fact of concerted action by the entire class will change the political landscape and bring even more dramatic confidence to the whole class than was accomplished by and for certain layers in December.

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY?

Cde. Balvanera, in contrast, champions the PO’s overall campaign for the constituent assembly. Time and again one finds in their press formulations that say that the mobilization of the masses should culminate in the constituent assembly. In the face of working-class setbacks and an admitted “reflux” in the popular assembly movement (the PO’s word), in the face of an aggressively threatening plan on the part of imperialism and the Argentinean regime, the PO’s answer is . . . still, overall, the Constituent Assembly. This is a case of a stopped clock that is not even right twice a day!

There is nothing wrong in having a consistent policy, a framing demand, over a whole period of time. There is nothing wrong with consistently propagandizing for a major tactic as long as it continues to fit the fundamental needs of the situation. (One can even use the word “strategy” as long as one makes clear that it is a subordinate part of the overall revolutionary strategy.) But we believe that the constituent assembly slogan in Argentina was as wrong last year (and the year before that) as it is now. Even then it was foreseeable that the slogan would not meet the objective needs of the working class in Argentinean conditions. Nor would it meet the direction of struggle.

Of course, the constituent assembly slogan is part of the revolutionary arsenal. For example, we favored this demand in Indonesia in 1998, in addition to the general strike demand – because there was the need for the proletariat there to gain the adherence of the peasantry and middle classes in a fight against dictatorship. (See *Proletarian Revolution* No. 57.) It is not that the democratic questions have been all answered in Argentina; that would be impossible, given the domination of imperialism, to be sure. But the fact is that the dominant democratic questions specific to the material experience of the peasantry, national minorities or masses suffering under a dictatorship are simply not at work in Argentina today. The Argentine working class itself is not consumed by the quest for democracy as a separate stage in its own struggle.

In cases where the constituent assembly demand would be necessary, revolutionaries go through the struggle with the masses, saying all along that the experience would prove the need for workers’ revolution. It would be necessary in advance to do everything possible to strengthen the independent organizations and fighting spirit and consciousness of the proletariat. It would be absolutely necessary to raise the need for arming the working class, as we do in conjunction with the campaign for the general strike. But the PO does none of this. While authentic revolutionaries would unite with the masses in a demand for the constituent assembly, where it is applicable, they would not hold back from saying that the answer was proletarian revolution, not the constituent assembly. They would in fact do and say everything possible in order to prevent the constituent assembly from becoming a separate stage of bourgeois democracy. They would warn in advance that a separate bourgeois democratic stage would be a disaster.

As Trotsky wrote of the Russian revolution:

The Russian peasant, only just awakened by the revolution to political life, found himself face to face with half a dozen parties, each of which apparently had made up its mind to confuse his mind. The Constituent Assembly placed itself across the path of the revolutionary movement and was swept aside. . .

The watchword, “All power to the Soviets,” was put forward by our Party at the very beginning of the revolution – i.e., long before, not merely the decree as to the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly but the decree as to its convocation. True,

we did not set up the Soviets in opposition to the future Constituent Assembly, the summoning of which was constantly postponed by the Government of Kerensky, and consequently became more and more problematical. But in any case, we did not consider the Constituent Assembly, after the manner of the democrats, as the future master of the Russian land, who would come and settle everything. We explained to the masses that the Soviets, the revolutionary organizations of the laboring masses themselves, can and must become the true masters. (*Terrorism and Communism*, 1961 ed., pp. 43-45.)

Are the working-class masses in Argentina today analogous to the Russian peasants, or to the Chinese, or to the Spanish struggle of the 1930's? Yes, the masses have a hatred of the military, of repression and of imperialist national oppression. And these are all democratic questions. But not purely so in reality, according to the theory of permanent revolution. And, as an advance over the situations in Russia, China and Spain, they are not purely democratic questions in the consciousness and activity of the working people either. The masses are also dominated by the quest for economic survival, which is seen already as inextricably linked to any struggle against imperialism. That is why we proposed a general strike to repudiate the debt, to link the economic struggle with the struggle against imperialism that is already so obviously needed.

The problem is that even the vanguard doesn't yet believe it is necessary or possible to make the socialist revolution as the solution; that is, they still accept capitalism in general even though many of their actions and demands are objectively against capitalism. This is mixed consciousness but not bourgeois democratic consciousness as such. In particular, the working masses are still tied to Peronism, hardly the ideal "democratic" answer but the one that at least historically seemed to deliver the most. It is sections of the left middle class that in the past were more seduced by liberal democratic promises; we suspect the PO is still catering to them.

Balvanera argues that "the illusions in bourgeois democracy are very high in Argentina, including important sectors of the working class. Therein the importance of the mistrust of political parties, the widespread conviction that at the bottom of it all is a problem of "corruption," a theme so readily managed by the social democrats and reformists." Certainly the middle class and working class are interpenetrated, but he can not even bring himself to state that the mass of the working class is caught up in bourgeois democratic demands, much less a constituent assembly.

If Cde. Balvanera wants to advocate a constituent assembly now, it is incumbent upon him to explain how it fits the objective situation, particularly the needs of the working class, beyond just explaining that the masses have illusions in the bourgeois-democratic form of capitalism. Soviets were a "standing demand" of the Bolsheviks, as the quote above from Trotsky pointed out. But "All Power to the Soviets" was withdrawn for a period in summer of 1917, and the Bolsheviks concentrated on factory committees as a revolutionary instrument. The constituent assembly is hardly a standing demand of revolutionaries on the same level as soviets (!), exactly because it is not a proletarian form of democracy but a bourgeois one. Those who argue for it have to show not only that the general contours of the situation in Argentina are conducive to it, but also why is it being specifically

put forward in the current conjuncture.

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE "REVOLUTIONARY" SITUATION

Above all, we emphasize the question of class consciousness, which is decisive for the fate of the Argentinean struggle, and in fact all of our struggles. In Argentina today, a general strike could not only forge the desperately needed working-class unity, but in so doing could go a long way toward resolving the gulf between the objective strength of the working class and its subjective feelings of weakness. In agitation, dialogue with the masses, the revolutionary proposal for the general strike may only be understood in terms of its immediate tactical advantages as the best way to unite the struggles already occurring and draw in the workers not yet involved. But at the same time in our dialogue with the vanguard workers, the more politically advanced, we openly stress the role of the general strike in raising class consciousness. That is the function of Bolshevik propaganda.

There is no question that qualitative gains were made in terms of the subjective element through the *piqueteros'* struggles, the militant workers' struggles, and particularly the battles of December 19-20 which took down the De la Rúa regime. We considered these events decisive in characterizing the Argentinean political situation as pre-revolutionary. The mass struggle showed what it could do and that was the qualitative leap forward. But it also showed what it could not yet do. We considered false the PO's characterization that the Argentine struggle had entered a "revolutionary" period.

The fact that the PO called the situation "revolutionary" makes it even more absurd to have the constituent assembly as the *crowning* demand. Balvanera misreads what took place in order to justify this: "the uprising which overthrew De la Rúa was sparked out of demands *democratic* in character before all other considerations! It was the Martial Law, the State of Siege, which broke the camel's back." At another point in his post, he raises the fight for jobs for all as being at the "heart" of the uprisings in North Salta, whose spreading all over Argentina is at the heart of the *piquetero* movement." (Why he would wish to counterpose a fight for jobs for all to the fight against the debt, rather than link the two the way we did, he doesn't say.) In any case, in fact the *piqueteros'* struggle over the past years was the spark for the entire movement against the economic crisis, which in turn was



State workers demanding unpaid wages clash with police, 26 April.

engendered by a growingly vicious imperialism. Balvanera "forgets" to mention that on the decisive days of December 19 and 20, the most oppressed layers of the masses were not only demonstrating against the state of siege – but were also looting the supermarkets because of the "democratic" demand that they did not wish to starve.

The December events represented nothing less than the culmination of struggles against the crisis — mass unemployment, poverty and hunger, the freeze on bank holdings. This was a struggle on the rise; it was spreading, and therefore it moved forward rather than backward in response to De la Rúa's desperate state of siege attempt. The extremely popular nature of the resistance to his rule, as well as divisions within the bourgeoisie itself, doomed the state of siege to failure at that time. But to cast those events "above all" as a struggle for bourgeois democracy is a great disservice to what took place and to the consciousness of the fighting layers.

Lenin clearly defined a revolutionary situation as one in which the system had come to such a political crisis, through the clash of the classes as well as the objective economic destruction, that neither class could go on as it had been doing. It was the fact that the working class did not have its own power alternative, that the mass of the working class and its existing organizations, the unions, was not even involved in the clash, that made the pre-revolutionary situation so fragile and tenuous in the concrete.

The absence has become even more troublesome now. The longer the large battalions of the working class continue to be kept on the sidelines, that its rotten bureaucratic misleadership is allowed to wheel and deal with the government, the greater the tendency for the working-class layers that have been so valiant in the struggle to become exhausted or demoralized. The Argentinean bourgeoisie, in conjunction with U.S. imperialism, has been given more time to concoct a more useful solution. It aims to break off middle-class support from the working class and over time to win support for increased repression as well. The more weeks and months that the undefined slogan "Down with Them All" continues to be the rallying call, celebrated uncritically by the PO, the PTS and the bulk of the left – without a sharp class alternative even suggested – the more hollow it becomes. And because there is no such thing as a municipality, province or nation with no politicians, it can only strengthen the middle-class populist

influence that the PO already acknowledged is at work. Even worse, it prepares the ground for the grander bourgeois Bonapartist alternative that is already in the wings.

When the working class sees its own power in unity, through mass actions like the kind of general strike we advocated, more workers see the possibility of a proletarian revolutionary alternative as real. We, like Trotsky, have pointed out that the general strike does pose the question of power because it is so clearly an act of major class against major class. It doesn't resolve the question in itself, but it goes a long way to making an answer possible. The self-activity of the working class, with the intervention of revolutionary workers, would represent a tremendous leap in class consciousness beyond what was accomplished in December. It could actually bring the working class into a real revolutionary period.

The constituent assembly that the PO proposes doesn't have the power to enact the laundry list of transitional demands that they often attach to it. It is the active general strike, that is, the action of the working class against the capitalist class, which has the power to shut down production and capitalist functioning. The mass strike could therefore actually win, at least in part, demands that the PO and other left groups have been advocating and that they report are growing in popularity – repudiation of the debt and the IMF, jobs for all, etc. (In actuality there have been left obfuscations on the debt question as well, but we must leave that aside for now.)

We not only put forward the most overall pertinent demands for the class but a battle plan, a way forward to fight for these demands. Our method in putting forward these transitional demands and the battle plan is to explain openly that we believe workers' revolution and a workers' state are necessary to secure these demands fully and permanently. But we also propose a united front so that we can fight side by side, communist workers with non-communist workers, to prove whether these demands can be won under capitalism or not. We believe this is the most effective way to dispel illusions in capitalism.

The PO is stuck on the constituent assembly call not because the objective situation demands it but because they do not actually see the question of working-class consciousness and self-activity as key. They persistently use the demand, without even warning

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the masses that if such an assembly were to convene, the bourgeois parties will be in there, trying to win off parts of the middle class and confuse the workers too. They don't warn that such a bourgeois body is fraught with dangers. They don't tell the full truth of what the constituent assembly is, that workers must at least prepare their own party to counter the bourgeois and radical middle-class parties that will be there. In short they are acting to build up illusions in the constituent assembly, not dispel the existing illusions.

Cde. Balvanera insists that the PO's use of the constituent assembly slogan rests on a Trotskyist application of the Transitional Program. But the heart of the Transitional Program is not democratic demands; it is that it puts forward political, social and economic demands that are a bridge to socialism, that outline how a workers' state would function. It does so through demands that are understandable under capitalism (like the sliding scale of hours, escalating scale of wages and nationalization of failing industries) and can be fought for now. But it was never advocated as a laundry list of demands to be plopped down on leaflets or recited at meetings without arguing for its revolutionary content and intervening as proletarian revolutionaries. As Trotsky explained, the Transitional Program substituted for the minimal reformist program, not for the revolutionary program. In the way the PO uses it, not only the constituent assembly but the other demands are a decorative disguise to conceal the necessity of revolution.

Centrism by its nature vacillates, caught between the pulls of the advanced workers and petty-bourgeois fear of workers' revolution. The fact that the PO uses the Transitional Program, and particularly the Constituent Assembly demand, in the way it does, is one manifestation of its centrist nature.

Comrade Balvanera and his allies don't like our sharp polemics; in particular they don't like that we label the PO, the PTS and other groups as centrist. The Argentine Solidarity list got flooded with charges that the LRP is "arrogant" and "ultra-left." And there were echoes of Balvanera's complaint: "Aren't we tired yet of the method you [the LRP] put forward, abstract and propagandistic to the core, invalidating all that exists as real leadership in the revolutionary struggle itself?"

Our "arrogance" stands in the tradition of both Lenin and Trotsky, who always believed in sharp polemics and in telling the truth to the working class as they saw it. We hold no loyalty to the more humble "Trotskyism" that bows down in favor of bourgeois democracy and betrays the centrality and independence of the working class. Rather, we insist on confrontation with pseudo-Marxist rhetoric and practice. Centrism is not an Argentinean or an American problem but an international phenomenon. The pseudo-Trotskyist call for a constituent assembly to take power in Argentina today is no accident or inexplicable fetish, any more than are the capitulations of like minded "Trotskyists" in the U.S. to the Democratic Party and labor bureaucracy.

The big dividing line separating revolutionaries from centrists everywhere is the class question. The whole notion of whether or not working-class consciousness is key to the revolution has been answered in two clashing ways for a long time among those that call themselves Trotskyist. This problem originated with the counterrevolutionary Stalinist defeat of the Russian revolution and the postwar proletarian struggles. The postwar "Trotskyists" came to accept that Stalinism had a revolutionary capacity; this reflected their altered class position. By believing that petty-bourgeois Stalinists could create "workers' states," however deformed, little was left for the working class itself to do but the superstructural and democratic



May Day protestors, Buenos Aires.

tasks of a follow-up political revolution. (See the article "Was Trotsky a Pabloite?" on our website.) Why would the question of working-class consciousness and an independent working-class party be so important if other class forces could do the main job? Permanent revolution is stood on its head; instead of the workers completing the democratic tasks through proletarian revolution, the workers are just needed to be vigilant about the democratic tasks.

It is no accident, likewise, that our insistence on propaganda for the revolutionary party and proletarian independence is disparaged as "abstract." Our insistence on fighting against the stream is called "a class destructive approach" which must be "abandoned in a hurry." That is Balvanera's conclusion! This in fact represents the denigration of the Leninist party's prioritizing the need to constantly develop advanced consciousness among the cadres, even when doing mass work. Propaganda is, as Lenin said over and over again, the vital means by which the party communicates its complex ideas to the growing vanguard, the advanced workers. Skipping over the heads of the advanced layers by stressing only agitation (singular or simple proposals directed toward immediate action by the mass of workers) always results in opportunism.

For us, the vanguard party is decisive. It represents the advanced consciousness of the proletariat itself. Propaganda, "cadre education," is the key to building the party and therefore the key to the revolution itself.

Simply to defend the necessity of revolution is a major step forward when "Trotskyists" like the PO do their best to hide the fact from workers. But we have advocated much more. We have said that the entire working class has to learn through struggle the need to fight united and independent against capitalist imperialism. Unlike the "revolutionaries" who wish to adopt a less "arrogant" world view, we instead want to aid the advancing revolutionary-minded workers. ●

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Stop U.S. Attacks on Immigrants!

The U.S. government has been waging a ruthless campaign against immigrants for months, a centerpiece of the "war on terrorism" being conducted on these shores. But like that same war abroad, it has an aim beyond the securing of the "homeland." It is directed most immediately at thousands of immigrants of whom only a handful would have anything to do with terrorism. Its broader purpose is to weaken and divide the working class while the ruling class sharpens its claws in preparation for future attacks.

The catalyst for the campaign was, of course, the September 11 attacks. However angry Bush & Co. may have been, it took them little if any time to realize this was a perfect opportunity to ram through a series of repressive measures under the guise of fighting terrorism. The political climate including mass outrage at September 11 made this far easier than otherwise. And it was achieved with the active connivance of the Democrats.

The reaction began before the smoke had cleared from the World Trade Center, with the round up and detention of non-citizens, mostly men from Muslim or Middle Eastern countries. In October, the "USA PATRIOT" (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) Act was signed into law by President Bush after sweeping through Congress. Much of the anti-immigrant attacks since have been funneled through this vicious legislation.

The Patriot Act defines "terrorism" in a deliberately vague way that gives cops and other state goons maximum leverage to carry out a variety of oppressive acts. Much of it is focused on permitting the terrorization of undocumented immigrants.

If a non-citizen is charged with an immigration violation, he or she is subject to mandatory detention and is ineligible for release until the Attorney General decides. The Attorney General does not have to inform the detainee of the evidence on which detention is based, nor does he have to provide an opportunity to contest the evidence at an immigration hearing.

So-called "terrorist activity" can simply mean the use of a weapon or dangerous device. For example, an immigrant who grabs a knife or makeshift weapon in a heat-of-the-moment altercation or on a picket line may be subject to removal as a terrorist. Just soliciting money for humanitarian causes for an organization that has been labeled terrorist is also grounds for being charged for terrorist activity, and those charged must prove they could not have reasonably known that the act would further terrorist activity.

These and other measures deprive immigrants of their First Amendment and due process rights and gives a green light for abuses by the authorities. As a result, over 2000 immigrants have been sent to detention centers around the country. Only one of these detainees is even being charged with a crime related to the terror attacks. Most have been detained without being notified of the charges against them. Attorney General John Ashcroft has refused to release the names of many of the detainees to the media. Of those detained, some 327 are believed to remain in INS detention, and an unknown number have been deported or released on bail, often after months in custody. Some 87 foreign nationals are now awaiting voluntary deportation; many have spent more than 100 days in jail.

An Amnesty International report of March 14, compiled through interviews with relatives and lawyers of the detainees and visits to the prisons, painted a chilling picture of the treatment of detainees in the detention centers.

In one case, an Egyptian man was detained on an immigration violation and held for more than five months. His window was blacked out as punishment because he failed to stand up when a

guard came into his cell during prayer, and he was not allowed to see his wife for two months. He is considered suicidal. A Pakistani man was interrogated by the INS while handcuffed to a chair for seven hours and denied access to a lawyer. When a lawyer found him the next day, he was in shock and crying.

The "war on terrorism" has also impacted immigrants other than those immediately targeted for police repression. Many Latino immigrants have faced long delays and lost jobs in the U.S. as a result of intensified border checks. They and other immigrant workers have felt greater pressure to keep their heads down; the anti-terrorist campaign has reinforced and tapped into racist sentiments in the country. This suits the needs of the ruling class fine, as it helps keep the better-paid American workers divided from the immigrant workers who are among the most desperate sections of the proletariat in these borders. It also puts immigrant workers in a situation of accepting even worse pay and conditions. It therefore means higher profits for the bosses.

As bad as the plight of immigrants under this legislation is, the PATRIOT Act goes far beyond those attacks. It minimizes judicial review of federal telephone and internet surveillance by law enforcement. It expands the ability of the government to conduct secret searches. It grants the FBI broad access to sensitive business records about individuals without having to show evidence of a crime. The police apparatus can use it to license the investigation and surveillance of political activists and organizations. Prosecutors will use it as a license to criminalize political dissent. This could lead to the anti-globalization protestors and the protestors against the bombing of Vieques being labeled domestic terrorists if they use civil disobedience or if there are spontaneous clashes with the police.

