

# PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION



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## U.S. Imperialism in Iraq:

# Bloody War, Phony Election

During the Vietnam war, a U.S. military officer asserted that his forces had to destroy a village “in order to save it.” Now the war criminals who run the White House and the Pentagon, with unanimous support from their Democratic Party “rivals” and their “watch-dogs” in the bourgeois media, have widened their sights by several degrees of magnitude: they have already leveled the city of Fallujah and are ready to destroy as much of Iraq as necessary in order to save it for “democracy” – that is, for imperialist exploitation.

### FALLUJAH: MOTHER OF ALL WAR CRIMES

After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Fallujah became the center of support for the resistance by Sunni Muslims, the Iraqi minority whom Saddam Hussein had bribed and cajoled into forming his base of support. There, the underground network of former Baathist soldiers and secret police, as well as groups of Islamic terrorists, plotted their anti-occupation ambushes and car bombings, as well as terrorist abductions and executions.

Now that the U.S. election freed the war-mongers of both parties from worrying about what voters might think, Fallujah, a city of 300,000 people, has been laid to waste. Its mosques, stores and homes were bombed, shelled and riddled with bullets. As one U.S. commander summed up, “There isn’t a building in this city that doesn’t have a hole in it.”

We will never know how many thousands of civilians died in the bombings or were killed by troops whose orders were to shoot anything that moved. U.S. forces made sure of that, beginning by occupying the city’s main hospital and barring it from receiving victims. Then they kept Red Crescent ambulances and convoys with food and water out of the city for more than two weeks.

One small indication of U.S. vindictiveness was seen in the videotaped execution of a severely wounded, unarmed Iraqi in a mosque by

a U.S. Marine. That Marine may be charged with a war crime, but the entire assault, not to speak of the whole war and occupation, are themselves unspeakable war crimes.

But the post-election escalation cannot extricate the imperialists from the quagmire they have dug themselves into. As we wrote in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 71, “[the U.S.] cannot stay in Iraq without greatly escalating its bloody attempts to suppress the masses, thereby abandoning the invasion’s vital goals of pacification and stabilization.”

### COMMUNALIST RIVALRY AIDS U.S. ASSAULT

The U.S. occupiers’ nightmare is a united, nationwide resistance. They know, as surely as Saddam did, that if the Iraqi people are to be conquered, they have to be divided. Towards this end,

*continued on page 18*



*Fallujah: destroyed by U.S. military to save Iraq for imperialist rule.*

### Inside

COFI/LRP Report . . . . .	2	Million Worker March Misses the Mark . . . . .	17
Labor Confronts Wal-Mart . . . . .	3	Why “No Draft” Is No Answer . . . . .	24

## Why Bush Won: Class, Race in the U.S. Election . . . . .9

# COFI/LRP Report

## COFI GERMANY

As reported in previous issues, the German working class has been taking to the streets, demonstrating against the present attacks on their living standards that go under the name of Agenda 2010. Yet, reined in by their union leaders, since last May the public displays of anger virtually disappeared. There have been scattered strike actions, most recently by Opel workers in Bochum in October, in response to General Motors' threat to liquidate their jobs. Without revolutionary leadership, however, these have all ended peacefully at the bargaining table – without much, if any, gain for the workers.

Just when it seemed that the summer would continue to be a period of relative class peace, August brought storm clouds from the East. Realizing that the harsh measures of the Hartz-IV laws "reforming" unemployment benefits (due to be implemented in January 2005) will dramatically alter their living conditions, thousands of predominantly working-class and unemployed people began taking to the streets every Monday evening (the *Montagsdemos*) in up to two hundred cities and towns throughout Germany.

The *Montagsdemo* movement – which revived the memory of demonstrations of the same name begun in the last days of the former East German GDR – lasted for about eight weeks, and was primarily concentrated in the East, where unemployment and dissatisfaction are high. At the movement's height, Berlin had 30,000 people participating, while smaller cities had quite respectable showings of 15-20,000 for many weeks. This was without any official support from the national unions, although local sections often sent token contingents to save face.

Caught off guard by this mass eruption, the reformist left was quick to prevent it from further disturbing the dreams of the ruling class. Although the number of protesters in many East German cities remained relatively high, things were otherwise in Berlin. With plenty of sectarian bickering among the misleaders, and next to nothing on offer from their speeches and literature other than legislative repeal or reform of the Hartz-IV laws, the movement's numbers dwindled rapidly, with about 5,000 people showing up about seven weeks after the movement began.

On October 3rd, a Saturday, the movement revealed how weakened it had become when a nation-wide mobilization to

Berlin brought only 50,000 people, and ended with no resolve to continue the movement in the future. Although hundreds here and there still gather on Mondays, for now the movement is in hibernation, a victim of the reformist left's self-serving cowardice and lack of real support from the unions.

## No to a New Reformist Party!

In an effort to direct the emerging motion of the German working class into safe channels, a number of reformists from the social-democratic parties and some union functionaries and leftists have been putting a lot of energy into forming a new party. Predictably enough, early pronouncements made it clear that this would not be billed as a "left," much less a "revolutionary," party. After months of haggling, in June various groups united as the *Wahlalternative* (its full name means Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice), making it clear to all that this would be little more than a new reformist electoralist trap. Its founding was roundly applauded by centrist currents such as Linksruck (the International Socialist Tendency affiliate), Sozialistische Alternative (the CWI affiliate; see PR 71), and Arbeitermacht (Workers Power).

As we argued at an Arbeitermacht public forum in Berlin, Trotskyists should only give critical support to such a party when there is indeed a mass movement behind it which we can try to win away. Although Arbeitermacht attempted to paint the recent mass demonstrations and scattered one-day strikes as a reason to believe that there is mass support for such a new party, we disagree. The masses have yet to really enter a serious period of struggle against the capitalists and their politicians, which will intensify the yearning for a truly working-class independent political force. When there is mass motion supporting a reformist workers' party, then it is the duty of revolutionaries to go into it, join with the militant workers and use the weapon of critical support in an effort to build the revolutionary party. But without that motion of the masses, we stand firm in saying that an independent revolutionary working-class party is the only alternative, not the back-room machinations and the long detour back to the SPD of the *Wahlalternative*.

*continued on page 14*

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# Taking on Wal-Mart

## How Labor Can Crack Wal-Mart's Anti-Union Program

by Dave Franklin

*This article is a continuation of "Wal-Mart: Vanguard of Capitalism" in PR 71.*

In our first article, we stressed that the grinding exploitation and suppression of Wal-Mart workers has been central to the success of the company. The Wal-Mart bosses have an iron-clad program of preventing any assertion of labor rights by their workers, in particular, union organization. As a handbook distributed to company managers spells out:

**Staying union free is a full-time commitment. Unless union prevention is a goal equal to other objectives within the organization, the goal will usually not be attained. The commitment to stay union-free must exist at all levels of management – from the Chairperson of the 'Board' down to the front-line manager. Therefore, no one in management is immune to carrying his or her 'own weight' in the union prevention effort.**

Wal-Mart's reputation for being the fiercest resister to labor organization around is well earned. This of course means the open and obvious acts of repression. But there are also more subtle yet highly effective methods. Simply put, the bosses make Wal-Mart a miserable place to work, day in and day out. An important reflection of this is the turnover rate of employees, which approaches half the workforce (44 percent) a year, and in a number of places exceeds 100 percent. Some of the angriest and therefore potentially rebellious workers simply up and leave, even if for other low-paying, demoralizing forms of labor.

### THE UNION LEADERS' "CHALLENGE" TO WAL-MART

At the same time, Wal-Mart officials are also very conscious of the fact that a section of the working class is living on the edge, desperate for any job and afraid they might not have one without Wal-Mart, as miserable as it is. Of course Wal-Mart arrogantly casts the exploitation of their employees in noble terms: "We are talking about people who might have fallen through the cracks without Wal-Mart," offers company spokesperson Mona Williams. In reality Wal-Mart stokes the job insecurities by, for example, designating much of its workforce as part-time. And it has moved away from offering the kind of incremental wage package (tied to years of service) that is geared toward encouraging long-term employment.

Thus any serious attempt to gain even basic labor rights for Wal-Mart workers through union organization has to provide a vision to workers that our class

actually has the power to unite and win, something the current labor "movement" hardly inspires. Not only is a raw expression of labor power the only way that the Wal-Mart bosses can be obliged to begin to concede anything major; only a struggle which utilizes the full resources of the labor movement is capable of mobilizing and animating the mass of Wal-Mart workers to overcome their own perfectly understandable fears.