There have been some disagreements among the capitalist rulers over how far the campaign against immigrants should go. Some of the Democrats, and even some conservative Republicans like columnist William Safire and Representative Bob Barr, have been openly critical of the PATRIOT Act. But if there is some debate about the worst excesses, there is general agreement that this war must be prosecuted.

The working class and its allies must oppose and defeat this present and future campaign of repression. In fact, there have been a number of spirited demonstrations across the country over the past few months against it. The LRP has actively participated in those where we could muster forces. These include protests at detention centers in the New York area, and at City College, where a Syrian student, Reem Khalil, was jailed along with her family by authorities for "suspicion" of terrorism.

Some of those demonstrations have had varying degrees of official support from some union leaderships. This is welcome, since the working class is central to any defense, and the unions are the only mass organizations of the working class in the country now. But the paper support they offer falls short of a real mobilization of the unions. For example, the demonstration in New York on March 23 had on its list of endorsers no less than 15 local labor unions, yet only a few hundred people attended and not one of these unions mobilized their memberships. Revolutionists and labor militants should bring pressure to bear on the union leaders to not simply proclaim their support but to throw the real weight unions have into the fight.

Most immediately, this fight requires defending immigrants who have been and will be attacked. But it must be seen as a defense of the working class and the masses as a whole. ●

Correction on the Slogan "Open the Borders"

Occasionally in past years, the LRP used the slogan "Open the Borders" in defense of the rights of immigrants to come to the United States. We meant it as a statement of our opposition to chauvinist attempts to limit or end immigration. In a world where starvation wages and repressive conditions inflicted by imperialism on the poorest countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America have driven millions of working people to leave their homelands, we argued that they have every right to seek refuge and jobs wherever they can, especially in industrialized imperialist countries like the United States.

For example, we wrote in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 52:

In the imperialist United States, communists stand for full rights for immigrants, jobs for all, and open borders to allow all economic and political refugees to enter the country and work. Only through such a program can the inequalities and divisions among workers be overcome. We fight for these demands under capitalism, but we say explicitly that only a socialist planned economy makes them possible.

Unfortunately, "Open the Borders" is an ambiguous slogan at best and conveys a utopian confusion at its worst. Therefore, we have decided to withdraw it. Instead, we will rely on our more commonly used and more accurate slogan, "End all Restrictions on Immigrants and Refugees." While it is not as catchy as "Open the Borders," it says more precisely what we mean in defense of immigrants. And that is all the more important today in light of the racial persecution of Middle Eastern and Central Asian immigrants in the wake of September 11.

The idea that any state in the world — especially an imperialist state today — would even begin to tolerate open borders is an impossible fantasy. Eliminating national borders means eliminating the nation-states into which the capitalist-dominated world is divided. Borders, and the armed forces that defend them, are essential for the existence of any state based upon class rule. The once-popular middle class movement for "One World" utterly collapsed for good reason. The modern nation-state arose with the development of capitalism, and capitalism cannot exist without it.

It might be argued that "Open the Borders" is transitional, in the sense that it can only be carried out by a workers' revolution that puts an end to the capitalist state. But even a federation of workers' states resulting from such socialist revolutions would have to maintain national borders for a period of time, if only to defend itself against still-remaining capitalist states. Under workers' states, borders will have a different meaning and will progressively disappear as the inequities and competition inherent in capitalism — and the state itself — fade away. Ending borders completely will be achieved at a higher stage, when the communist society of abundance for all is achieved on a world scale.

For comparison, consider the slogan for "disarmament." That is certainly an ultimate goal of communist revolutionaries, and we certainly oppose all armament measures taken by imperialist states, whose weapons are used overwhelmingly for the oppression of masses of working people abroad and at home. But to advocate disarmament today is not the same thing as opposing each and every bourgeois arms proposal. As the Bolsheviks pointed out, "disarmament" creates dangerous illusions in the nature of the state, as if an imperialist power could conceivably disarm. The appropriate task of the working classes is to arm themselves in the struggle to achieve state power and thereby disarm their exploiters.

In the same way, Leninists do not call for the abolition of war in capitalist society; instead we explain to fellow workers that they need to wage the class war in order to abolish the otherwise inevitable imperialist wars by abolishing capitalism. Because only

a communist world can have peace, we cannot be pacifists today.

Our error concerning open borders was largely unintentional, unlike the more aggressively illusionary Progressive Labor Party slogan, "Smash All Borders," and the anarchist-inspired chant, "No Migra! No Borders! Smash the New World Order!"

THE ROLE OF IMPERIALISM

Of course, any slogan that simply advances the democratic rights of immigrants is inadequate by itself as a solution, since the real problem is imperialism. We favor ending restrictions on immigration to the imperialist countries because imperialism has given the immigrants no other choice. Emigration is not a solution to worldwide oppression, superexploitation and suffering. It is merely a democratic right that we defend for our fellow workers.

Indeed, to a certain extent the imperialists allow emigration from some oppressed countries as a safety valve to reduce working-class explosiveness there. They also seek to import "cheap labor" to lower all wages at home and to out-compete low-wage labor in the oppressed countries. Such is the inhuman downward wage spiral inherent in imperialist competition.

We never make any concession to pro-imperialist and racist reasoning that justifies maintaining barriers to immigration. Along with our slogan for ending immigration restrictions, we maintain all our slogans demanding an end to all forms of racism and chauvinism, which are built into the capitalist system. Further, to combat the superexploitation of immigrant workers and to fight the downward spiral among workers in the imperialist countries, revolutionaries continue to fight for class-wide economic demands like jobs for all, public works and equal pay for equal work.

Our position has nothing in common with those of the Spartacist League or its spin-off debris, which oppose "Open the Borders" on chauvinist grounds. These groups advocate instead "full citizenship rights" for all immigrants — that is, only when they get here. The Spartacists say they oppose "open borders" as liberal utopianism unachievable under capitalism, which is true enough. But their real reason is that they are against ending all immigration restrictions by imperialist powers. Here is the Spartacist argument, presented over 25 years ago and repeated often:

However, on a sufficiently large scale, immigration flows could wipe out the national identity of the recipient countries. ... Unlimited immigration as a principle is incompatible with the right to national self-determination ... (Workers Vanguard, Jan. 18, 1974.)

That is, a tide of poor proletarians from third world countries endangers the "national identity" of the advanced capitalist countries. This is obviously a cover-up for a national chauvinist position. The SL and its offspring defend the right to self-determination of the imperialist U.S. — which means the suppression of the national rights of people across the globe. Communists, in contrast, defend resisters and refugees against imperialism. As framed by the Bolsheviks, the right to self-determination distinguishes between oppressed and oppressors.

The flood of immigrants from "third world" countries has become a tidal wave in the past decade, as U.S.-led imperialism has stepped up its depredations. In the U.S., immigrants are now a significant section of the working class. Racist arguments like that of Pat Buchanan, that the "browning of America" threatens to destroy "Western culture" and "civilization" have been effectively answered by reality. The present degeneration of civilization in the U.S. originates not with recent immigrants but with the indigenous

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Stalinist Expansion, the Fourth International and the Working Class

The following article was the LRP-COFI's contribution to the magazine Tribune of Debates, published in 2000 by the Argentine Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR; Revolutionary Workers Party) and the Brazilian Liga Bolchevique Internacionalista (LBI; Bolshevik Internationalist League), in preparation for an international conference in August 2000. We reported on the collapse of that conference in Proletarian Revolution No. 62.

by Sy Landy

In the late 1940's and early 1950's, the Fourth International (FI) made a great leap backward, a major step in its collapse as the world communist revolutionary vanguard. After years of understanding that the post-World War II expansion of Stalinism into East Europe had developed state capitalist regimes there, the FI suddenly declared these nations to instead be "deformed workers' states." The term "deformed" was used instead of "degenerated," because nobody could pretend that these states had ever been revolutionary workers' states. Thus, with the stroke of a pen, an organization which claimed the unstained banner of Trotskyism, turned the fundamental principles of the Marxist world view into their opposites.

In the course of the FI discussion on East Europe, James P. Cannon, the leader of the Socialist Workers Party of the U.S., pointed out in 1949:

I don't think you can change the class character of the state by manipulations at the top. It can only be done by a revolution which is followed by a revolution in fundamental property relations. . . . If you once begin to play with the idea that the class nature of the state can be changed by manipulations in top circles, you open the door to all kinds of revisions of basic theory. (SWP *Internal Bulletin*, October 1949.)

Soon Cannon, like Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel, Gerry Healy, Nahuel Moreno and the other leaders of the FI not only opened this door, they broke it down. Nevertheless, Cannon had been right in pointing to the extensive revisionist consequences of the new "deformed workers' state" theory. Among those Marxist fundamentals which had been necessary to revise were:

1. That only the working class can make the socialist revolution, i.e., establish a proletarian dictatorship, a workers' state.
2. That socialist revolution can only occur when the proletariat is led by its most conscious advanced sector, organized into a Bolshevik-Leninist vanguard party. Proletarian class consciousness is the key element.
3. That Stalinism constituted an alien and counterrevolutionary invasion force within the working-class movement. By 1940, the Stalinist bureaucracy had become, in Trotsky's words, an "absolute obstacle in the path of the country's development" and an imperialist tool. Its murderous struggle against Trotskyism was designed to prevent socialist revolutions, not to lead them.
4. That Popular Fronts are class-collaborationist blocs created to prevent socialist revolution, not aid and abet it.
5. That the bourgeois state apparatus must be destroyed by an actual revolution (a civil war by the working class against the

capitalist class) rather than reformed or manipulated at the top – if a workers' state is to be created.

6. That the purpose of Marxist theory and analysis is to broadly predict developments in the class struggle and thereby guide "the line of march" for our class, the proletariat. Its aim is not to serve as a retrospective rationalization for tailism; especially with an analysis which lacks any predictive capability.

At the close of World War II in 1944-5, the Soviet army marched into Eastern Europe and dominated most of the new governments set up by the Stalinists. In country after country, the masses rose up as the Nazi German occupation forces were weakened and in retreat. In several countries, workers' councils and soldiers' councils raised the red flag of revolution. All such workers' uprisings were crushed by the Soviet armies – except in Poland, where the Russian divisions halted their advance in order to allow the Nazis to destroy the rebellion.

Stalin then moved to organize the new regimes as "Peoples' Democracies." These Popular Front governments were rotten blocs: servants of the previous pro-Nazi regimes, outright fascists, pogromists, old counterrevolutionary military figures, liberal bourgeois, social democrats, even a king – in addition to indigenous Stalinist Communist Party members. And the ranks of the CP's themselves had been swelled by the admission of large forces from the fascists like the Romanian Iron Guard.

Years before, Trotsky had predicted that the bourgeoisie would never engage in full nationalization of the means of production, even though he thought it theoretically possible. The capitalists, he wrote, would be too frightened of the opportunity that statified property would present for seizure by the working class. Thus, before the Peoples' Democracies could transform their economies according to the Soviet model, the Stalinists had to first behead and smash the proletarian forces.

In 1947 the leading FI theoretician, Ernest Mandel, summed up the events: "The bureaucracy in general began by curbing and breaking the revolutionary upsurge of the masses. A year and a half later, however, the situation in these countries is marked by a more or less widespread introduction of agrarian reforms and nationalization of heavy industry." ("The Soviet Union After the War," *IIB*, March 1947.) Mandel denied that nationalization signified anything more than private capital's inability to run these economies. He labeled as "absurd" any idea that workers' states, degenerated or not, could arise without proletarian revolutions.

Extensive sectors of these economies had already been nationalized during the Nazi occupations. The process was continued over the next years until nationalization was nearly complete by 1948 and the Stalinists had ejected most of their coalition partners. The decapitated and demoralized working class played no role in these events, except in Czechoslovakia where there were police-dominated and staged events which gave formal agreement to the changes made at the top.

The new regimes in Yugoslavia and Albania had been created by indigenous Stalinist guerrillaist forces. However, they were just as intent as the Soviet dominated governments on preventing any proletarian upsurge. In 1948, when Tito broke with Moscow, the

first reaction of the FI was to support Yugoslavia, which it still regarded as state capitalist, against the Soviet Union, which it still considered a "degenerated workers' state." This absurdity was soon resolved by a further one: a retrospective declaration that four years before, there had been a "socialist revolution" in Yugoslavia. Of course, when Tito's "workers' state" supported Western imperialism in the Korean War, this proved even more embarrassing than when he ignored the Pabloite FI's embarrassing and indeed criminal offer for Tito to join the FI.

By 1951, the FI declared all of the Peoples' Democracies to be "deformed workers' states," even though neither the workers nor even the Stalinist rulers considered them anything of the kind. The degenerating FI could never resolve the question of precisely when these states had become "workers' states." If the date of the social transformation was 1947-48, then the transformation from popular frontist capitalism to workers' state was made without a revolution and without the smashing of the state apparatus. After all, the Soviet Army and the Stalinists held effective power both before and after the peaceful change.

On the other hand, if the date was set at 1944-5, that meant that the "socialist revolution" had occurred at the very moment that the Soviet armies were crushing the workers' struggles. Further, if these armies created socialist revolutions by their occupation, how could eastern Austria and Finland revert to capitalism without a violent counterrevolution when Russian control ended in those countries?

Neither scenario can answer the fundamental question of how the socialist revolution could be accomplished without leadership by the proletariat, spearheaded by its conscious vanguard. The whole structure of the Marxist world view is rooted in the understanding that the working class is the sole agency of the socialist revolution.

"Orthodoxy" is anathema for genuine Marxists. The factional struggles waged by the "orthodox" tendencies led at times by Cannon, Healy, Lambert, Moreno, et al, as opposed to the groups led by Pablo and Mandel, were fought over secondary questions. All sides embraced the "deformed workers' state" rationalization that counterrevolutionaries could carry out socialist revolution. We designate them all as Pabloites after the inventor of the theory. Some decided that Stalinism was not in fact counterrevolutionary; they were the first to capitulate to the Stalinist parties at home.

One attempt to justify tossing out the proletarian essence of Marxism was to distort Trotsky's point in the Transitional Program that under exceptional circumstances the petty bourgeoisie, including the Stalinists, might be forced to go further along the revolutionary road than they wished and break with the bourgeoisie. True enough, but nowhere does Trotsky suggest that the petty bourgeoisie could make the socialist revolution. Had Trotsky come to the conclusion that Marx had erred in believing that the working class was the only revolutionary agency, he would have devoted far more than a glancing reference to this new shattering conclusion!

For the FI, the exceptional circumstances soon proved to be the rule. The revolutions in China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba - all of which were bourgeois-democratic anti-imperialist revolutions that suppressed and decapitated the working class, were again designated as "socialist revolutions" by Trotsky's false followers. Eventually the Pabloites called the new regimes workers' states; they disagreed among themselves over whether these "workers' states" were deformed or healthy!

They also disagreed about the nominally anti-imperialist

regimes that had taken power in Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Algeria, Cambodia, South Yemen, Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Burma. Were these workers' or bourgeois states?

Another damning fact is that for the duration of all these "workers' states," over half a century of history, Pablo and Mandel wrote no analytic works describing the dynamics of these economies and how they worked. The "deformed workers' state" name proved to be not a theory that helped explain reality but a rationalization.

Once the idea that the proletariat was not the necessary agent for the socialist revolution became dominant in the FI, it opened the floodgates to every form of tailism toward peasant-based guerrillaism and social-democratic electoralism, in counterposition to revolutionary Bolshevism. It led some to support the Stalinists when they shot down workers, as with the Berlin Wall and in Jaruzelski's crackdown in Poland. One of the greatest examples of the practical as well as theoretical collapse of the FI occurred over the Bolivian revolution of 1952. The Bolivian POR led by Lora capitulated to the left nationalists, and the FI as a whole supported its policy. For us this event marked the end of the Fourth International as a revolutionary organization.

Today, the various tendencies who believe that the collapse of Stalinism in the East has led to the creation of bourgeois states cannot explain how counterrevolution occurred without the smashing of the workers' state apparatuses and without civil war. The same state police agencies which once defended nationalized property today defend private property.

In *Proletarian Revolution* magazine and in our book *The Life and Death of Stalinism*, the LRP/COFI has developed the point of view that the Stalinist counterrevolution had finally succeeded in overthrowing the degenerated workers' state in the Soviet Union by the end of the 1930's. Like Trotsky, we saw the Great Purge as a "civil war." He thought the slaughter of the old Bolsheviks was a violent and desperate last resort of the Stalinist Bonapartist caste, trying to keep control over the fragile remains of a "hollow workers' state" which could not outlast the coming world war. In contrast, we see these counterrevolutionary events as the final blow in the restoration of capitalism on a statified basis - the elimination of the last representatives of October in the state and party apparatus and the consolidation of the Stalinists as a ruling class, a regent class for the missing bourgeoisie.

Unable to fully destroy proletarian property forms and other gains of the October revolution, the Stalinist USSR was fragile compared to U.S. imperialism, but far stronger than Trotsky believed. His predicted collapse of the USSR not only did not occur, but the USSR rapidly expanded its area of rule in the wake of the world war.

As opposed to the degenerated "Fourth International," we have no problem in explaining the Stalinist transformations in a Marxist manner; they were political but not social transformations within capitalism. We believe that our analysis reflects the outlook of authentic Trotskyism, despite our difference with Trotsky as to the rapidity of the collapse of the Soviet workers' state. We were also able to use our theory to foresee, as early as the mid-1970's, the Stalinists' inevitable turn to openly bourgeois methods of exploitation by wiping out the surviving gains of the workers' revolution.

We in the COFI have begun to seriously study the literature of the POR and the LBI. Our obvious disagreements concern the nature of the Stalinist USSR, the deformed workers' states and the class nature of the police under capitalism. But there are also very

important points of agreement, such as the trenchant criticisms of the capitulations of the FI made by these comrades. So far, however, we have not seen a class analysis of the collapse of the Fourth International. Trotsky pointed out, in the faction fight against the petty bourgeois Shachtmanites in 1939-40, that every important split in the Marxist movement is not simply the result of bad ideas and wrong leaders; they reflect class differences at concrete turning points in history.

We believe that the Pabloites in the West saw the Stalinist transformations in the East as progressive because their class position at home was changing. The growing post-war prosperity and the huge expansion of the middle-class intelligentsia and labor aristocracy led to a new political world view. The reformist social democratic, labor and Stalinist parties in the West, understood by Trotsky to be counterrevolutionary, were now deemed moderately progressive "blunt instruments" that could be pressured to work in the interest of the proletariat rather than the bourgeoisie. That is, social-chauvinist parties were now seen as stepping stones to socialism. Shachtmanites, Cliffites and Pabloites of all sorts entered these parties, not as Trotskyists to break the ranks from the misleaders, but with illusions in the reformists. Others embraced the middle-class-led guerrillaists. The once-revolutionary parties of the FI became prisoners of the rising new "progressive" middle strata; their tailism of Stalinism in the East reflected capitulations at home.

Today, the various petty-bourgeois Pabloite tendencies even acknowledge that they believe that the proletariat itself cannot achieve revolutionary consciousness. This is directly counterposed to Lenin's view as it evolved after 1903 and to Trotsky's very explicit statements on this most vital question. Those of us who are fighting to re-create the authentic, revolutionary anti-imperialist Fourth International must recognize that our struggle is not simply against false theories but a crucial front in the proletarian class war, the driving force of Marxism. ●

Letter from Daniel Bengoechea

This letter was written in early 2001 by a member of the POR of Argentina.