Yet a serious struggle to take on Wal-Mart is more than possible, because Wal-Mart workers, in collective action, will be a powerful force. But they will not stand alone. This mammoth company, a deserved symbol of race-to-the-bottom bargain basement wage policies, has well earned the hatred of most American workers and superexploited workers across the globe. The potential is enormous.

But even a militant trade unionist strategy is not something that the labor bureaucracy is interested in. And a dramatic shift in overall political strategy, which is most vital, is not even up for discussion in their world. The reformist misleaders have a clear stake in the capitalist system; their position as power brokers for labor power is the basis for their privileged status. At this point, they are far more worried about a labor confrontation that could get out of hand than they are about the damage inflicted on the working class. And as pro-capitalist leaders, they fundamentally accept the notion that profits must be made at the expense of workers; they just want to shift the terms a bit.

### FERMENT AMONG LABOR TOPS – THE NUP

We have noted in the past how the capitalist offensive has steadily besieged the unionized base of the bureaucracy itself. This clear danger has produced ferment within the labor leadership over how to counter it. It was the basis for John Sweeney's



*Unionists in protest organized by UFCW Local 588 at a Wal-Mart in Sacramento, CA November 21, 2002.*



San Francisco hotel struggle.

defeat of those AFL-CIO bureaucrats who sought to continue on the same path as the retiring Lane Kirkland in 1995. And this year has seen the emergence of the New Unity Partnership (NUP), an amalgam of labor officials including the presidents of five major unions: the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the recently merged Hotel and Retail Employees (HERE) and UNITE unions, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, and the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA).

The NUP leaders have been making waves about the need to organize, and have been highly critical of the AFL-CIO's efforts at recruitment. (The Carpenters withdrew from the AFL-CIO in 2001). Their contention, put forward in a document by Steven Lerner, the director of SEIU's Building Service Department, is that the unions have been weakened by a piecemeal, overlapping and decentralized pattern of organization that lacks "industry and market focus" and substitutes "general workers' unions" for ones based squarely on a core industry. According to this notion, unions have to be organized to correspond to specific industrial sectors, with the aim of achieving a "density" sufficient for bargaining leverage. NUP leaders have seized on this argument, and further argued that 77 percent of union resources should go towards organizing, far more than the 30 percent currently proposed by the AFL-CIO. At an election post-mortem of top AFL-CIO officials, SEIU President Andrew Stern made open references to his union leaving the AFL-CIO – while pushing for it to adopt the NUP strategy. He directly connected this dispute to Wal-Mart by calling for a \$25 million campaign to unionize the company.

There are several reasons to avoid dismissing all this as a typical bureaucratic flap. There is a certain history to the NUP's emphasis on organizing: key members of the NUP, including UNITE President Bruce Raynor and HERE President John Wilhelm, were prominent in Sweeney's Task Force on Organizing established in the '90's, and encountering stiff resistance from other labor officials over giving organizing efforts any real priority. The NUP unions have devoted more of their budgets to organizing than the typical AFL-CIO union. They have shown co-operation in organizing – notably the work of UNITE and HERE with the SEIU in organizing workers at Sodexho, the country's largest provider of dining services, a kind of union collaboration seldom seen in this country. And the SEIU and HERE have been involved in the most successful organizing efforts in recent years, among Las Vegas hotel workers and Los Angeles health care workers.

Moreover, there are technical merits to their arguments about focused industrial organizing; revolutionists are in general in favor of more centralized, coordinated union structures. But the NUP's proposed solution amounts to a bureaucratic restructuring: collapsing the dozens of union organizations into roughly 12 large ones, and delegating more power in the hands of top AFL-CIO officials.

Moreover, the NUP leaders hardly have a sparkling track record in the class struggle. For example, they have passively accepted concession-laden contracts like the sellout of San Francisco city workers earlier this year, which SEIU led. And UNITE routinely signs off on sweatshop contracts in the garment industry. As well, leaked documents showed that NUP leaders planned to axe the AFL-CIO's Education, Field Mobilization, Health and Safety and Civil and Human Rights departments to make way for a "Strategic Growth" Department; they planned to replace local labor councils with officials appointed from the top. While the current structure is hardly a paragon of rank and file democracy, such changes reflect the NUP's contempt for democratic forms.