Dear comrades of the LRP:

Here are my opinions on some of your documents. Of all of them I have chosen the article published by Sy Landy in *Tribune of Debates* and your political declaration on the convocatory declaration for the failed conference of last August.

I have decided to start with these two items since they in some sense synthesize the central axes of the discussion which we have intended to establish and which for a number of reasons beyond your control have been postponed. To facilitate the discussion I have followed the order established in your declaration. In the future I hope we will be able to broaden the discussion to other points and also deepen the debate on the points included here. Finally it is necessary to make clear to you that the opinions in the first item of the document do not correspond to the official position of the POR. Due to this, my comrades decided that this would not be published in the name of the party, and authorized me to do this in my own name.

ON STALINISM AND REVOLUTIONARY DEFENSISM

For me, the fact that Stalinism definitively crystallized in the 30's into a counterrevolutionary force is not sufficient to determine a change in the class character of the USSR. This is always

determined by the property relations, and these did not take on a bourgeois character until the 90's. Until that moment the Stalinist bureaucracy maintained the monopoly of foreign trade, the means of production remained under state control, and the gains of the working class had not yet been liquidated. If in fact these characteristics do not suffice to determine that a state is a workers' state, they are sufficient to demonstrate that the workers' state constructed in the October Revolution still survived in its death throes until the end of the 80's. Moreover, if capitalism was restored at the end of the 30's we would have to be able to determine who was the bourgeoisie in the USSR at the time.

On the other hand, I have to recognize that the definition of "deformed workers' states" used by us to characterize both the Stalinist states created after the Second World War and those resulting from anti-imperialist revolutions (China, Cuba, Vietnam and North Korea) is based on the repetition of the concept established by the Pabloite Fourth International. Assuming that the USSR was a workers' state until the Stalinist collapse of the 90's, the resounding similarity between these societies and the USSR made us assume pragmatically that they were, in a certain sense, the same. At any rate, we understand that the "deformed workers' state" definition always must be applied with much skepticism, lacking a better characterization, and without attributing any sort of viability to those societies.

In your reasoning there are two central points with which I agree. The first is that workers' states can only be created by workers' revolutions, which in the postwar period either did not happen or were suffocated by Stalinism. The second is that the concept of a degenerated workers' state was conceived by Trotsky for a particular situation in the USSR which could not be indefinitely prolonged in time.

On the other hand, the weak point of your reasoning is the affirmation that the capitalist counterrevolution took place in the USSR at the end of the 30's. Just as you have done with the postwar Stalinist states, one can affirm that in the USSR there was no change in the state apparatus at that time. Before and after, the police, the army and the governing forces were the same. It seems to me that from your reasoning follows the necessity of the USSR having been a capitalist state since before the war, but by no means is this a fact that could have been inferred from the functioning of the Soviet economy. However, I have to admit that your book, *The Life and Death of Stalinism*, has had the virtue of making me initiate a process of reflection upon this theme, a process which continues and remains open.

I also agree with you on the need to distinguish between the defense of the gains won by the workers of the Stalinist and ex-Stalinist states, on the one hand, and the defense of the Stalinist state apparatus, on the other. Of course, on this question one must not lose sight of the counterrevolutionary character of the bourgeois leaderships of the masses, which made use of the processes of the 90's to the benefit of imperialist interests. To propose defeatism and fight on equal footing both Stalinism and the bourgeois leaderships of the masses has helped make some view the installation of the new regimes as a conquest of the masses. In that sense I agree with the LBI's criticisms of Morenoism and other centrist currents who were dazzled by the processes in Eastern Europe and who placed the necessity of defeating Stalinism above the defense of the gains of the masses. Of course, as you say, to defend these gains it was necessary to oppose the privatizations of the economies of the USSR and the rest of Eastern Europe, which implied also the necessity of a revolutionary opposition to the state

and the Stalinist bureaucracy, which had initiated the attacks on the working class well before the changes in government.

But it was also necessary to combat the reactionary leaderships of the masses, whether these arose from Stalinism or not. And this was not done by the great majority of the Trotskyist movement, which was only preoccupied with the overthrow of the Stalinist regimes. In any case, I understand that it is an exaggeration on the part of the LBI and the POR to equate the defense of the gains of the masses with the defense of the Berlin Wall, since the Wall formed a part of the Stalinist repressive apparatus which supported the bureaucracy's attacks against the masses.

Finally, in the cases of China, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam, if it is in fact true that the assault on the workers' gains is being led by the Stalinist bureaucrats, I suppose that you would also accept that these gains will fall more rapidly in the event of a military defeat of these regimes by imperialism. In that sense if in fact these states must be defended from imperialism like any other oppressed nation, there has to be special emphasis on their defense because the gains embodied in them are greater.

ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The term "Anti-imperialist United Front" has a tactical character for us, not a strategic one. In no way do we hold expectations in the national bourgeoisie, which in the current stage of capitalist development is incapable of finishing the democratic tasks that are still pending in our countries. The incorporation of bourgeois sectors in an "Anti-imperialist United Front" in no way implies the formation of political blocs with them. According to our interpretation, the revolutionary party must always maintain its political independence and must use, through the Front, criticism against its allies with the object of exposing them before the masses. In no way does the concept of the "Anti-imperialist United Front" imply the formation of political or governmental blocs with elements of the bourgeoisie. Much less does it imply that the revolutionary party proposes to the proletariat that it trust the anti-imperialist programs claimed by such elements. To sum up, the "Anti-imperialist United Front" must be understood as a tactical tool that serves to raise the democratic demands of the exploited masses but at no point should it be understood as a tool which can substitute for the revolutionary party, which would imply a popular frontist deviation.

ON THE CONCEPT OF THE PARTY

I agree with you that the proletariat is the only force capable of making the socialist revolution. It is lamentable that almost a century after the October Revolution it is still necessary to make this declaration. I also understand that the process of the formation of consciousness is a process that must develop within the working class. In general history shows us that it is in struggle that the working class develops its consciousness. In general the working class begins to struggle with leaders who do not represent its interests, and only through the development of the struggle does it produce and select from the vanguard those who will form the political leadership of the proletariat.

To think that consciousness can be developed from outside by intellectuals is an idealist conception. Those who hold this conception always only crystallize a nucleus of pseudo-revolutionary intellectuals, which from outside the class tries to impose its conceptions without maintaining any contact with the class struggle. With this method, sooner or later they end up building a sect. A vanguard party must test its positions daily by applying

them in concrete action. You are probably right when you say that this idealist conception, contrary to the thought of Lenin and Trotsky, is a reflection of the influence of the middle layers and the labor aristocracy within Trotskyism.

ON THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

I agree that the convocatory statement to "advance in the discussion on the constitution of a new Fourth-Internationalist tendency" does not have the clear vision of the history of the Fourth International which there must be to speak for the formation of a new tendency. I think this basically results from the empiricist conduct of our current which led us to reject centrism empirically without doing a deep-going balance sheet of the history of the Fourth International.

My position is that none of the fractions into which the Fourth International shattered after the schism which occurred in its 3rd Congress represented the revolutionary reserves of the proletariat. In fact, the revisionist turn was consolidated at the Second Congress in 1948 and began at the end of the Second World War. The hope that the Fourth International held in Tito due to his confrontation with the Kremlin was a clear proof of this. This reflected in some way that the rupture was not based on programmatic differences. Basically the schism consisted in a confrontation between cliques in which none of them raised the necessary program to regroup those who would confront revisionism. Thus, the organizational collapse was nothing more than the expression of ten years of centrist degeneration.

I've done some thought as to whether the form in which the Fourth International degenerated is related in some way to the entrisism into social democracy recommended by Trotsky to some of its most important sections. For me it seems that this helped the sections of the Fourth International fill with intellectuals and bought-off workers, isolating it from the most oppressed sectors of the working class. Therefore, the Fourth International, instead of winning vanguard proletarians, which was very difficult in the period of retreat in which it was being built, ended up recruiting intellectuals and sectors of the labor aristocracy, which would have to be reflected in centrist and opportunist deviations. What else could account for the various fractions of the Fourth International? What else could account for the policy applied during the 1952 revolution in Bolivia, a key event in the degeneration of the Fourth International?

Regarding the support given by the Fourth International to the MNR during the Bolivian Revolution of 1952, which certainly was a very grave error which marked a turning point in the trajectory of the Fourth International, in no case do I think it was treason comparable to the approval of war credits by the Social Democrats in 1914, or to the betrayal of the German and Spanish proletariat by the Third International in the 30's. These events implied that the Second and Third Internationals were converted into counter-revolutionary structures at the service of the bourgeoisie. This did not happen with the Fourth International. If it had occurred we would have to speak about founding a new international, instead of reconstructing or recreating the Fourth. The Fourth International degenerated into a multitude of centrist, bureaucratic and opportunist tendencies which oscillate between revolution and counter-revolution but which are not counter-revolutionary apparatuses at the service of the bourgeoisie. Obviously these currents are an obstacle to the development of working-class consciousness, but they are not the same as social democracy or Stalinism.

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Enron and Capitalist Decay

by Dave Franklin

The fall of Enron and its fallout have shaken the capitalist class, and for good reason. The virtual ruin of a flagship firm that until yesterday was hailed as a symbol of the vitality of the system is more than a political embarrassment and financial body-blow. It is a harbinger of far greater crises and a potent argument for the necessity of socialist revolution and the rule of the working class to salvage society from the depths of capitalist decay.

The dimensions of the collapse are colossal enough when confined to Enron itself: the vaporization of seventy billion dollars of stock valuation; the defaulting on tens of billions of debt; the sacking of over 4000 employees with the loss of their life savings; the bankruptcy of the 7th largest corporation on the Fortune 500 list. The debacle also engulfed a swarm of banks, insurers, auditors and others who had extensive investments in or contracts with the company, who advised and approved its financial practices, or all of the above. Prominent among these are the J.P. Morgan Chase bank, which could possibly lose billions, and the Arthur Andersen accounting firm, which faces a criminal indictment and a probable collapse of its business.

Beyond them are more general threats to an American and world economy that has been wracked by recession. A darkening investment climate (how many other Enrons are out there?); an emerging credit crunch, as banks tighten lending terms; a shaky stock market that tumbled in the immediate wake of the Enron bankruptcy and is poised to dive again as repercussions from Enron and other bad news hit home.

There is also of course an openly political dimension to all this. Enron is now legendary for its connections with the capitalist state. It was not only the major contributor to Bush's election campaign, but it also lined the pockets of all sorts of Republicans and Democrats. And with Bush and Cheney facing a lawsuit over their refusal to disclose even the names of energy executives they met with to draft their energy plan – an Enron-inspired inquiry – the possibility of even more scandal looms.

THE ROOTS OF ENRON

The reaction of capitalist politicians (particularly those most beholden to Enron) to the scandal is as expected: condemn it and disassociate from it. Even Bush had to complain loudly about his mother-in-law losing a little money in company stock. The reaction of the capitalist class in general is also as could have been expected: detach Enron from the system by painting it as a rogue operation.

The reality is just the opposite. Enron's spectacle is a picture window into capitalism itself. Not only did the company have deep economic and political connections with capitalism's major players, not only is it a product of the system, but all its major characteristics are those of the system as a whole.

On one level, Enron typifies capitalism as it has always existed. When top executives like Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling unload tens of millions in stock while lying to their employees about the health of the organization (and while the workers couldn't unload their shares), that is greed of dramatic proportions. But the knee-jerk reaction of any capitalist firm in a pinch is to screw the workers, through layoffs, cuts in wages, etc. – all the while lying about and/or refusing to disclose company finances. Likewise, financial swindles are hardly new; they have permeated capitalism throughout its history. And the speculative bubble, which helped provide the atmosphere and ammunition for the elaborate schemes



cooked up by Enron's leaders, has been a periodic phenomenon for much of capitalism's time on earth.

But there are features to this crisis that hardly typify the early history of capitalism. The sheer size of Enron's capital dwarfs the crises of yesteryear. Enron's is the largest bankruptcy of a single firm in history, although the savings and loan scandal a decade ago involved greater sums of capital. Moreover, the nature of its deception is truly unique: it was not back-room bribes but the guts of the corporation. Enron was revered for its capitalist savvy, "the GE of the new economy." But as one former executive described this paragon:

Everyone knew that the company was a house of cards and that it was overvalued. I just figured – and I think most people did – that if they were getting away with it now, they will get away with it forever. (*Business Week*, Feb. 11.)

To grasp the full meaning of Enron, we have to go beyond what typifies capitalism in general. A house of cards like Enron arose out of the particular conditions of capitalism in its epoch of decay, which are now deepening.

FICTITIOUS CAPITAL

Karl Marx referred to "fictitious capital" as capital that carries a monetary value exceeding its real underlying value (if any) based on socially necessary labor time. In this magazine and elsewhere we have expanded on his investigation, particularly for understanding this epoch of capitalist decay.

Marx's prime example of fictitious capital is the state debt. Interest must be paid on it, even though the funds taken by the state are not used to produce any surplus value (part of which could cover the interest payments). Another example is income-bearing securities of a capitalist firm; these can be traded as commodities as if they were real capital, but they are just titles of ownership to a share of anticipated profits. Particularly during the expansion phase of each business cycle, over-optimistic expectations of profit can overvalue such shares; hence their value would be partly fictitious.

In the earlier epoch of capitalism, periodic crises would wipe out much of this fictitious capital along with many of its holders, thus deepening the crises. Then, with the purge of this debt, a renewed basis for the expansion of credit would emerge, meshing with other factors for an expansion phase.

But there is another aspect of fictitious capital, residing in the production process itself. When a company introduces new machinery that is more productive than that of its competitors, the value of the competitors' machinery has in effect been lowered. (Marx called this "moral" as opposed to material depreciation.) Yet those competitors cannot simply lower the value of the fixed capital on their books, especially if they are still paying off loans they bought it with originally. Thus a certain fictitious value is created, the difference between the equipment's original cost and its new, lower, value.

Even though the book value of its capital has not been lowered, the firm's competitive position has been weakened. In the "competitive" epoch, these firms tended to be the first to be devalued during the crisis phase of the economic cycle, and their fictitious value would be wiped out. Surviving firms would pick up the pieces in a fire sale and be in better position to expand. Thus, like other aspects of financial capital, this process is in phase with the cyclical nature of bust and boom.

With the growth of monopoly capitalism, the "healing" process of the crisis phase becomes distorted. Many of the firms with outdated capital can maintain the fictitious valuation of their capital through their market domination, financial finagling and the active connivance of the capitalist state. The state allows this not only because of its class connections to the monopolists, but also out of fear of a general economic meltdown that a collapse of the monopolies can bring. Given crises may be postponed under this arrangement – but at the cost of increasing obsolescence of capital, a suppression of the true state of affairs and setting the stage for a greater crisis when it does come.

In the monopoly epoch, the financial and productive aspects of fictitious capital become more entwined, magnified and distorted. Industrial and bank capital more closely merge to form finance capital. One of the prime institutions for fictitious capital – joint stock companies, facilitate this merger while centralizing capital and power in the hands of the "captains of industry" who monopolize their respective sectors.

A prime feature is the huge growth of the financial sector – the stock market, investment banks, insurance firms, etc., along with an army of attendant accountants, lawyers and consultants. Much of this activity is concerned not with actually creating value but with its transfer. It thus constitutes a tremendous drain on the wealth of society, and is made possible only by the siphoning off of surplus value, much of it from the super-exploitation of the imperialized world. Like all capital, it seeks to maximize its value, and it has ways to do this by fictitious means, such as puffing up the stock values.

The more far-sighted elements of the capitalist class recognize that all this can get out of hand and lead to a breakdown in credibility and thus an economic meltdown. Thus, a set of regulations and regulatory institutions has arisen. Over time they have served to tamp down the worst excesses but have not

prevented a vast growth of the fictitious element.

In the boom following the Great Depression and World War II, the financial and fictitious capital greatly expanded, along with government debt, waste production and speculation. In our book, *The Life and Death of Stalinism*, we noted the difference between the actual performance of the economy and the proliferation of paper values, in the U.S. as well as the USSR. The build-up of debt was so great that more capitalist income was coming from interest than from corporate profits. And this was in 1990, before the great speculative bubble of the past decade and the weakening of many of the existing financial safeguards.

The result is a highly overvalued stock market and a leveraged credit system that events like the bursting of the Internet bubble only minimally addressed. There is an increasing obsolescence of capital, a greater proportion of value being eaten through parasitical activity. The danger of a massive international depression is looming.

THE ENRON STORY

Even a glance at the headlines makes clear that Enron is perhaps the greatest example of fictitious capital ever. A closer look at its development further confirms that impression.

Enron started life as the merger of two pipeline companies in the mid-'80's. Even then it exhibited some of the traits that characterized its scandalous later years: a reliance on debt and financial tricks and a willingness to run roughshod over its employees' pension fund (at that time it was raided to buy out an ornery shareholder). But basically it gained a share of surplus value through the hard assets of its pipeline business.

By the beginning of the '90's, Enron was transforming itself into an energy trader while maintaining its pipelines. It set up deals for other energy players and became a middleman in its own right. It bought cheap and sold dear, in part through the deliberate creation of volatile pricing situations. Why be content with a middling operation of ordinary exploitation, when you can make a real killing fleecing customers?

This aspect of the Enron operation became widely admired in the capitalist world – and to a large extent still is. While some of the praise has to do with the glitter of hi-tech marketing techniques, much was based on the fact that Enron was avoiding producing much of anything in favor of playing the role of a major-league parasite. That Enron earned its "new economy" tag this way is an indication of how some of capitalism's most "modern" features are used for decadent purposes.

Enron did expand its "hard assets" in the third world, with pipelines in South America, a water treatment plant in Britain, and power plants across the globe. The most important – and notorious – of the latter was a power plant project in Dabhol, India. In the first private power plant in the country, Enron made a deal with the state government of Maharashtra. But Enron ended up charging so high a price for electricity – twice that of the nearest competitor and seven times the cheapest rate available – that the state government ended up losing less money by simply buying power elsewhere while coughing up \$220 million a year for plant maintenance and administration. The scandal surrounding this rapaciousness included the brutal suppression of local villagers by company thugs. The project was scuttled, but Enron had stolen a bundle.

For its various operations, Enron leaned heavily on the support of the capitalist state. Enron's political connections helped deregulate much of the energy market in the United States, and on terms that gave it the inside track. And it has used both Democratic and Republican administrations and other politicians to strong-arm governments from India to Mozambique and Argentina to sign up Enron for projects.

It has now become questionable whether even Enron's early trading was nearly as profitable as it appeared. Whatever the truth, the company began expanding its trading operations to include commodities from coal to toilet paper. It also became more and more dependent on financial maneuvers to obscure its real state of affairs.

While this has been given a lot of press, the emphasis in the capitalist media has been on its illegal aspects. But far more revealing than Enron's "roguish" behavior is how so much of its hustles were "legitimate" – legal and acceptable, and standard practice in the world of finance capital.

Such practices as disguising loans as trading (as Enron did with J.P. Morgan Chase) is fine in the eyes of the law. Booking profits based on market predictions for a long-term contract is A-OK. Having a consulting firm give a seal of approval to the very deals it is setting up with its client? No problem. Even the notorious "off balance" partnerships, designed in large part to shift debts off the books, are not by themselves disapproved. (Enron, however, stopped abiding by even the minimum restrictions imposed by the semblance of outside partnerships, and moved towards setting up completely dummy partnerships run by its own executives).

TAKE THE MONEY ENRON

Enron's top men used these schemes to enrich themselves, of course, particularly in the case of the partnerships. But a more general aim was to puff up the stock value and secure a better credit rating by making the company look far more profitable than in reality. That such practices are so pervasive is a clear lead on the fictitious underpinnings to so much of imperialist financing. And Enron's stock valuation alone is a classic manual on the decadent trends in finance capital: the use of market dominance, political connections, and command of fictitious means to maximize value, rather than the development of the productive forces.

The major personalities in Enron's rise and fall are hardly accidental figures. They had traits and talents that suitably reflect the nature of the company's development.

Most prominent is George Bush's pal Kenneth Lay, the company's founder and former CEO. Despite his laid-back, above-the-fray image and denials of responsibility, Lay was deeply involved in the finances. His affability in fact was part of his hustle. But his real forte was his political skills. An energy regulator early in his career, Lay gained first-hand knowledge of just how compliant the state is with the bosses' wishes. He would develop into the ultimate political operative. He fervently and financially embraced conservative Republican causes and politicians, most prominently Bush II. But he was pragmatic enough to realize the Democrats would gladly assist his agenda.

Money was tossed far and wide to a variety of candidates and public figures. A special tactic was granting seats on Enron's Board as political rewards, from Wendy Gramm, an energy bureaucrat and wife of Sen. Phil Gramm, to Frank Wisner, the ambassador to India during the first Clinton administration. (The process was reversed in the case of hiring Gen. Thomas White and having him later installed as the current Secretary of the Army.) Gramm was rewarded for setting policies as head of the federal Commodities Futures Trading Commission that enabled Enron to manipulate the California electricity market in 2000 and 2001.

Lay was amply rewarded for his efforts by energy deregulation and fervent government backing of foreign projects. Enron virtually wrote much of the Bush Administration's energy plan, and would have undoubtedly done more if Bush was not also beholden to other capitalists as well.

Also prominent in Enron's story was Jeff Skilling. A financial whiz kid, Skilling was ably disposed to view the business as a series of financial hustles. He was the architect of Enron's tran-

sition to a "new economy" energy parasite, and used this identity to rise to the position of CEO early last year. He was also largely responsible for promoting a corporate culture that was cut-throat and paranoid even by capitalist standards.

Andrew Fastow brought less to the table than the others. But he had a penchant for hustles of all stripes, and an imaginative way with financial numbers. These would enable him to lead the development of over a thousand outside partnerships, and eventually make him the Chief Financial Officer.

Even while Enron and its officers were getting all kinds of good hype in capitalist circles, the underlying reality was that by the turn of the century the company was in a shambles. Competition had cut into some of its markets, and some important investments, like in telecommunications, had lost them billions. The debts, although swept under the rug, were nonetheless there, and mounting.

In fact, important sections of capitalists were aware of some or most of Enron's problems prior to its public crash. Veba, a German energy firm, broke off merger talks when auditors informed it of horrendous debt levels and "aggressive accounting practices." Wall Street short-sellers, who specialize in making money from stock slides, were warning of Enron's weaknesses. And there were the highbrow investors who were given a closer look at Enron's finances even as other shareholders were being duped.

A tip-off came a year ago, when Skilling began unloading millions of dollars of his stock. By the time he resigned as CEO in August after only 6 months, it was publicly clear something was terribly amiss. With the announcements in October of a \$638 million loss and another shortfall of \$1.2 billion, things were in free fall. When a rival broke off merger talks, bankruptcy was declared and the stock vaporized.

CAPITALISM BETRAYED?

The final weeks were instructive. The losses in stock valuation far exceeded the reported losses in earnings. But the stock prices had been hopelessly puffed up to begin with. Like a pricked balloon, a puncture released a mass of hot air and left a shriveled skin.

The Enron mess has forced the ruling class into a damage-control mode. In addition to the economic trouble, U.S. imperialism has been compromised. Its preachings to third-world rulers about the virtues of "transparency" and "rule of law" – code words for the encroachment of American-based firms – were pussed on by one of the U.S.'s premier companies. Worse, the greed, callousness and stupidity of Lay & Co. have been very bad publicity for capitalism, not what is needed when support is sought for military adventures abroad and cuts in living standards and services at home.

Of course, for individual capitals involved in the scandal, damage control has meant a scramble to grab whatever can be grabbed and dumping any hot potatoes on somebody else. Charges, denials, maneuvers and lawsuits are flying. But there has also been the more general response. On the propaganda level, all major factions of the ruling class agree on some basic points. One is to detach Enron from capitalism: to say that the problem is not the system, but roguish elements like Lay and Skilling who abuse it. Bourgeois politicians and the media have piled on Enron, calling Congressional hearings, digging up dirt and loudly condemning what's already known. (Even the *National Enquirer* got into the act, making claims – apparently true – about escapades by top Enron executives in Houston strip joints.) In what is surely a stretching of the bounds of irony, financier Felix Rohatyn called Enron "a betrayal of capitalism."

An associated point is the notion that the system really doesn't need to be fixed. But there is agreement that some tinkering must be done. The Republican view is generally that this be kept to an

absolute minimum. Bush's point-man in all this is Harvey Pitt, the head of the Securities and Exchange Commission – a darling of the accounting giants who figured hugely in promoting the deregulation of the last decade. He is for tightening up on some of the disclosure rules but staunchly opposes any rollback of those deregulatory measures that have produced some of the worst extremes. The Democrats are more willing to impose more regulations but nothing of much substance.

Business Week (April 1) cynically but accurately observed: "In nearly every scandal of the past 100 years, from Teapot Dome to insider trading, the capital engages in a ritual of outrage, but produces little legislated reform." The Andersen firm has been indicted, and some people there and at Enron may see jail time. But actually changing much is another matter. Politicians of both parties are more interested in creating an impression that things are getting done. The emphasis on image is a bit like the workings of the fictitious capital it is attempting to address. As one accounting advocate argued in regard to whatever does get passed: "All this legislation will be is an invitation for consultants and accountants to figure out a way around it, and we will. That's what we're paid to do." (*Newsweek*, Feb. 18.)

The capitalist general staff, in other words, lacks the will to try something substantive to help the system save itself from itself. (Not that that could be done anyway.) There is an awareness of the danger of a complete meltdown of the stock markets, credit system and the economy itself, if valuations become so fictitious they lose all credibility. But the "financial community" is a decisive segment of the ruling class and of both major capitalist parties and will not allow for any important reversal of the way they have played their game.

Much less can the government be expected to act in the interests of the masses. After all, what debate between the Democrats and Republicans that is occurring is over the best way to exploit the masses and divide the spoils.

For those workers most directly affected by the scandal, the compensation will be minimal, if that. Unlike in the case of the World Trade Center victims, where the government was building war support, there will be no emergency aid for laid-off Enron workers. A struggle to claim money for shareholders including Enron workers and public employee pensions is in the courts. But the only sure thing there is that the lawyers will collect their fees. (In fact, the government indictment of Andersen makes it less likely that that source of damages will be tapped.)

More generally, the Democrats are trying to use Enron as leverage to advance some very diluted form of shareholder protection – incentives to diversify stocks in 401(k)s – and to blunt the most excessive efforts of the Republicans to turn Social Security over to Wall Street. Nothing serious is being done to contain the challenges, real and potential, to the limited and uneven forms of retirement income the masses have. Clearly, the most demonstrative form of "support" for affected workers from the bourgeois politicians has been their very public crocodile tears.

The Enron spectacle is not likely by itself to radically transform the landscape of the class struggle in the U.S. While the thousands of affected workers are thousands too many, they are still a small and relatively privileged proportion of the class. Moreover, the workers already had a high degree of cynicism about the motives and practices of corporations, banks and politicians: the news of Enron was hardly a total shock.

Nonetheless, this spectacle will not easily be forgotten. Enron has quickly become a popularly recognized symbol for not simply capitalist greed, but some of the worst aspects of modern capitalism and the direction it is heading in. Moreover, given the depths of the fiasco, the continuing economic repercussions and ongoing investigations, its impact has not been played out.

Revolutionists cannot by themselves alter the general consciousness of our class. But we can take advantage of the capitalists' mess to help drive home to advanced workers the fact that our politics represent the true interests of our class. Some examples:

On a popular level, we can emphasize the very real links between the Enron leaders and the politicians of both parties who take their money, share friendships, even swap positions. And then make the point that it is these same politicians who carry out the imperialist "war on terrorism" and attacks on the masses at home.

Enron has raised particular questions of further attacks on past gains regarding income in retirement and old age. We defend Social Security and existing pension rights against their wholesale trashing by Wall Street gamblers. But we do so by openly saying that the existing rights are cruelly inadequate and sharply slanted towards the more privileged workers. And we oppose the Democrats who strut as champions of Social Security and pension rights but who will ultimately abandon even these limited measures.

More generally, we can draw the lessons of the debacle by framing it as a dress rehearsal for the enormous crises – and attacks on the masses – that will be coming. The burst balloon of fictitious capital in this case is an indication of a far greater venting to come. And while that fictitious capital is at once a mask, symbol and contributing cause to the growing international crisis, it is subordinate to the ultimate cause of crises in our time, capitalist ownership and relations in a world of socialized production – and a working class with the potential to rule. The best thing that could come out of the Enron story is the winning of more workers and allies to see the necessity of a proletarian party, socialist revolution, and the rule of the working class. ●

Letter

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ON THE CURRENT PHASE OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

In response to your question about our characterization of the current phase of the international class struggle, we understand that we find ourselves in a pre-revolutionary phase, of the preparation of the vanguard. The struggles which are developing the working class all over the world are of a defensive character and this is happening basically because of the absence of an internationalist political leadership which will lead the proletariat in its confrontation against the bourgeoisie. Of course, the resistance of the exploited masses and the fact that they have not been physically crushed by the bourgeoisie means this has not been converted into a counterrevolutionary period, in spite of the repeated defeats suffered by the working class.

A QUESTION

Accepting that the USSR was a bourgeois state since before the Second World War, then this war was an inter-bourgeois war. Do you think of it this way? From this would it have followed that the Fourth International should have raised the banner of revolutionary defeatism also in the USSR? Do you agree on this with the Bordigaists?

I hope that my short commentary will serve to deepen the debate between us. It has made me reflect on a series of questions which I had once assumed axiomatically, which is no small thing. Probably in the future it will enable us to gain more important results, in particular to join together in recuperating the patrimony of the working class, the six fundamentals of Marxism which Sy has said were revised by the centrist leaders of the Fourth International. ●

Empire

continued from page 1

This enabled the ruling class to step up its war at home against the workers, as well as its war abroad. The "Vietnam syndrome," which weakened Pentagon attempts to send ground troops into war scenes abroad, has been momentarily offset.

Thus the U.S. ruling class was able to advance its wet dreams of imperial world domination. Since World War II, America has been the most powerful imperialist state, but it still had to seriously adjust its aims to the interests of other states as well as to threats of revolution around the world. With the collapse of the Soviet empire, the U.S. became the sole superpower. With the 1991 Gulf War, Bush I declared his "New World Order" after crushing Iraq, but was then forced to leave Saddam Hussein in power to avoid the far greater evil, a successful uprising by Kurdish workers. Under Bush I, White House diplomacy still had to heavily cater to West European and other interests. Now Osama bin Laden (or whichever clerical reactionary it was) has handed Bush II an unprecedented opportunity. Bush's declaration of "endless war" told one and all that the U.S. reserved the right to wield its power anywhere it sees fit. Its goal is a new New World Order, ruled by an unstoppable U.S. imperialism, with "limited sovereignty" for everyone else.

And it almost worked. But the Palestinian masses' heroic resistance to Israel's latest war of devastation suddenly forced the U.S. to postpone its renewed war on Iraq. As we write, the uprising has inspired millions across the world to protest the U.S.-armed Israeli terror. Bush had ignored squeaks of complaint from his imperialist allies and his tools, the Middle Eastern Arab rulers. The mass struggle alone forced Bush to dim the green light he had given Sharon's attack. (See the article on page 48.)

It was quickly followed by the working-class uprising in Venezuela that restored Hugo Chávez to power over a U.S.-backed coup. Chávez's eagerness to appease imperialism in no way diminishes that at bottom it was once again the masses who blocked the will of the mighty American new global order.

WHY WAR AND WAR DRUMS

The White House certainly didn't want the September 11 attack. God's own superpower doesn't relish getting slapped in the face in front of the whole world – especially by what it regards as a bunch of cave-dwelling nuts. But the results were a godsend. The war drive has not been confined to Bush and the Republicans; aside from a few minor self-serving criticisms, the Democratic warmongers have been just as rabid. Bush will now be able to spend more billions to build up the already massive military establishment through a new anti-missile "defense," a "more usable" nuclear weapons system and a bigger conventional arms program. An added benefit of the "Attack on America" is that now the U.S. government has the popular backing it can use to secure additional oil and gas pipelines overseas.

But the U.S. rulers' main enemy is not Al Qaeda terror. It is

the constantly regenerating mass struggle of the workers and oppressed people around the world. That growing struggle is the major threat to the profits of imperialist "globalization," and the enforced stability that exploitation demands.

However, it is not only the masses that have to be intimidated. Imperialism, the modern monopoly capitalism of this epoch, is an inherently divided war-of-all-against-all system. The current American war clamor promises an ongoing military confrontation at least with Al Qaeda and "the axis of evil" – Iraq, Iran and North Korea. As well, Washington's "Nuclear Posture Review" matter of factly mulls over a threat of atomic war against not only those three but also Russia and China. The cold-blooded arrogance is breathtaking, and it is meant to be.

It is also aimed at cowing America's imperialist allies and other "friendly" powers, who are also to one degree or another its economic competitors and potential military opponents. Finally, the war drums are intended to intimidate imperialism's regional comprador pawns in the "third world," who are always a threat to get out of hand in promoting their own interests at the expense of their masters. After all, renegade thugs like Saddam Hussein, Slobodan Milosevic, Manuel Noriega, bin Laden and the Taliban were all once nurtured by Washington.

The U.S. colossus is not only the greatest power in the neo-colonial world but is also vastly stronger militarily than the European and Japanese imperialists, and it is predominant economically. The other imperialists resent the U.S. leash but must accept U.S. leadership if order is to be maintained. The White House sees serious problems rocking its world order, but no power can yet challenge its imperial sway. Therefore Bush believes that, within certain limits, he has the right to ride roughshod over any and all rival interests. And he gets indignant when his authority is challenged.

BUSH: A PASSIONATE OPPORTUNIST

The media may have re-invented George W. Bush in the light of capitalism's needs after Sept. 11, but in essence he remains the same politician he was before. The numerous stumbling blocks inherent in the U.S. political process insure that anyone who achieves the presidency has the lofty personal traits that fit him for the highest office in the land: he must be an opportunist, a liar, a manipulator and a hypocrite. He has to be capable of sending thousands of innocent people to their deaths without a moment's hesitation. Bush, like Clinton and so many others before him, has all these job qualifications in full.

Clinton was smart and Bush is not. But, like Clinton, Bush has been a very successful opportunist. He cashed in on his inheritance, position and dynastic name without embarrassment. He labeled himself a "compassionate conservative" – that is, all things to all people. At a recent dinner in Washington, Bush delivered a tell-tale gibe at his rival presidential hopeful, Democratic Senator Tom Daschle, "What are you going to run on, Tom? Patient's bill of rights? I'm for it. Enron? I'm against it. Campaign reform? I'll sign it. Child care? Tom, I'm gonna expand child care to those who don't even have children." That is, he'll adopt almost any stance in order to maintain power.

Bush's opportunism does not mean that he and his team are not committed to certain specific material interests; most notably in the oil and energy industries. These ties generate a particular outlook on how to carry out the demands of U.S. capitalism as a whole. Bush represents the conservative wing of mainstream imperialist capitalism. As the commander-in-chief of the "executive committee of the ruling class," he has a narrower vision of its interests than did Clinton. While the gap between them is not huge, there is no doubt that Bush's instincts are more conservative and dependent on a more conservative political base of support.

The terrorist attacks enabled Bush to cater to the right-wing core of his petty-bourgeois voting base while at the same time winning support from large sections of his more moderate and

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even liberal opponents. His bellicose tactics abroad have meshed with frontal assaults on civil liberties, immigrant rights, racial gains and workers' benefits at home. Bin Laden gave the U.S. bourgeoisie as a whole the chance to take a giant step to the right – a direction in which it had already been moving.

The deepening economic crisis of world capitalism is forcing its way to the surface of political events. The U.S. can no longer benefit from the downturn abroad, as it did in the '90's. Despite passing ups and downs, the overall economic trajectory is downward. In response, the crisis drives the bourgeoisie everywhere to intensify its exploitation of the working class at home and abroad. The rival imperialists are increasingly forced to scrap over the diminishing pie. Inescapably, the greater exploitation forces the masses to resist. The system is driving the American ruling class to try to carry out its dream of iron world rule even further, lest it, and imperialism as whole, fall to revolution and/or World War III.

Bush II will face further dramatic turning points at home and overseas. His opportunism could allow him to move in new directions to preserve the system. After all, with the advent of the Great Depression of the '30's, even the Republican Herbert Hoover pushed what later became known as New Deal welfare-state measures. "Anti-war" presidents like Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt became ardent warmongers. In contrast, Bush's father wasn't flexible enough when it counted. He enjoyed high popularity when posing as a tough guy during his war against Iraq in 1991. But the 1992 verdict clearing the cops who battered Rodney King triggered a massive rebellion in Los Angeles. The U.S. ruling class needed a president who could appear concerned about injustice and offer a few phony reforms; Bush was too inflexible, fanning the flames of struggle with thinly-veiled racist rhetoric about the war on crime and the need for tough policing. That's why the bourgeoisie turned to the two-faced and slicker Bill Clinton.

Clinton got away with what Republicans would have had far greater difficulty in doing. He used his liberal image to erode past gains by workers and Black people. But he couldn't dramatically change his rudderless foreign policy, and that set up Bush II to appear more decisive. Clinton paved the way for Bush's overt drive to the right. However, Bush will soon face far greater challenges; as the economic crisis deepens, despite the temporary ups and downs, patriotic fervor will inevitably wear off. Whether his opportunism will be supple enough cannot yet be predicted.

BUSH VS. CLINTON ABROAD

In the face of an explosive world, the Clinton administration tried not to rock too many boats. But when the inevitable explosions occurred, it lashed out militarily. This approach was sometimes effective, as with the murderous bombing of Serbia. Often it was ineffective: economic sanctions against Iraq caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi workers and poor, and air strikes continued to hit Iraq's military, but these attacks had no success at toppling Saddam Hussein from power. The Somali invasion, and the bombing of Afghanistan and a Sudanese factory in order to hammer bin Laden after the African embassy bombings, were failures.

During his campaign, Bush was critical of Clinton's armed interventions abroad. Bush's own first major foreign policy blow, the bombing of Iraq in February 2001 was designed to show that he too was tough. Yet the bombing also covered a reduction of the economic sanctions, a measure taken to placate Arab governments, Russia and the European powers. Although the early Bush administration was unsure about the scope of foreign interventions, it signaled less willingness to take on burdens that were not in America's immediate interest. It promised no more risky "nation-building" of collapsed states abroad.