#### **HOTEL WORKERS UNDERMINED**

Most distressing, as we write in November, is how HERE leaders have undermined their stated goals of united contract fights for hotel workers nationally by a pathetically limited and divisive strike strategy. At the end of September, local contracts had expired in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. But UNITE-HERE called only a 2-week strike, only in San Francisco and by less than half of its membership there! The rest of the hotel workers in San Francisco predictably suffered a lockout. By late November a temporary two-month suspension of the lockout was hailed by the union leaders as a major victory. While the battle is not over, the ranks must fight for a radical change of policy, in order to prevent a repeat of the failed California supermarket strike. (See *PR 70*.)

The essential point is that the NUP leaders are unwilling to pursue a level of militancy and mobilization of the ranks that is even significantly distinguished from the daily sellouts of the labor bureaucracy at large. No wonder they have conveniently based their platform on the question of organizing narrowly posed, as if defending current members against the bosses' attacks and organizing new workers are not organically connected. Yet without a change in strategy, plans to restructure and devote more

funds to union organizing will by themselves bear little fruit in achieving even their own limited goals.

A decisive problem goes even beyond this obvious lack of trade union militancy. The NUP offers no political alternative; yet the fundamental problems facing all workers, including union workers as well as Wal-Mart and other non-union workers, are not solved by trade union contracts. On one level this is true because every serious struggle confronts the politicians, the police and the courts sooner or later. But beyond this there is a growing understanding that the fundamental quality of workers' lives, and even their health and survival, is something that is ultimately decided by political power. Revolutionaries fight to raise the consciousness of workers to see that it is a question of which class holds state power that basically determines our fate, not one bourgeois politician or another. This is not yet widely understood, yet the attention paid to the recent elections showed an increased politicization within the working class.

As if to underscore their own understanding of politics, NUP leaders postponed the fight within the AFL-CIO until after the November elections. This belied their claim that the question of organizing was the top question for the unions: apparently it wasn't crucial enough to interfere with *their* politics, another round of support to the capitalist parties.

Thus resources were wasted on getting out the vote for the "lesser evil" Democrats. But this after all is the dominant strategy of the AFL-CIO – and here NUP has nothing new to offer. They are posing a break or change in the leadership based on no different political view from that of the other hacks. In fact a telling exception to the dominant AFL-CIO trend has been made by one NUP leader, Doug McCarron of the Carpenters, who has been an enthusiast of the virulently anti-labor President Bush. Apparently the only thing they agree on is that there's a need to support some bourgeois party. This makes the short-sighted and suicidal nature of the NUP bloc most evident.

### ORGANIZING AT WAL-MART

A focus on NUP is well deserved because they are the ones claiming to be the champions of organizing the unorganized. But no union in the NUP has declared its intention to compete with the union that has been expected to organize Wal-Mart workers, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). With nearly a million and a half members, the UFCW is the largest private sector union in the country. Roughly half that membership is in

the retail industry (including supermarkets). In the retail sector there has been particular growth of giant non-union firms like Target – but above all Wal-Mart. The union leaders have watched that growth increasingly threaten their existing organized base. So they have been obliged to throw up some sort of challenge to Wal-Mart's rampage through the retail industry. As one UFCW staffer said, "we have no choice but to [unionize Wal-Mart] if we want to survive." Some momentum has been built to this end.

The UFCW leadership has quite a gamey history, even by bureaucratic standards, notably its butchering of the Hormel strike in 1985. (*Proletarian Revolution* gave this struggle extensive analysis in issue 26.) It was responsible for the betrayal of supermarket workers in the southern California grocery strike. It also leads the pack in the number of contracts with two-tiered wages, a favored mode of pushing concessions on the unions. So it's no surprise that its early efforts to tackle Wal-Mart in the early '90's were unimpressive – just conferences and small orchestrated rallies. As one genius bureaucrat put it: "The key thing for any union is to talk to workers, and we hadn't done that."

The results were predictable; not even a toehold was established. But with little to show and the Wal-Mart threat increasingly clear, sections of the UFCW bureaucracy began to take the organizing attempts a little more seriously. A Strategic Programs department was created in 1999 and an Organizing Department in 2000, and the union began conducting organizing efforts that at least recognized that workers needed to be involved. The union actually began chatting up Wal-Mart workers, often through the internet, and actively promoting shop-floor organizing committees.