Bush carried on Clinton's eastward expansion of NATO, increasing the pressure on Russia. Indeed, Bush made a provoc-

ative show of U.S. strength against Russia by threatening to junk the Cold War anti-ballistic missile accords, upstaging the tentative Russian-Chinese defensive alignment against further U.S. impositions. The Kremlin at first complained loudly. But symbolic of the Russian ruling class's recognition that it is too weak to resist U.S. power, President Putin quickly met with Bush and echoed his assertion that the two enjoyed a special and personal rapport.

A major shift in Bush's foreign policy took place after the Sept. 11 attacks, but it was not a complete turnaround. Liberal journalists say that the initial policy was "go it alone" – the assertion of narrow U.S. interests and a show of little regard for the views and needs of other powers. Now, the pundits say, Bush has shifted to building mutually beneficial alliances and emphasizes constructing a broad coalition of forces abroad. To a degree such a shift has occurred, but the basic line remains constant. Both policies have in common the single goal of maximizing the dominance of American interests over those of its friends, rivals and minions. That has always been true, but now with Bush, as with the proverbial bull in the china shop, it is far more aggressive and far-reaching.

The culture of the oil-based capitalists tends to be more narrow-minded and to favor a more heavy-handed militarism. In contrast to the "anti-big government" conservatives, they appreciate what their control over the federal regulatory agencies can do. They cherish federal subsidies. They also know the value of a strong U.S. military establishment in protecting overseas installations from superexploited workers. A strong military threat protects vulnerable pipelines, wells and bought-and-paid-for puppet governments abroad. Not by accident, the new U.S. military bases in Afghanistan are being placed along the proposed pipeline routes connecting Caspian oil to Pakistani ports.

POST-SEPT. 11 FOREIGN POLICY

Both before and after Sept. 11, Bush let everyone else know that Washington is kingpin and has the ability to enforce that status. Sept. 11 enabled him to overcome barriers that inhibited his exercise of dominant power. He made it clear that he was going to use the iron fist – before he suddenly ran into the mass upsurge he hasn't yet faced at home.

- He proclaimed a campaign against his "axis of evil" – Iraq, Iran and North Korea. It evoked bleats of protest but no concrete counteractions by other imperialist powers or local potentates. Outside of Tony Blair and Ariel Sharon, they all grind their teeth, but that is it. Bush labeled Iraq, Iran and North Korea as demon states in order to continue a long-term military buildup at home and help the Republicans win coming elections. However, such is the power of the U.S. that President Khatami of Iran made renewed overtures to Bush despite his own weakened position and the opposition of the powerful clerics. The North Koreans, out of weakness, also had to deal with South Korea again. Bush's threat also served notice on Seoul that it had been rash to side with Moscow's initial objections to Washington's missile stance. And clearly Saddam Hussein took the U.S. war threat seriously enough to make concessions he didn't contemplate before.

- Bush dispatched "anti-terrorist advisors" (shades of the early

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days of the Vietnam war) to the Philippines and the former Soviet republic of Georgia, with more slated to go elsewhere.

● In Afghanistan, the U.S. put an American pawn in power, and the West European imperialists have been kept on a short leash. The U.S. has made General Pervez Musharraf's government in Pakistan practically a colonial possession. Further, it has gained enormous clout in the former Soviet Central Asian republics, important because of their strategic location and energy resources.

● Bush was able to dispose of rightist and leftist objections in the U.S. to dealing with the Chinese Stalinists and their repressive regime. The Chinese rulers, who used to kick up a fuss over every U.S.-provoked incident, began to act circumspectly in the face of naked U.S. power. U.S. support for Pakistan was welcomed, given Beijing's desire to offset India's growing friendship overtures to Washington. As well, the U.S. backed Beijing's crackdown against struggles by the Muslim Uighur people of western China.

● Bush ditched official U.S. criticism of the Russian bloodbath in Chechnya. He swung Putin into line on Afghanistan and other crucial questions; Moscow came to accept even NATO's advances into East Europe and the former Soviet Union. Washington even used Russia as a counterweight to West European power within NATO itself.

● The Afghan war enabled the U.S. to utilize NATO again and thereby expose the European Union's own planned armed striking force as illusory. NATO acted as the U.S. wanted, and outside of NATO, each West European government acted individually rather than in EU concert. Washington uses NATO to counteract any independent assertion of power by European states in order to contain the long-term threat of a rival Europe dominated by German imperialism.

Signs of reawakening militancy in the West European workers' movement are disturbing the European powers – at a time when the European bourgeoisie must step up its attack on the workers in order to compete with the U.S.'s advancing trade-war tactics. Bush's latest step, raising protective tariff rates for steel imports, was a brazen challenge to the weakening European economies. Bush has made life difficult for the U.S.'s rivals, who are being forced to grudgingly accept its blows.

● Washington re-emphasized its economic and political power in Latin America. After the recent class explosions in Ecuador and Bolivia, the rebellion by the working class and the middle strata against the World Bank and the IMF in Argentina is particularly alarming, together with the inability of the Colombian government to crush its rebels. No wonder various Latin governments are yearning for more U.S. support. And no wonder that the CIA tried to topple the maverick nationalist Chávez regime in Venezuela for more dependable business and military pawns.

Then almighty American imperialism was stunned by the rising of the Palestinian people in defiance of the U.S.-backed Israeli blitzkrieg. Mass public rage against American and Israeli imperialism swept the Arab countries and spread around the world. Urban Arab workers went onto the streets in force to protest. Bush's throne was suddenly rocked. He had to back Sharon's echo of his own phony "war on terrorism," while recognizing that the consequences of the bloody assault could only further undermine American dominance.

MIDDLE EAST EXPLOSIONS

Before the Arab masses rebelled, Bush had blandly humiliated the Middle Eastern rulers. They had been happy to serve Washington as long as the U.S. maintained its phony diplomatic evenhandedness over Palestine. Sept. 11 not only lined Bush up squarely behind the war criminal Sharon but also led him to threaten to invade Iraq. The most important of the regional potentates, the Saudi and Egyptian rulers, had to come to Washington to kneel at the emperor's throne and pledge their fealty. Arab leaders had also been forced to promise normal

relations with Israel in exchange for pulling out of the West Bank. Ignominiously, they were forced to openly compromise on Jerusalem and the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland. Only after the Israeli attack met with mass protests did the Arab regimes make gentle criticisms of U.S. policy.

When millions took to the streets in March and April, Bush sputtered fitfully. He had to temper his endorsement of Israel's terror and back off his immediate threats about war against Iraq. But he didn't slap Sharon's wrist too hard, and he continues to place the major blame for the fighting on Israel's victims. He also knew that Israel has its own agenda and won't simply take orders.

At the start of the diplomatic dance, the *New York Times* quoted an Administration official:

The President is facing a series of bad choices unlike any he's confronted since Sept. 11. . . . "There's a lot that is still undecided here, and perhaps that's why our messages have seemed, well, less than crisp." (April 1.)

A week later, the *Times* noted that Bush was "testy" and "brusque" when Sharon did not call off his war dogs.

For the first time Mr. Bush has issued commands that he believes sovereign nations or leaders must obey immediately, for their own good. Any prolonged acts of defiance of the president would call American influence into question. (April 8.)

Having left Sharon to bash the Palestinians, Bush was then forced to try to halt the resistance. He sent Secretary of State Colin Powell to the Middle East, to hurry up Sharon's murderous West Bank occupation in order to gain a cease-fire to calm the regional masses. Bush criticized both Sharon and Arafat, but it was obvious to the masses in the Arab and other Muslim countries that in reality the U.S. supports Israel, its imperialist junior partner and regional pit bull. No wonder the protesters in Arab countries are targeting the U.S. as much as Israel.

Fear of Arab upheaval is so real in ruling-class circles that Arab leaders felt compelled to put on a show of opposition to the U.S., and the latter was forced to accept such snubs as necessary to avoid greater explosions. Thus Arafat, for example, felt compelled to refuse Powell's truce proposals. And, of all the unlikely candidates to step out of line with the U.S., Egyptian President Mubarak, the infamous servant of U.S. interests, actually had to publicly snub the American Secretary of State by not meeting with him during his visit to Egypt!

THE WAR AT HOME

Bush's foreign policy is not determined only by international considerations. As with any administration, its ventures abroad are heavily impacted by domestic economic and political needs. Washington's overt pro-Israel stance was no doubt deeply affected by the Republican's desire to maximize electoral contributions from the pro-Zionist wing of Wall Street. As well, the chance to win a big section of the Jewish vote in important states (New York, New Jersey, California, Florida, etc.) didn't escape Bush's notice. And pro-Zionist war policies are highly welcomed by the Christian fundamentalists who are a significant portion of Bush's core following.

An inescapable attribute of the on-going wars on "evil" is its time-release factor. The likelihood of future military adventures and the associated boosts in patriotism and administration popularity is a juicy benefit for Bush & Co.

In any case, the predominant thrust of Bush's foreign policy is designed to maximize exploitation of workers abroad in order to preserve the capitalist system. The domestic patriotic campaigns that the war ventures deliver not only build electoral support but also offset the still deep unrest among hard-pressed workers in the U.S.

In the Winter 2002 *Proletarian Revolution Supplement*, we detailed the series of blows that the American working class has received in the wake of the WTC/Pentagon attack. We compared this assault with massive infusions of capital given to the giant

corporations. We said, "September 11 became the excuse for laying off hundreds of thousands of workers, slashing social service programs and opening the budgetary trough for a renewed feeding frenzy by capitalist pigs." The huge new commitment to massive military spending will over the years pour billions more dollars into guaranteed profits for an already-bloated industry.

Bush & Co. are now boasting that the U.S. is pulling out of the recession. It may be true that the economy is momentarily doing better – unfortunately, workers are not. In fact, persistent unemployment, underemployment and the growing gap between working-class and ruling-class incomes is one crucial reason for the so-far slight upturn.

Recessions and depressions are terrible experiences for the working class, and even for the less secure sections of the capitalist class. But they are necessary correctives for the survival of the capitalist system, and they work to the benefit of the top-dog bourgeoisie. The loss of jobs suffered as a result of the recession and the added impact of Sept. 11-related layoffs added to the growth of the long-term reserve army of the unemployed, which, through competition with employed workers, serves as a constant downward pressure on wages and a threat to the still employed workers.

In spite of the current uptick in the U.S., the world economy is still staggering under a more fundamental condition of over-production which led to the East Asian crisis of 1997 and will not simply go away. (See our pamphlet, *The Specter of Economic Collapse*.) The U.S. cannot long benefit from the depressed conditions abroad as it has done before. That is why the imperialists are ravenously looting the world for all they can immediately grab. The layoffs and cutbacks, and the subsidies taken from the public till, are also ways to deepen long-term exploitation at home.

In racist America, the bourgeoisie has learned to target first the most vulnerable sections of the working class, in order to weaken the whole. The only difference now is that the brunt of the attack is borne not just by American Black workers but by the increasingly significant section of the U.S. working class made up of immigrant workers. They have been the prime victims of the post-Sept. 11 backlash. (See page 23.) For the moment, many Black and Latino workers feel part of "America under Attack" and thus, like their white counterparts, accept racist profiling of Middle Eastern and Central Asian immigrants. The reality of racism and the persistence of police brutality are already beginning to undermine that false consciousness.

The Vietnam War and the Gulf War were both undertaken with an eye to maintaining "guns and butter," not risking cutting living standards to wage war. The ruling class then feared that severe cutbacks would trigger social explosions when wartime patriotism inevitably declined. Now it is "guns versus butter." The terrorist attacks not only blunted the "Vietnam syndrome" but enabled the bourgeoisie to speed up its war on the proletariat at home under the cover of the war abroad. By the time the patriotic ardor declines, they hope that the workers will be too beaten down and bled dry to launch a mass fightback.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW "EVIL"

During the Cold War, Soviet-based Stalinism helped prop up the world system of imperialism by subverting and helping to contain working-class and national liberation revolutions. But the stop-gap Stalinist system of barely controlled industrial anarchy was a weak link that faced disaster when the post-war boom ended and the world capitalist downturn deepened.

This magazine was alone on the far left in pointing out that the Stalinist statified capitalist societies were economically backward and destined for crisis. We foresaw that they would devolve toward traditional capitalist market forms so as to more intensively exploit the proletariat. We also observed that the weakness of Stalinism meant that a future World War III was far more likely to

be a conflict between the rival imperialisms of Germany, Japan and the U.S., in some as yet undetermined combination, rather than between Russia and the U.S.-led bloc. Russia and China would become bones of contention or possible junior allies.

Henry Kissinger and other imperialist sages used to bemoan the end of the Cold War because of its stabilizing effect on international and domestic politics. They recognized that while the rivalry between the USSR and the West was real, it also served to preserve the imperialist system as a whole. Without the semi-conscious, choreographed minuet between Washington and Moscow framing international rivalries, anything could happen. The Cold War had been a special version of the traditional "balance of power," which had often postponed wars in the past and allowed imperialism to envelop the world.

When Stalinism collapsed, the lack of a rival threat to Western imperialism loosened the bonds that held the system together. U.S. foreign policy desperately searched for a unifying theme, a New World Order. It needed a compelling reason to both force competing rival imperialists to submit to Washington's superior power and straitjacket the class struggle at home. Clearly, imperialism couldn't openly target the masses as the enemy. To illustrate its problem, it maintained NATO as a force to restrain moves by West European (predominantly German) states toward independent assertions of their interests and power and to act as an overall stabilizer. But in the absence of a Russian threat, NATO lacked a publicly believable purpose and therefore led to restiveness in the West and strained relations with Moscow.

The post-Cold War period indeed proved unstable. With the demise of counterrevolutionary Stalinist power (and in the absence of a genuinely revolutionary communist leadership), workers' anger was often diverted by nationalist misleaders into fratricidal wars. As the economic crisis deepened, nations began tearing themselves apart and ethnic conflicts heightened. Regional pawns like Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Milosevic in Serbia initiated confrontations for their own benefit. In the "third world," many among the desperate peasants and urban poor now looked to religious obscurantists, authoritarian capitalists to their marrow, for leadership against the imperialist oppressors. The U.S. was increasingly drawn into bloody battles abroad to maintain stability in an inherently destabilizing world.

At home, given the absence of any foreign power that could be pictured as a serious threat, waves of patriotism were short-lived and memories of Vietnam hampered foreign adventures needed to strengthen imperialism. The lack of a credible threat also prevented the federal government from funneling more massive funds to the military.

BUSH'S EMPIRE

Even before the Soviet downfall, Ronald Reagan had begun talking of the menace of "terrorism" as a growing evil. We pointed out that Moscow's decline made necessary a new all-encompassing enemy. (See "The Method in Reagan's Madness, *PR* 26.) In this light, Osama bin Laden was indeed a blessing for George Bush II. National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice had written in 2000 that "the United States has found it exceedingly difficult to define its 'national interest' in the absence of Soviet power." Today she says, "I think the difficulty has passed in defining a role. . . . September 11th was one of those great earthquakes that clarify and sharpen. Events are in much sharper relief." (*New Yorker*, April 1.)

But religious terrorism, via even the Sept. 11 carnage, is not enough to justify a massive military build-up and permanent war. Bush needs a genuine state power as an enemy to focus on. Hence the "axis of evil" rhetoric aimed at countries which could conceivably develop nuclear bombs.

Before Palestine and Venezuela slowed them down, Bush's triumphs triggered a wave of accolades to the new American empire in the bourgeois press. The *New York Times* on March 31

cited the "consensus of some of the nation's most notable commentators and scholars" that the U.S. has achieved a world-historical level of economic, military and cultural dominance.

"People are now coming out of the closet on the world empire," said the conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer. **"The fact is no country has been as dominant culturally, economically, technologically and militarily in the history of the world since the Roman Empire."**

Americans are used to being told – typically by resentful foreigners – that they're imperialists. But lately some of the nation's own eminent thinkers are embracing the idea. More astonishing, they are using the term with approval. From the isolationist right to the imperialist-bashing left, a growing number of experts are issuing stirring paeans to American empire.

The new "New Order" is reborn as the "New Rome." The underlying idea is to lock the U.S.'s imperialist rivals into support for the U.S.'s added new "imperial" role: but it won't be that simple. First of all, the "axis of evil" of three small powers is nowhere as intimidating as a Soviet Union with a vast land army and nuclear arms comparable to America's. The mass protests against Israel and the U.S. in Europe as well as the Muslim world – at the first sign of an all-out imperialist invasion – show that the masses even in the imperialist countries do not accept their assigned role. And given the world economic trajectory, far greater storm clouds are on the horizon.

A NEW IMPERIALIST RIVALRY?

Workers in the U.S., even though most have accepted the "Attack on America" scenario, are increasingly questioning imperialist foreign policy. In Afghanistan, they see the warlords and mass misery once again ripping the country apart. And despite the media's depiction of Israel as the innocent victim of fanatical Palestinians, there is a growing conviction that the Zionists are responsible for fomenting much of the terror. Unfortunately, only a small number of workers see the role of U.S. imperialism as the fundamental instigator. But as revelations pile up, that too will be questioned.

The domestic scene will create more problems. Workers know that Bush is spearheading attacks on social security, Medicare/Medicaid and a host of other past gains. The connection between Bush and Enron – with its high-profile record of screwing its own workers and everyone else – is also widely known. Even in the unlikely event that there are no other major scandals, the economy in this period cannot sustain the "American dream" that was possible in the post-World War II era. In the post-war boom, a huge new middle class developed, in addition to the expanded labor aristocracy, with a deep loyalty to the system. Now the middle layers are endangered, the labor aristocracy is declining and the attack on workers can only grow. Below the present patriotic surface, suspicion and unease already run deep.

It is crucial to understand that a now significant portion of the U.S. working class is immigrant and sizably composed of people of color. As the attack on immigrants deepens with the economic crisis, their defensive struggles will inevitably grow.

Bush is a "one issue" president: his popularity stems solely from the "war on terrorism." But this issue cannot provide the deep-seated long-term patriotic rallying to the colors that enemies like the World War II Axis or the Cold War USSR did. The U.S. ruling class needs a real enemy if it is going to lock allies and masses into the kind of hegemony it craves. That awaits a rearmed and hostile Germany and/or Japan, allied with Russia and/or China.

It is not a conscious policy of the U.S. to create an enemy out of Germany or Japan. To the contrary, the would-be Emperor Bush wants very much to keep them tame and dependent allies in his quest for a sole world dominance. But Bush's new "New World Order" is doomed. As the crisis deepens, capitalism's inherent rivalries will force a new clash of powers into existence. An actual

balance of power between strong rivals temporarily deters wars; but, its very existence denotes the fact that world war will come if not prevented by revolutions.

Unseen on the surface, the coming imperial clash already exists beneath the surface of diplomatic and trade maneuvers. For example, Bush's recent move to raise steel import tariffs heated up the trade rivalry between Europe and the U.S. Such measures by the imperialists on all sides can only spiral upwards. Not only do they heighten the potential for war but they immediately put downward pressure on wages and jobs everywhere.

A reawakened patriotism enlisted under the banner of a fight against major imperialist powers would aim at setting back the coming class struggle. It will be accompanied by a whipping up of racist and anti-immigrant attacks and a resurgence of a real fascist movement – not just the right-wing establishment views of politicians like Bush – but the attempt to crush unions, the launching of mass deportations, the move toward racist genocide and an enormous lurch toward imperialist war. That is the inevitable drive of capitalism in our epoch, and if humanity is to survive it must be prevented at all costs.

A capitulatory working-class leadership like that of the present union bureaucracy is the deadly enemy of the fight for socialist revolution, the only answer to imperialist attacks on the masses of the U.S. and the world. Revolutionaries must be committed to engage in every struggle with the open intention of trying to convince fellow workers of the need to throw out treacherous misleaders and work to rebuild the revolutionary leadership our class needs.

The working class masses constantly rise up looking for leadership. In recent decades, they have been just as constantly betrayed by the middle-class intelligentsia "progressives" around the world. The decline of the middle strata points the way for renewal. We must lead ourselves! Our struggle is regenerating with the demise of Stalinism and social democracy. There is only one way to prevent the further horrors of capitalism: through the re-creation of the authentic working-class communist revolutionary party here and in every country, sections of the re-created Fourth International. The working-class vanguard party is the only hope that humanity has to crush Bush and his bloody nightmare dreams of empire. ●

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF STALINISM

A Resurrection of Marxist Theory
by Walter Daum

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

"A thoughtful, and indeed in many ways, an ideologically exciting book. Whether you accept its main thesis or not, and . . . this reviewer does not, it will still challenge your presuppositions and force you to rethink your ideas from top to bottom in the most rigorous way." *Al Richardson, Revolutionary History*

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campus anti-war group, which organized speakouts and rallies. In response to anti-war speeches at one meeting, the *New York Post* launched a vicious campaign against campus opponents of the war. Walter Daum, an LRP leader, was the target of particular wrath for his condemnations of U.S. imperialism. The City University's Chancellor and trustees soon followed the *Post* in condemning the speeches. Then a right-wing Washington think-tank founded by the Vice President's wife Lynne Cheney and Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman issued a report attacking numerous academics for opposing the war, including two references to Comrade Daum. The immediate result of this witch-hunt was harassment and threats against academics and students. The main goal, however, was to prepare the way not only for attacks on democratic rights on campuses but also for budget slashing and tuition hikes, particularly at working-class colleges.

At Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), LRP supporters initiated a campus anti-war group which mobilized for anti-war protests. An LRPer spoke out against the war and explained our revolutionary socialist perspective at a Black Solidarity Day event.

Soon a coalition of campus anti-war groups was formed, New York Schools Against the War (NYSAW). The coalition is dominated by students from private colleges like Columbia and NYU and is overwhelmingly white and middle-class in membership. We participate in it to promote united mass action against the war and raise to the fore the interests of the workers and people of color. Thus LRPer initiated NYSAW's first protest, which took place at the *New York Post* offices. It opposed the newspaper's attacks on students and academics and focused on upcoming cuts to CUNY's budget and government attacks on immigrant students.

Northeast Regional Campus Conference, Boston

LRPers participated in the Northeast Regional Campus Conference of anti-war groups in Boston in November. The make-up of students attending this conference was even more white and middle-class than at NYSAW meetings, and the dominant political view was pacifist opposition to the U.S. war on Afghanistan. BMCC Students Against the War organized a forum at the conference entitled "Bringing the War Home: How Washington's War on Afghanistan is driving a Racist War Against the Working Class in the U.S." with an LRPer speaking. The meeting was well attended, and a lively discussion took place after which a number of students purchased LRP literature and signed our mailing list.

At the end of the conference, when a Ralph Nader rally was scheduled, we used placards and speeches to draw attention to the fact that Nader is not only in favor of U.S. imperialist war against Afghanistan but even called for U.S. military occupation of the country. Many conference attendees bought copies of our new pamphlet *The Nader Hoax*.

National Campus Anti-War Conference, New York

On February 22-24 LRPer attended the National Campus Anti-War Conference at Columbia University in New York City. A long struggle took place in NYSAW in the lead-up to the conference over whether Comrade Daum would be allowed to speak at the event's main plenary session. Among a number of anti-war fighters on campuses, Walter was a natural choice for the session since he had been so prominently attacked for his role. But representatives of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) argued against him on the grounds that he might criticize the views of others, as he had criticized supporters of the pro-imper-

ialist Labor Against the War statement from the floor of the Boston conference. We explained that this was an outrageous act of political censorship: no one should have to "pledge allegiance" not to criticize openly or implicitly pro-imperialist statements. The ISO won this struggle, but we ended up gaining agreement to a debate over different perspectives for the anti-war movement, with Comrade Daum, an ISOer and other activists speaking.

At the conference, a key political issue was the movement's "points of unity." NYSAW, like many anti-war coalitions around the country, had simply identified itself against the war, against racism and ethnic scapegoating, and for the protection of civil liberties. An amendment was accepted by the ISO-led Columbia delegation adding, "We call for the funding of jobs and education, not war." And an alternative proposal, made by the SUNY Binghamton delegation (led by the Progressive Labor Party), called for opposing "all terrorism and imperialist war." We opposed the PLP motion for equating the violence of the oppressor with that of the oppressed; and we spoke against the funding amendment on the grounds that it fed illusions that an imperialist U.S. could somehow stop financing its wars.

At the much-debated debate panel, now entitled "Alternatives to War," Daum pointed out that there are no such alternatives because the only way to prevent imperialist war is to win the working class to oppose capitalism — that is, to wage the class war against the warmongers. He drew the tragic lesson from the anti-Vietnam war movement in the 1960's and '70's that no revolutionary party had been built through winning and cohering large sections of workers, soldiers and revolutionary-minded students.

The LRP held its own workshop at the conference, "Imperialism: What It Is and How to Fight It," which also stressed the class viewpoint. The discussion was mainly a debate with attendees from the ISO and the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) over the lessons of the Vietnam anti-war movement and the nature of the labor aristocracy. It finally focused on the issue of the Labor Against the War statement, which members of the ISO and FSP (along with other leftists) had signed.

A striking feature of the conference was that not only had the anti-war milieu become much smaller since the fall; working-class students and campuses were even fewer than before. It was a middle-class conference through and through, more dominated by pacifist politics than the Boston conference. We came away from the conference having made contact with a small number of revolutionary-minded youth, and those who we had already attracted to us through earlier anti-war work felt politically closer to us as a result of our work.

Appeal for Funds —

Support the LRP's Anti-Imperialist Campaign

The LRP has worked intensely to bring revolutionary Marxist politics into the anti-war and Palestine solidarity protests. We have been pleased to find that several readers of our literature, notably Palestinians, have given us donations to allow us to distribute our pamphlets without charge.

Our organization is largely working-class in composition, and our resources are limited. We are working to expand our press and issue it more regularly. Small or large, your contribution will be welcomed. It is desperately needed!

Send contributions to: SV Publishing, P.O. Box 769, New York, NY 10033.

PALESTINE SOLIDARITY

Our anti-war work turned toward an emphasis on the Palestinian resistance struggle, as the war in Afghanistan cooled down and the war on Palestine escalated. Our leaflets were eagerly taken, mostly by Palestinian and other Arab demonstrators, at actions in New York and at a rally of thousands in Chicago on April 6. At the massive April 20 march in Washington, D.C. (see page 47), we sold hundreds of copies of our pamphlet *All Israel Is "Occupied Territory"; Stop Israeli/U.S. Terror against Palestinians*. At the May 5 counter-demonstration to the Salute to Israel parade in New York, we sold another hundred. The article on page 48 is an expansion of our leaflets and the main article in the pamphlet.

NEW YORK UNIONS

In the unions that LRPers are active in we distributed our propaganda against the imperialist war against Afghanistan, and spoke out against the war when we could. As the capitalists increasingly looked to use the September 11 attacks as an excuse for their economic downturn and for workers to sacrifice for the "common good," we took every opportunity to expose these lies and encourage a workers' fightback. One early battle was opposing union support for electoral candidates of the two main capitalist parties and instead encouraging a response of mass action against the capitalists' attacks.

SEIU Local 1199

In an outrageous betrayal of the interests of workers in New York State, Dennis Rivera and the leadership of the hospital workers' union 1199 decided to endorse the re-election campaign of New York State Governor George Pataki. In his eight years in office, Pataki has been vicious in his attacks on the working class, in particular Black, Latino and immigrant workers.

Rivera is a leading figure in New York's Democratic Party. As a result, his embrace of the Republican governor has shaken both the Democrats and the trade union bureaucracy; further union defections to Pataki are expected to follow. Rivera's deal traded funding for a new 1199 contract with the hospitals in return for the union's endorsement. The crudeness of this horse-trading shocked liberals and even some of his supporters in the Delegate Assembly, since 1199 had a reputation for "progressive unionism."

The LRP has condemned the unions' capitulations to the bosses in the name of wartime "sacrifice." We were the only force in 1199 opposing Rivera's non-struggle contract deal and the sellout to Pataki. We have consistently raised opposition to the imperialist war in Afghanistan, and we enthusiastically supported a Delegate Assembly resolution by a Workers World supporter to condemn the Israeli attack on Palestine, to call for an end to U.S. military aid to Israel and to support the right of return of Palestinian refugees. The motion passed almost unanimously.

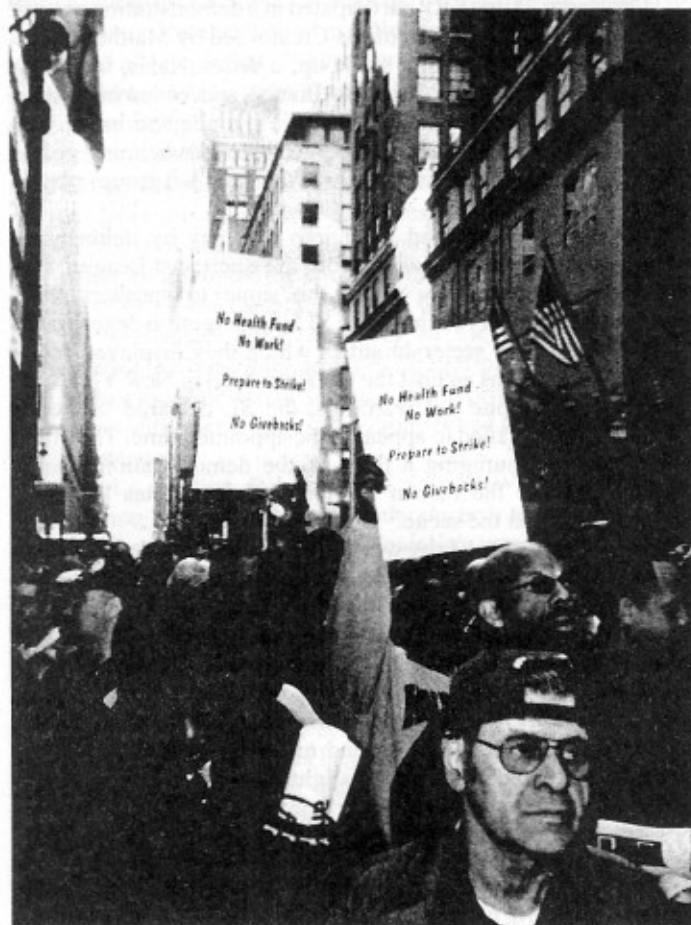
But as we go to press, we have learned that the 1199 Executive Council voted to reject the delegates' motion, one more confirmation that even "progressive" union bureaucrats serve the bosses, not the working class. In this case they prefer not to offend the Democratic and Republican politicians they kiss up to, who all unconditionally support Israeli oppression.

Transit Workers Local 100

Since our last report, there have been three new issues of *Revolutionary Transit Worker*, the regular bulletin for members of Transport Workers' Union Local 100 supported by the LRP. For the last 18 months Metropolitan Transit Authority management has heavily underfunded payments to the workers' health care fund as a weapon to force concessions in the upcoming contract. While it has organized a few protests for show, the Local 100 leadership has refused to launch a mass struggle against this

attack; rather it let the crisis grow to where the health care fund is bankrupt.

But the Local leadership has put a lot of energy into cashing the coattails of capitalist politicians. Health care fund rallies were used to give Democratic candidates for Mayor a chance to speak from the union's platform and gain added media exposure. To add insult to injury, not only were all these candidates from the



"No Health Fund — No Work! Prepare to Strike!" Transit workers hold signs distributed by Revolutionary Transit Worker and the LRP at April protest against attacks on workers' health care fund.

capitalist Democratic Party, but all the main ones had come out in favor of the Taylor law which denies transit workers the right to strike and which was used to defeat the transit workers' 1999 strike movement. We exposed this fact in *RTW*, and harassed the candidates about this. At one point we, together with many transit workers, succeeded in throwing off their speeches with chants of "Taylor Law, Taylor Law," much to the annoyance of the union hacks. Finally, the union leadership threw its weight behind Freddy Ferrer, who lost his race to be the Democratic Party's Mayoral candidate to fellow hack Mark Green, who in turn lost to Republican Michael Bloomberg.

No sooner had the union participated in this debacle than it used its first mass membership meeting to give a platform to Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton, who had supported then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's draconian attack on transit workers' right to strike in 1999.

RTW has consistently argued that the union must prepare to strike against the bosses' attacks and hold democratic mass meetings to decide on the way forward. At mass rallies thousands of copies of *RTW* were snatched up by workers, as were hundreds of our placards featuring the slogan: "No Health Care, No Work! Prepare to Strike!" Our views are supported by a growing minority

of workers, but most still hope that the new leadership of the Local will eventually put up a fight.

RTW has an expanding number of subscribers. Subscriptions are free for transit workers and \$5 a year for non-union members and can be obtained by writing to S.V. Publishing.

CHICAGO LRP

On March 23, the LRP participated in a demonstration against the neo-Nazi World Church of the Creator led by Matthew Hale. While Hale's group did not show up, a dozen Nazis, including supporters of the deadly National Alliance, succeeded in holding a "white power" rally in the Portage Park neighborhood. The fascists' victory was not due solely to the overwhelming police presence; the shameful sectarianism of the main left groups played an equally important part.

First, the ISO worked itself into a frenzy by deliberately chanting to drown out speakers from the Spartacist League. The Spartacists responded by doing the same to speakers from Anti-Racist Action. From here, the SL's intervention degenerated into a repeat of the sectarian antics which they displayed at the 1999 demonstrations against the Ku Klux Klan in New York City (see PR 60). Despite our warnings, the SL declared "victory" when the fascists failed to appear at the appointed time. They then left, thereby encouraging a third of the demonstration to also depart and leave the rest in the lurch. Ten minutes later, the fascists arrived on the scene.

The LRP has been busy working inside the Chicago Teachers Union. At the October meeting of the House of Delegates, our comrade attempted to condemn the upcoming U.S.-led imperialist onslaught of Afghanistan. However, he was forced to sit down by President Debra Lynch by his third sentence, which correctly stated that Osama bin Laden was a creation of the United States.

Additionally, we have been consistently fighting within the CTU against Lynch's political and monetary support of Democratic (mostly) and Republican (slightly) politicians. Lynch has instituted a "campaign" against Article 4.5 of the 1995 Amenda-tory Act, which gutted collective bargaining rights on all substantial issues. But her campaign has amounted to only wearing anti-4.5 buttons, lobbying and stuffing money into the pockets of politicians. The LRP has been instrumental in acquiring delegates' signatures to a petition calling for a meeting to discuss the creation of an action program to get our collective bargaining rights back. This petition was completed and handed to Lynch at the May delegates' meeting.

KOVI-Dokumente VII Kommunistische Organisation für die Vierte Internationale

- L.D. Trotski, Klasse, Partei und Führung: Warum wurde das spanische Proletariat besiegt?
- Unser Standpunkt: Nein zu neuen reformistischen Parteien!
- ATTAC und die 'Linke' (A.Holberg)
- Argentinien: Krise und revolutionäres Programm
- Flugblätter: a) Gegen den Krieg: Was tun? b) Solidarität mit dem palästinensischen Volk: Was ist notwendig?

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KOVI WORK IN GERMANY

KOVI-BRD took part in a Palestinian demonstration in Bonn, Germany on April 6th. Our comrade distributed a leaflet which was critical of the platform put forward by the organizers and pointed to the need for a revolutionary opposition to the Israeli blitzkrieg against the Palestinians.

Well before the event, KOVI had issued an open letter addressed to the German left organizations in Bonn, criticizing them for their shameful lack of action in solidarity with the anti-Israel struggle. We proposed a united demonstration but received no positive response. The protest on April 6 was mobilized by Palestinians with almost no support from the local left swamp. KOVI also participated in the May Day celebration in Bonn and set up a literature stall at the open air meeting afterward.

UKRAINE: NEW REVOLUTIONARY PRESS

This past fall, in a significant step forward in the struggle to build the revolutionary party in Ukraine, the comrades of the Revolutionary Workers Organization (RWO) published the first issue of *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya*. The 44-page magazine contains articles in Russian and Ukrainian, on topics such as these:

- Reports of the RWO's fight for revolutionary Marxist politics against opportunists and sectarians on the left during last year's political upheavals against Ukraine's authoritarian president, Leonid Kuchma;
- Analysis of the political situation in Ukraine and the major political forces, especially the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) and its role as the left prop of Kuchma's regime;
- The Russian translation of the LRP's statement, "Stop the Imperialist War on Afghanistan!";
- Most importantly, the magazine features the programmatic article, "For a Leninist Revolutionary Workers' Vanguard Party," which proclaims and explains the central organizing slogan of revolutionary socialists today.

The appearance of such a substantial and serious political organ advancing the revolutionary Marxist viewpoint is an impressive achievement by the RWO, a group of young comrades heavily rooted in the more oppressed layers of the Ukrainian working class. It strengthens our conviction, expressed in the previous issue of *Proletarian Revolution*, that "we are optimistic that continued discussion and collaboration will confirm that the LRP (COFI) and the RWO share a common political world view and will unite in the struggle to re-create the Fourth International."

The publication of *Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya* No. 1 went hand-in-hand with other critical accomplishments of the RWO last fall. On November 3-4, 2001, the RWO held its first convention in Kiev. There it approved a political program, organizational structure, and a plan for systematic work across Ukraine. It was indeed a national convention, with comrades from regions in both mainly Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine and predominantly Ukrainian-speaking western Ukraine, as well as the geographic and political center, Kiev. Since the convention, the RWO has gained supporters in several more cities and regions from all parts of Ukraine. ●

Borders

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reactionaries of the right and the left.

Today, when the U.S. ruling class is terrorizing thousands of immigrants and will try to expel millions as the economy plunges, communists continue to fight every manifestation of anti-immigrant bias, along with all bars to immigrants and refugees. ●

Israeli/U.S. Terror

continued from back page

expense of the Palestinians. But the Israeli masses are not personally responsible for this – most are the manipulated beneficiaries of the brutal policies of the Israeli ruling class and imperialism. It is the latter ruling classes and their armed forces who are the enemy and must be defeated. The Palestinian struggle should make every effort to distinguish between the Israeli ruling class and working class, as we will explain further below. Under no circumstances do we equate the violence of the oppressed with the violence of the oppressor. But the killings of workers and other civilians (including Arabs) through the suicide bombing strategy is wrong, and plays into the hands of Sharon by providing an excuse for his far greater terrorist response.

Seeing no other way to fight back against Zionist terror, many Palestinians understandably see the bombers as heroic, but they cannot stop Israeli tanks and missiles. Most crucially, they mislead masses into trusting false leaderships and “saviors” instead of recognizing their own mass power. And the Palestinians do not stand alone: their struggle has inspired millions to rise up against Israeli and U.S. imperialism.

The struggle has been massive, spreading especially in the Arab world. In late March and early April, hundreds of thousands took to the streets in Yemen, Libya, Iraq, Lebanon and Morocco. In Jordan, where a majority of the population is of Palestinian origin, the monarchy forcibly repressed huge pro-Palestinian protests, but the demonstrations continued. In Egypt, the largest Arab country, the normally unhesitatingly brutal state at first had to allow solidarity demonstrators to swell into hundreds of thousands, but then began to crack down. The growing economic crisis sweeping the Arab countries, like most of the world, feeds fuel to the anti-imperialist explosions.

Courtesy of Osama bin Laden’s terrorist attacks, Emperor Bush had been riding roughshod over all opponents. Afghanistan fell, Iraq was next; nowhere in the world was safe from imperialist attack. But suddenly Washington’s plans hit an unexpected wall of mass resistance. Growing Middle Eastern instability – the impending overthrow of regimes submissive to the U.S. – shook the centers of world power.

The various Arab rulers – exploitative, corrupt, subservient to U.S. imperialism and brutally oppressive of their own people – were terrified by the potential of the Palestinian struggle. Now, as a result of the intifada and the mass explosions it was sparking in the Arab world, even these traitors had to temporarily oppose the threatened U.S. war on Iraq. This was not out of genuine opposition to U.S. policy but out of fear of what might befall them if they went along with yet another imperialist war against fellow Arabs.

Bush & Co. are clearly upset that they cannot yet unleash more terror on Iraq. But, while they are annoyed at Sharon for not crushing the intifada more quickly and quietly, they place the real blame on “Arafat” – shorthand for the Palestinian struggle. Each new provocation by Israel, together with the daily grinding oppression of life under occupation and the collapsing economy, gives rise to new acts of resistance that Israel uses as convenient pretexts for further violence. The arrogant rulers of the world despise the Palestinians’ failure to simply roll over and die.

ALL ISRAEL IS OCCUPIED TERRITORY

Historically, the Zionist ideology claimed the right of all Jews to “return” to their “Palestinian homeland” where some of their

ancestors lived thousands of years ago. Inevitably, when the state of Israel was created it meant the brutal forced exile of most of the indigenous Palestinian people and the seizure of their lands – a massive crime in keeping with colonialism’s long history of bloody conquest. At the time of the United Nations partition plan of 1947, Jews made up only 30 percent of the population of the British colony of Palestine between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Yet the U.N. plan called for 55 percent of Palestine to become a “Jewish State.” But even before Israel’s declaration of independence in May 1948, armed Zionist forces had staked claim to territory not allotted by the U.N., terrorizing Arabs in areas under their military control. With imperialism firmly on their side, the Zionists were able to capture 78 percent of Palestine, at the cost of the lives of thousands of Palestinian civilians and the displacement of hundreds of thousands more. In its 1967 war of expansion, Israel routed the armies of the Arab states and occupied the rest of Palestine. Despite toothless U.N. resolutions, Israel has steadily implanted settler enclaves in the post-’67 occupied territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, ruthlessly isolating and destroying Palestinian villages in the process. In any event, regardless of the percentages, the Zionists had no right to steal *any* of the land areas.

Israel’s creation following the Second World War was no coincidence, and had little to do with concerns to protect the Jews from another holocaust. British colonialism was in its dying days, and was withdrawing from its vast empire, setting up local ruling classes as substitutes. But with the Middle East’s oil wealth so hugely important to the imperialists’ economies, they could not afford to only leave such a fragile power structure behind. They needed to have a permanent imperialist military presence in the region to replace the British colonialists, and the creation of Israel fit the bill. Ever since, Israel has been imperialism’s beachhead in the region – its guarantee that the Arab masses would remain oppressed and superexploited.

Israel is an apartheid colonial-settler state. The existence of a religiously and ethnically exclusive Jewish state in Palestine is no different from the past creation of the racist Afrikaaner state in South Africa. Naturally, Israel’s racist oppression of the Palestinians it expelled from its territory is mirrored by racist policies internally. Jews of European or American origin, even recent immigrants, receive the full benefits of citizenship: land, housing, hospitals and education. Jews from Arab countries and new immigrants from Russia and Ukraine are in second place, competing for middle-range jobs. Black-skinned Ethiopian Jews are scorned by a deeply racist society. Palestinians living within the 1948 borders are forced to accept fourth-class status as “Israeli Arabs,” as opposed to those in the territories occupied in 1967.

Any support to the existence of the Israeli state is an endorsement of the bloody colonial seizure of land from the Palestinians. The term “occupied territories” is used by the media to refer to those new areas the Israelis occupied in the expansionist war of 1967 – the West Bank and Gaza – and not the initial seizure of land at Israel’s founding. But we join with Palestinians in declaring that *All Israel is “Occupied Territory”!*

THE PHONY “PEACE PROCESS”

The supposed “peace process” initiated between Israel’s Rabin Administration and the PLO’s Arafat, with the backing of U.S. imperialism, aimed to consolidate Israel’s rule over the vast bulk of Palestine. In return, the Palestinians were offered formal recognition of a state on tiny scraps of territory. Yasser Arafat and his Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were offered the perks



LRPers join with Palestinians to protest Zionist/U.S. terror, Washington DC, April 20.

of office and limited neo-colonial power, in return for policing the Palestinian masses in the interests of imperialism.

It was on this colonial basis that the Oslo process projected the establishment of "sovereignty" for the Palestinians. Not only were Palestinians required to forego all claim to the 78 percent of Palestine territory encompassed by the state of Israel, as well as to accept the continued occupation of 59 percent of the West Bank, but they were to do so *without* control over their airport, any control of international boundaries or any free movement between the scattered fragments of the Palestinian Bantustan. Arafat's Palestinian National Authority (PNA) would have as its primary task the domestic repression of Palestinian militancy. And the millions of Palestinians in the diaspora could hope at most for a token few to be allowed to return to their homeland.

But Israel could not tolerate the idea of even such a tiny and divided Palestinian state. There is a relentless capitalist-economic and religious-ideological pressure for the Israeli imperialist state to expand to its "biblical" borders. And the reaction of the Palestinian masses to the proposals showed that if they were forced to accept such a fragmented "state," it would only be as a stepping stone toward a renewed and more powerful struggle to retake their homeland. Thus the Israelis sabotaged even this rotten deal from the beginning. In the course of the "negotiations" the Israeli government tripled the amount of land taken up by new Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and doubled their population. "Access roads," open only to Jewish settlers and Israeli troops, were built throughout the territories, further dividing the area into isolated and unviable patches of land – Palestinian villages and towns isolated from each other by a series of checkpoints and barriers.

The negotiations failed because they revealed that the co-existence of the Zionist state and any kind of a Palestinian state was impossible. It became clear that the Palestinian mass struggle would never cease if Arafat accepted pieces of the West Bank and Gaza plus scattered and miserable refugee camps abroad as their "homeland." Thus the process served only to tighten Israel's occupation.

There is no middle ground between the existence of the racist, imperialist state of Israel, and the Palestinian masses' demands for freedom. But the need to dampen the struggle of the Palestinians and their masses of Arab supporters means that such hopeless "peace" proposals must constantly be advanced.

The plan presented by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and approved at the recent Arab League

summit in Beirut is another such betrayal. In exchange for a full withdrawal from the 1967 occupied territories and the establishment of a Palestinian West Bank/Gaza state, it promises "normal relations" between Israel and all Arab states – that is, free reign for the Israeli bourgeoisie to militarily and economically imprison the Palestinians in a pseudo-independent mini-state, while gaining access to exploit Arab workers throughout the region.

Despite Washington's verbal support for the Saudi plan, motivated by its need for Arab support against Iraq, all sections of the Israeli ruling class rejected it. Sharon refused to entertain the thought of giving up an inch of Israeli territory. And, like the more "dovish" racists like Foreign Minister Peres, he utterly rejected the right

of return for Palestinian refugees, since it would obviously destroy the "Jewish character" of Israel, and thus the Zionist state itself.

In fact, the Saudi plan was equivocal on the right of return, referring vaguely to U.N. Resolution 194, which promises "return or compensation" to exiles. The Arab rulers know that Israel would not accept its destruction as a Jewish state. They had the utopian hope that Washington would force a token return and some kind of compensation deal upon the Israeli negotiators. However, the Israelis cannot even acknowledge such a right without undermining their own existence as a state. And the U.S. will not cripple the only reliable counterrevolutionary army in the Middle East.

ARAB RULERS NEED ISRAEL

The regional Arab rulers do not wish to see Israel destroyed and the Palestinians liberated. Israel has a contradictory meaning for them. Often it serves to divert the anger of their own workers. But, more and more, the Palestinian intifada ignites those same masses not only against the Zionists, but their own rulers as well. Their "practical" course is to ostensibly champion the Palestinians, get some sort of mini-state and enough compensation to placate them and to see that Israel keeps a firm grip over whatever statelet emerges. It is the only course they have, and of course it is a hopeless disaster for Arab workers in Palestine and everywhere else.

As for Yasser Arafat, every tank and bulldozer, every Israeli bullet and bomb aimed at his Ramallah compound, gave him added popularity among Arabs. The Palestinian people, who have had just cause to mistrust him, nevertheless know that it is they who are being attacked when the Israelis attack him. They want unity of all Palestinians in the struggle. The fact that he was under the gun and was seemingly refusing to give in could only raise his stature. However, Arafat's politics are in fact a barrier to united Arab mass struggle.

Sharon's blitzkrieg and Bush's support for Israel have not stopped Arafat from repeatedly signaling his desire to undermine the intifada. First he urged Arab states to enlist in Washington's "war on terrorism," then he arrested militants from rival organizations like Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). He supported the Saudi plan. Later, under fire from Sharon's forces, he called for U.N. "peacekeepers." But this kind of "protection" for the Palestinians would mean their defeat and disarmament in the face of Israeli terror by the imperialists, a lesson that should have been learned 20 years ago in Lebanon, when Israeli forces slaughtered thousands of Palestinians under the watchful eye of the U.N.

Arafat tried to end the intifada. But he failed; he knew he couldn't remain in power if he openly took the side of its enemies. Sharon therefore wanted to humiliate him and decimate the Palestinian people. The necessity of defending Arafat against Israel now must not blind Palestinians and their supporters to the need to defend themselves from him as well. Because he in fact does not defend the Palestinian masses or fight to restore more than shreds of the Palestinian homeland, he can only sabotage and betray the unity that the fighters yearn for.

ARAB LEADERS WANT THE STRUGGLE CONTAINED

Israel is not simply a loyal servant of the U.S. Nor is the U.S. simply in thrall to Israel, as some Arab nationalists believe. Israel is ultimately dependent upon the U.S. but has a great deal of room to maneuver. The ruling classes of both countries share a common interest in maintaining imperialist domination over the region. But while the U.S. usually prefers to maintain a fragile equilibrium, Israel has its own interests: maximizing its own policing role, getting paid for it by U.S. imperialism, and ensuring that any Palestinian statelet they might be forced to accept as a way to contain the struggle would be as subordinate as possible to Israel economically, politically and militarily. And now the Israeli rulers hope that by destroying the Palestinian social infrastructure they can even avoid conceding a potentially threatening mini-state.

Arafat and the other Arab rulers want some sort of Palestinian state in the "occupied territories" to bolster their strength against imperialism as well as against the restive Arab masses. They hope such a state will quell the struggles of most Palestinians, and will be able to repress those who oppose such an impossible betrayal. But they recognize that any such Palestinian state will inevitably exist in the shadow of Israel's overwhelming military force – and as far as they are concerned, that is just as well. For the Arab rulers know that their states are too weak to be relied on to crush powerful mass rebellions. They and U.S. imperialism both need the guarantee of the Israeli military machine, the proven counterrevolutionary containment force in the Middle East – witness its role in the "Black September" events of 1970 when the Mossad, Israel's CIA, helped prop up Jordan's monarchy against a Palestinian uprising.

DEFEND THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE!

Working-class revolutionaries among the Palestinians must be prepared to oppose bourgeois, pro-imperialist forces for the leadership of the struggle. Crucially, the Palestinians must be able to defend themselves from Israel's assault in an organized fashion, arms in hand, without having to rely on Arafat's police or factional militias. Leaders of working-class organizations in Palestine like the trade unions must be challenged to support the formation of mass workers' militias.

Because of the monstrous love affair between the AFL-CIO and Israel, it would be absurd to challenge the U.S. labor bureaucracy to provide arms to Palestinian workers as an exposure tactic. However, around the world the working class fervently supports the intifada, and its leaders pay it lip service. In demanding the arming of the Palestinian masses, proletarian revolutionaries would make every effort to prioritize the arming of organizations of workers and the poor.

To aid the Palestinians and expose the present illusions in Arafat and the Arab rulers, proletarian revolutionaries demand of them: provide arms to the masses! The Saddam Husseins, Mubarak, and Abdullahs talk big about the poor Palestinians. The Arab masses must challenge them to put up or shut up – *send arms*

to the Palestinians!

The street protests in support of the intifada are vital, but they need to be joined by massive general strikes in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and the other countries of the Middle East demanding arms for the Palestinians. Once workers realize their power to shut these states down, their own additional demands for jobs, a decent income and an end to imperialist superexploitation will lead them to question which class should have state power at home.

Over the decades, the Palestinian masses have been led to believe in a variety of supposedly "practical" solutions (i.e., ones that accept the continued existence of imperialist capitalism and Israel) – all of which inevitably failed. In desperation, some turned to reactionary clerical leaders, another dead end. The masses have paid in blood for the absence of a genuine revolutionary leadership.

But the Palestinian intifada has inspired the Arab masses into struggle and threatens the Arab bourgeois ruling classes of the region. Mass struggles for real solidarity with Palestine and for the social and economic needs of all Arab workers could promote a huge leap in class consciousness. With the active participation of a revolutionary communist political party, millions could embrace the chance to overthrow hated dictatorships and establish their own workers' states. Such a revolutionary onslaught could tip the balance of forces in favor of the Palestinians and enable them to finally overthrow their Zionist oppressors. This revolutionary road is far more practical than the "solutions" now being presented.

WORKERS REVOLUTION CAN SMASH IMPERIALISM!

In the interests of imperialism, the Middle East is divided into a series of inter-dependent prison-states: Arab dictatorships in the service of imperialism, with Israel the maximum security core. While the Arab masses' struggles constantly force attempts to superficially reform the arrangement, the survival of the system demands that its basic structure remains. All regional bourgeois forces, both Israeli and Arab, depend on it against the threat of the masses' struggles.

The Palestinian masses alone cannot defeat Israel – they do not have the strength to overcome this state that has the full backing of imperialism. But through their heroic struggles they can become the vanguard of the Arab masses' revolutionary overthrow of imperialism. The road to Palestinian freedom really begins with unchaining the Arab working classes of the region from their bourgeois leaders and opening a revolutionary struggle against their neo-colonial Arab rulers.

But this has always been rejected by Fatah, Arafat's party that leads the PLO. Its bourgeois nationalism matched easily with its pledge of non-interference in the affairs of "brother Arab" regimes. The left wing of secular nationalism is little better. Both the PFLP and the smaller DFLP remained for years as Arafat's and Fatah's pseudo-socialist loyal opposition within the PLO. They have a two-stage theory of revolution, which set aside the working-class struggle for socialism in favor of collaboration with Arafat and the bourgeoisie, even during the Oslo "peace process," when Fatah's betrayals of national liberation were most obvious.

It is no secret that the masses who risk their lives for the creation of a Palestinian state are driven by economic as well as social and political needs. Instead of the grinding poverty enforced by imperialism, they dream of a liberated state in which they will live as well as their present oppressors. The interpenetrated yearning for freedom and a human standard of living drive the struggles of the Arab workers. However, so long as the intifada is led by bourgeois forces rather than the class-conscious proletariat,

it cannot succeed.

The betrayals of the bourgeois nationalists were predictable, and they led to a situation where the only major force that claims to speak for full self-determination is the right-wing Islamists. In despair, many Palestinians have turned to them. But their claim is a lie. The Zionists helped build Hamas in the first place, to offset Arafat. Sharon's offensive decimated the Palestinian Authority and the secular nationalist leadership around Arafat but left Hamas relatively unscathed; its stronghold in Gaza was initially not attacked. Just as Bush needed Osama bin Laden to justify his new imperialist offensive, Sharon needs suicide bombers to justify his brutal oppression of the Palestinians. He tries to avoid dealing with Arafat because he wants to avoid ceding even a statelet, and because he prefers Hamas as his "terrorist" target.

So too, the fundamentalists timed their campaigns to destroy possible truces, not because the truces were lies (which they were) but because they need a constant, overwhelming Israeli attack to magnify their own religious and political authority. Authentic Marxists support an armed struggle against Israel – a mass struggle designed to win, not a struggle of individual heroes which is rooted in a sense of hopelessness and desperation that breeds martyrdom and inevitable defeat. As well, the socially reactionary agenda of Islamists cripples the class struggle which is the only real hope for the Arab masses. As economic misery deepens, the fundamentalists' hostility to mass armed struggle becomes even clearer. Because the clerical reactionary leaders themselves represent the anti-secular part of the bourgeoisie, they favor individuals with bombs. They too fear the threat of mass armed and trained militias. The Bush/Sharon terrorists feed off the acts of the Islamic terrorists, and vice versa. It's no conspiracy – it's a fact.

Socialist revolutions by the Arab working classes can overthrow the current capitalist dictators and put the working class in power. A Socialist Federation of Workers' States of the Middle East could destroy imperialism's grip on the region and start to rebuild their economies in the masses' interests.

There is no way to predict exactly how the Israeli imperialist settler state will be overthrown. But it is clear that revolutionary struggles of the working classes and poor of the region would by themselves greatly undermine Israel. They would destroy the artificial states that border Israel – like Jordan and Lebanon – that were created by imperialism to divide the Arab masses, particularly the Palestinians. And revolutionary states in which the

working class is armed and organized to defend its interests would be able to realize the Arab masses' already burning desire to aid the Palestinians' revolutionary struggle to overthrow Israel. Then the battle, which today sees the Palestinian masses armed with little more than stones fighting Israeli tanks, helicopter gunships and jets, could be turned into a fight the Palestinians could win.

Revolutionary socialists aim for the overthrow of Israel and the creation of a Palestinian workers' state that includes the whole of Israel, and in which all people have the right to live free of religious or ethnic discrimination.

THE SCANDAL OF "SOCIALIST" ZIONISTS

Zionists constantly slander the Palestinian struggle against Israel as inherently anti-Jewish. It is a tribute to the Palestinian people that in spite of their brutal oppression at the hands of Israel, the vast majority have refused to support an anti-Jewish program or leadership. Their struggle's aim is not the destruction of Jews in the region, but the destruction of the Israeli apartheid state. Scandalously, there are some groups which consider themselves socialist, and even Trotskyist, which echo Zionist propaganda and say that to champion the cause of the liberation of all Palestine and the complete destruction of Israel is to call for "driving the Jews into the sea."

A prominent example of such an organization is the Spartacist League (SL), along with its splinter groups, the Internationalist Group and the International Bolshevik Tendency. The SL recently attacked our revolutionary strategy for the Palestinian struggle in its newspaper, *Workers Vanguard* (April 19).

The Spartacists' article condemns leftists who call for a Palestinian workers' state "in which Jews, Arabs, Muslims and Christians would have equal rights." The problem, as the SL sees it, is that this position "denies that the Hebrew-speaking people constitute a nation with the right to self-determination. ... Behind this position is the argument that since Israeli Jews are the oppressors, they have forfeited their own national rights as against the oppressed Palestinians."

The SL then singles out the LRP for attack since, unlike deceptive pseudo-socialists, we make this approach explicit. The SL elaborates:

The doctrine that an oppressor nation forfeits its right to self-determination has nothing in common with socialism and democracy; it is the ideology of genocidal irredentism.



Left: Supporters greet Yasser Arafat on his release from captivity. Israeli attacks on Arafat have bolstered his popularity among Palestinians, but his betrayals will force more and more to reject his leadership. Right: A sign of things to come. Hundreds of supporters of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine protest Arafat's prosecution and jailing of assassins of Israeli Cabinet Minister.

The Zionist state was created by crushing the national rights of the Palestinians. But securing national justice for the Palestinians does not mean reversing the terms of oppression and denying the democratic rights of the Hebrew-speaking people. Basic to the Leninist position on the national question – the only consistently democratic position – is that all nations have a right to self-determination.

Self-determination for Palestinians means nothing if it does not mean their right to reclaim the land that was stolen from them by imperialism and the creation of the state of Israel, and to form their own state on that territory. Since Arabs would vastly outnumber Israelis under such circumstances, it is only natural that the state created by a victorious workers' revolution will be a Palestinian state. But a Palestinian Leninist workers' state would defend the right of Jews and all other peoples to live there in peace.

As the SL agrees, national self-determination means nothing if it does not mean the right to secede. To defend the right of what the SL calls the "Hebrew-speaking people" to secede from a Palestinian workers state means their right to declare control of a territory and form their own state. When Palestinians win their right to self-determination, including a full right of return to their homeland, they will be a majority everywhere. Hence to defend the right of self-determination for Israel means to defend the right of Israelis to keep land stolen from the Palestinians and either rule its "workers' state" as a minority, or expel the Palestinian majority from that land entirely. No wonder the SL condemns us for saying that "All Israel is Occupied Territory!" It's time for the SL to put up or shut up: are you for Israeli minority apartheid rule, or Israeli ethnic cleansing? It must be one or the other.

Note that the SL is so cowardly and dishonest that they cannot bring themselves to even write the name of the nation they are concerned for – Israel. Instead they refer to the Israeli Jews as "the Hebrew-speaking people," as if they are the only nation in the world without a name! They do this to hide the fact that they support the continued existence of an Israeli Jewish state, albeit a mythical Israeli "workers' state." The SL are, in a word, Zionists. And since the SL defends the idea that "all nations have a right to self-determination," it must mean that if the Palestinian majority ever seem able to return to "Israel," or if the Palestinian struggle ever threatens the imperialist Israeli nation-state's existence, the SL would defend the Zionist colonial settler state! Shame!

Indeed in another example of their touching concern for the rights of self-determination for imperialist nations, the SL long ago declared their support in principle for some immigration controls in order to protect imperialist nations from being overrun by foreigners from the neo-colonial world. (See page 24.) So surely the SL should join with Ariel Sharon and every other racist Zionist in opposing the full right of return of Palestinians and their descendants to the land the Israelis expelled them from. And they should do so for the same reason: that the exercise of such a right would lead to a Palestinian majority and the end of an Israeli nation-state!

The SL argues that Lenin treated the question of national self-determination as an abstract bourgeois right uncomplicated by the concrete nature of imperialism. This is nonsense. The First World War and the Russian revolution taught Lenin that capitalism had entered its imperialist epoch, and all democratic questions could now only be solved by the overthrow of imperialism through world socialist revolution. During the war, various reformist social democrats called for the defense of all the warring nations and in particular wailed in sympathy for the small imperialist state of Belgium, which was overrun by Germany. Lenin, on the other hand, did not call for equal rights between imperialist nations in the war, let alone between

imperialist and colonial nations, but for the defeat of the imperialists. He never said a word about the rights of imperialist nations!

Whenever the "rights" of imperialist nation-states are brought into question by the struggle against imperialism, Leninists unhesitatingly support the rights of the oppressed over the oppressors. To do anything else means to weaken and divert the democratic and revolutionary socialist struggle into the blind alley of bourgeois "democratic" solutions. This can only limit the masses' struggles and give imperialism the opportunity to launch counterrevolution. And that is certainly the meaning of defending the right to self-determination of the imperialist Israeli nation.

Moreover, in the case of Palestine, while the SL wails about equal democratic rights, their position is an anti-democratic travesty of Leninism. Israelis are still a minority in Palestine, despite all of imperialism's attempts to slaughter and destroy the Palestinian nation. To defend the right of Israeli self-determination is to defend the right of a *minority* people to seize territory and rule over a *majority*. And that's the point: to defend the rights of imperialist nations means to repudiate the rights of the oppressed.

Indeed, in their article attacking the LRP, the SL comes out more clearly for a separate Israeli (workers') state than ever before. The SL says their solution is an "Arab/Hebrew workers revolution." They explain that in the past:

we raised the call for a bi-national workers state encompassing both the Palestinian Arab and Hebrew-speaking peoples, but we have not since raised that tactical perspective. We cannot project the particular national configuration which would best express the democratic aspirations of both peoples under conditions of proletarian power in the region. This might well take the form of a bi-national workers state or two or more workers states.

The SL's strategy is as farcical as it is reactionary. The "Arab/Hebrew workers' revolution" they conceive of is one conducted jointly, in which the "Hebrew workers" then refuse to live in a Palestinian state and demand the right to secede. The Spartacists imagine a socialist revolution made by "Hebrew" workers who are still so racist and accustomed to minority rule that they demand the right to keep stolen Palestinian land on which to set up their own separate "workers' state"! But the SL's position is not unique. It is in the vile tradition of those racist "communists" in South Africa who raised the call "Workers of the World Unite – For a White South Africa." The policy of favoring a "bi-national Arab/Hebrew state" was not the SL's invention. It was the policy of the arch-renegade from Trotskyism, Max Shachtman. The SL is now following the same right-wing course Shachtman blazed ... to open pro-Zionism.

The source of the SL's position is that they share the Zionists' fear of the oppressed and their racist caricature of the Arab masses as anti-Jewish pogromists. After all, the Arab workers who make the revolution which they imagine could, according to their conception, only establish a Palestinian workers' state that oppresses the Jews. They cannot conceive of a Palestinian workers' state that allows Jews to live in peace within its borders. Such attitudes are standard for the SL. They match the SL's attacks on past U.S. ghetto rebellions, and the more recent rebellion against police brutality in Cincinnati, as dangerous explosions of "lumpen rage" rather than working-class struggles. Thus the SL expresses the racist fears of petty-bourgeois whites that unless the struggles of oppressed peoples are strictly controlled, they will simply be criminal bloodlettings.

BUT WHAT OF THE ISRAELI JEWS?

In elaborating their pro-imperialist position on Palestine, the SL does raise an important question, albeit in a dishonest way:

The LRP characterizes the whole of the Hebrew-speaking proletariat as a "labor aristocracy" and calls for "a single Palestinian workers' state." ... This perspective rejects any possibility of winning the Hebrew-speaking workers to a program of *class unity* with their Arab brothers and sisters in a common fight against all the exploiters and oppressors of the region. And without that, any talk of "revolution" or national justice is simply empty rhetoric that does nothing to advance the cause of the Palestinians.

On the contrary, all the Spartacists' talk of solidarity with the Palestinians is empty rhetoric when their strategy is for the Palestinian workers to not overthrow the Israeli state until the Israeli masses awaken from their Zionist stupor and join with the Palestinian struggle. It is no wonder that in reference to the struggle against South African apartheid, the SL once argued that black workers would have to wait to make their revolution until they won white workers to the cause – a doomsday proposition. (See our *Socialist Voice* No. 8.)

In their attack, the SL buries grains of truth in a mountain of distortion. To begin with, we have never simply characterized the whole Israeli working class as a "labor aristocracy" – that is, a whole class so privileged that it is wedded to its rulers. But for the SL to act as if there is not a huge difference between the freedoms and standards of living of Israeli and Palestinian workers is repugnant.

As embarrassing as it is to have to explain, Israeli workers enjoy a tremendous privilege over Palestinian workers: Israeli Jews have a state and democratic freedoms, and Palestinians do not. Also, a large portion of the Israeli working class enjoys a high standard of living as a result of Israel's imperialist domination of the Palestinians, and the support it receives from the U.S. for performing this role. This elevated standard of living serves to tie large numbers of Israeli workers to supporting the Israeli state.

However, such economic privileges are not enjoyed by all: Jews originally from Arab and African countries in particular face heavy discrimination, although not to the extent of fourth-class Israeli Palestinians. The Israeli bourgeoisie has been able to buy the loyalty of many Jewish workers with property stolen from Palestinians and the subsidies paid by the U.S.; but in conditions of economic crisis, this bribe is ultimately incompatible with the bourgeoisie's own profits. This labor aristocracy will inevitably be undermined by the Israeli ruling class.

Palestinian revolutionaries must oppose all tactics that unnecessarily drive Israeli workers into the arms of their rulers, such as suicide bombings of civilians. And they must seek every opportunity to win active support for their cause among Jewish workers. They should come out in defense of Israeli workers under economic attack from their ruling class in order to show that the Israeli ruling class, and not the Palestinian masses, is their enemy. And they must take advantage of other divisions in Israeli society, such as that of the "refuseniks," the hundreds of Israeli reserve officers who, while professing loyalty to Zionism, have refused to serve in the territories occupied in 1967.

Courageous work by Palestinian revolutionaries could win a minority of Jewish workers to the cause of socialist revolution. Palestinian revolutionaries must make every effort to make clear to Jewish workers that a workers' state will not mean their oppression – by offering them cultural autonomy as a practical concession, along with guarantees of economic equality and other democratic rights.

However, the hard truth is that the privileges granted Israeli workers, along with Zionist mythology, have tied most to support of the state of Israel. Spartacist fantasies of an "Arab/Hebrew

workers' revolution" aside, in all likelihood a majority of Israeli workers can be expected to remain loyal to the continued existence of Israel – despite the best efforts of Palestinian revolutionaries. But through their efforts to reach out to Jewish workers, Palestinian revolutionaries can at least hope to neutralize the role of most Israeli workers and win them away from supporting the Zionists' brutal, counterrevolutionary plans.

Finally, the SL writes:

The logic of the LRP position is that if the Israeli working class is unwilling to live in a Palestinian-dominated state, then it has no right to live in the region at all.

Jews will have the right to live in a Palestinian workers' state, free from any form of religious or ethnic discrimination. And it can be said that Israelis unwilling to live in a Palestinian workers' state will have the right to leave, with the exception of those who wish to leave in order to mount counterrevolutionary attacks on the workers' state – they will have to be repressed. But who has ever heard of "Leninists" defending reactionary racists who refuse to accept majority rule in a workers' state? No wonder the SL's article condemns leftists for calling Israel a "settler-colonial state." And no wonder the SL's chieftain James Robertson once publicly called for self-determination for the Boers in South Africa.

It is one of modern history's great tragedies that the Nazi holocaust of Jews has been manipulated by imperialism to justify the creation of the Israeli apartheid state. But the state of Israel is no protection from anti-Semitic attacks. The majority of Israelis are in any case not European Jews, but come from the Middle East and elsewhere. And Israel's creation has obviously failed as a solution to anti-Jewish attacks. The only way to put an end to the threat of anti-Jewish attacks is to resolutely fight them wherever they occur in the course of struggling to overthrow the system that breeds them: imperialist capitalism.

RE-CREATE THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL!

The crisis of modern society is, as Trotsky pointed out, the crisis of working-class leadership. The Middle Eastern masses have repeatedly risen up. The betrayals by secular middle-class nationalist, Stalinist and pseudo-socialist leaders in the past, opened the doors for the Islamic obscurantist leaders. It is now crucial for a working-class revolutionary leadership to lead the struggle.

We said above that the democratic right of Palestinian self-determination demands the end of the racist Israeli state and its replacement by a united workers' Palestine with full rights for all. The abandonment of genuine Palestinian self-determination by nationalists both left and right is confirmation in negative form of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, which holds that the democratic demands of the oppressed can only be secured in the course of the working-class-led struggle for socialist revolution and its extension internationally.

Revolutionary strategy will not appear out of thin air. What is necessary is the leadership of an authentic Trotskyist party in each country in the region, sections of a re-created Fourth International – to lead our class to settle accounts with its rulers and to confront the Zionist and imperialist murderers. We in the imperialist countries have a similar task. ● May 6, 2002

***Self-Determination for Palestine:
All Israel Is "Occupied Territory!"
For Mass Armed Self-Defense!
Down with Anti-Arabism and Anti-Semitism!
Smash Zionism through Workers Revolution!
For a Socialist Federation of the Middle East!
Re-create the Fourth International!***

Washington Palestine Solidarity Protest: Sectarians and Slogans

In the U.S., the movement opposing Israel's war on the Palestinians achieved a tremendous outpouring of support on April 20, when upwards of 75,000 people rallied in Washington, D.C. under the banner "Free Palestine!" A large number of the protesters were Palestinians and Muslims, who bravely defied the government's offensive of jailings and deportations against Middle Eastern and Central Asian immigrants.

SECTARIAN DIVISIONS

The rally's success came despite months of sectarian infighting among its organizers. The date had originally been set for an anti-war demonstration to protest the planned meeting of imperialist financiers in the International Monetary Fund. Two coalitions – International ANSWER, led by the Workers World Party, and the Stop the War coalition initiated by student peace groups – organized competing actions on the same day. That itself was a step forward, since they had originally been scheduled a week apart!

The reasons for the split were originally pure sectarianism. On one side, the WWP habitually hides behind supposedly broad fronts like ANSWER and issues ultimatums about when and where to protest. The other side, led by social-democrats, pacifists and "revolutionaries," would rather split the movement than work with WWP, which they denounce, accurately, as Stalinist. But politically the two sides are not very different. Both covet the participation of liberal politicians, although today most of the Democrats they are saving seats for won't touch the Palestinians' cause with a ten-foot pole.

A similar division marred the February 2 protests against the World Economic Forum in New York. Essentially the same forces as today split the politically similar protests against Bush I's Gulf War in 1991. (See *Proletarian Revolution* No. 38.)

This April, however, a real political division emerged. As the Israeli offensive intensified, ANSWER rightly decided to place its main emphasis on solidarity with the Palestinians. In contrast, the publicity of the Stop the War grouping opposed war only in the abstract and not in Palestine; there was a nod to Palestinian solidarity buried deep in its website but nothing on leaflets distributed only a few days before April 20. That made the Stop the War event a diversion from the prime need to protest an ongoing imperialist war backed by the U.S. We were hardly the only ones to notice: that is clearly why at least three-quarters of the D.C. protesters showed up at the ANSWER rally.

"SHARON = HITLER"

A theme on many placards on April 20 was the slogan "Sharon = Hitler," or its symbolic equivalent, Israeli Star of David = Nazi Swastika. These signs are immensely annoying to Zionist sympathizers and were criticized as overly provocative or inaccurate by some pro-Palestinian marchers as well, including ANSWER officials who went around asking that the signs be put away.

We defend these slogans. They concisely express the outrage



Palestinian at Washington DC protest connects Israeli oppression of Palestinians with Nazism. "ANSWER" officials tried to censor these popular and effective signs — revolutionaries defend their just expression of outrage against Zionist racist mass murder.

that we and millions of others feel about racist mass murder. The fact that Sharon is not a fascist but is carrying out the policy of mainstream Zionism today makes him no less dangerous. Identifying the Israeli invaders with the Nazis is indeed provocative: it justly defies the Zionists' claim that *they* are the moral heirs of Hitler's victims. On page 48 we cited one quotation where Zionist officials make the parallel to the Nazis themselves, and there are others.

And the comparison is as accurate as any slogan can be: Sharon's war is not his "final solution," but it is a step in that direction, no less bloody and destructive than, say, Kristallnacht in 1938. (Interestingly, the "provocation" that the Nazis cited for that crime was the assassination of a Nazi official in Paris by a young Jewish "terrorist," Herschel Grynszpan.) Moreover, the slogans are explicitly not anti-Jewish; and they have the added virtue of countering those Muslim reactionaries who *admire* Hitler for his treatment of the Jews. ●

PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

Spring 2002

All Israel is "Occupied Territory"!

For Arab Workers' Revolution To Smash Israeli/U.S. Terror!



Israel is waging a brutal war of devastation against Palestinian society. Ariel Sharon and his government – armed, financed and endorsed by the United States – are wiping out the entire social infrastructure and slaughtering all who resist or get in the way, trying to erase all hope for any kind of a Palestinian state.

Thousands of Palestinians have been rounded up; some shot dead, execution-style. Almost two thousand have been killed. In the cities and refugee camps, whole neighborhoods were bulldozed, electricity, water and telephones were cut off, hospitals and ambulances were targeted, offices were ravaged and looted, and few dared venture out for food or other necessities.

Israel's atrocities are so extreme, and the Palestinian defense so defiant, that the U.S. has been forced to caution Sharon with a few slaps on the wrist. The tenacious Palestinian struggle, coupled with the mass uprisings sweeping the Arab world, have unnerved Washington and its regional Arab servant rulers. But the planes, helicopters, missiles and tanks terrorizing the Palestinians are still largely American-made and supplied. And Bush grotesquely praised the mass murderer Sharon as a "man of peace."

The bourgeois media in the U.S. mimic the Israeli and U.S. rulers in incessantly harping on acts of terrorism associated with the Palestinian intifada. None dare mention that at least four to five times as many Palestinians have been massacred by Israel's state terror. Israeli dead are presented as full human beings, with names, ages and histories; but the Palestinians murdered are lucky to even receive a number, and many were buried by bulldozer.

While Israeli attacks are always described as "retaliation" for suicide bombings, they are in fact planned in advance. This was admitted by the Israeli armed forces through one of their mouthpieces, Amir Oren of the liberal Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*:

In order to prepare properly for the next campaign, one of

the Israeli officers in the territories said not long ago, it's justified and in fact essential to learn from every possible source. If the mission will be to seize a densely populated refugee camp, or take over the Casbah in Nablus ... then he must first analyze and internalize the lessons of earlier battles – even, however shocking it may sound, even how the German army fought in the Warsaw ghetto. (Jan. 25.)

Given the racist and inhuman nature of Israel's offensive, picking the Nazis as a role model is most fitting. Indeed, four months later, the *New York Times* reported that the Nablus Casbah was "utterly destroyed." Then Jenin was demolished.

George W. Bush and Colin Powell are knowingly guilty of supporting these war crimes. Their toothless plea for Sharon to stop "without delay" gave him extra weeks for slaughter. Even more rabid are liberal Democratic politicians, including Hillary Clinton, Charles Schumer, Joseph Lieberman, Diane Feinstein, Jon Corzine, John Kerry, Richard Gephardt, et al, who teamed up with Christian-right reactionaries to demand yet more time for Sharon's butchers to finish the job.

MASS ERUPTIONS SHAKE THE SEATS OF POWER

Today's Palestinians, especially the heroic defenders of the Jenin refugee camp who held off the Israeli assault for a week, take their place alongside the fighters of the Warsaw ghetto and the Paris Commune in the long line of those who have struggled against overwhelming force to resist their oppressors. Armed struggle against the Israeli military and the settler-zealots, who are an armed occupation force, is necessary. The vast majority of Israelis personally and directly benefit from the oppression of Palestinians – they enjoy their citizenship on Palestinian land at the

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