The most ambitious effort has been in Las Vegas. Most of the city's Wal-Mart stores have organizing committees, and the union filed for a store-wide election in 2001 after most workers in a local affiliate signed authorization cards. Wal-Mart responded with a harassment campaign, using both legal and illegal tactics that included threatening to fire pro-union workers, encouraging employees to retaliate against pro-union co-workers and interrogating workers about union sympathies. Under those conditions, the union leadership felt obliged to delay the elections and rely on appeals to the NLRB and a long drawn-out legal process. Thus the momentum was stalled for years. In Jacksonville, Texas, a unit of meat-cutters voted in February 2000 to unionize their operation. Here the company responded by closing down their meat departments nationwide and selling pre-packaged meat. While Wal-Mart

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management conducts decisive actions, the UFCW failed to get its own locals in Las Vegas to offer any credible level of support there, and employs a bare two percent of its budget for organizing Wal-Mart generally. As we go to press, workers in an automotive department of a Colorado Wal-Mart have requested UFCW representation, in the face of management's predictable opposition.

The situation has been marginally better in Canada. Workers in Jonquière, Quebec have been certified to form a UFCW unit, and workers at a handful of stores in Quebec and elsewhere have sought certification. Not surprisingly, Wal-Mart is making threats about closing the Jonquière store. That Wal-Mart reacts to every union development is an indication of its fear of a spreading revolt. But fundamentally, the company has been successful in Canada, as in the U.S., in keeping a lid on organizing victories.

### **KEEPING WAL-MART OUT?**

Facing unrelenting hostility to their slightest organizing efforts, the labor bureaucrats have sought even weaker, more tangential, ways to realize their ends. These are not a coherent blend of tactics to correspond with the organizing in the field but a hodgepodge of ideas and activities that do a bad job of hiding the lack of a determined strategy to face this enemy.

A prominent example is a series of coalitions of unions, ministers, small businessmen and community activists in urban areas to "Keep Wal-Mart Out." Such a coalition was instrumental in setting back Wal-Mart in the Inglewood, California referendum (see Part I in *PR 71*); this method has also built resistance to Wal-Mart's moves into urban areas like Chicago and Minneapolis. But while we take pleasure in seeing Wal-Mart get its toes stubbed, and while we may support some of these demands, the fact is that pursuing the class struggle inside and outside the company is the only feasible way to fight.

The coalitions have centered their campaigns on defending the small stores that Wal-Mart threatens to swamp, for the sake of the stores themselves as well as the jobs and community ties they represent. But the threatened petty-bourgeois establishments cannot possibly compete with Wal-Mart's power or economies of scale; thus any attempts to keep the giant out by protecting local shops is at best temporary. Secondly, those petty-bourgeois operations are neither proletarian bastions nor the embodiment of

decent wages and union rights. They cannot offer the numbers of jobs that a giant enterprise can. Most of all, the concentrated establishments of Wal-Mart contain the potential for proletarian power: the mass of workers that run the stores. Organizing the workforce that monopoly capital creates, not protecting the remnants of the system's past, is the key.

### **THE CONSUMER BOYCOTT TACTIC**

The consumer boycott is another tactic being floated by some labor bureaucrats and others. The UFCW has in a low-profile way been asking customers not to shop at Wal-Mart. Others protesting Wal-Mart's very real evils, from exploiting sweatshop labor to censoring recordings, launched a boycott effort on Memorial Day.

This tactic generally has serious weaknesses. Boycotts do not have the concentrated power of strikes, which can effectively shut operations down. They are dispersed, less cohesive and less direct, and they rely on moral persuasion rather than power. We have in the past supported specific boycotts as an elementary form of working-class solidarity. Even then, we criticized them as a substitute for a militant and effective strategy.

Boycotting Wal-Mart at this time would be exceptionally ineffective. A boycott is not tied to any strike action. It is aimed at a company with a great capacity to blunt such efforts, because of the nature of its working-class consumer base: at least 30 percent of union credit-card purchases are made at Wal-Mart; in many small towns, it is so dominant that people have little choice for purchasing basic goods. (It is thus no surprise that even many in the bureaucracy do not want to apply one of their favorite tactics in this case.) Moreover, mixed in with progressive sentiments for the boycott are more reactionary ones – notably a good dose of protectionism in protesting Wal-Mart's purchases of foreign-made goods.

Other lines of conducting the struggle have been suggested. One notion from Wade Rathke, the founder and chief organizer of ACORN and SEIU Local 100 in New Orleans, touts a mode of organization that attracts workers by offering legal and social services. Such a "Wal-Mart Workers Organization" would be an example of what has been called "open source unionism." Such organizations can possibly provide useful job, social and legal

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services for workers; under given conditions they can be a staging area for militant organizing. The problem is that it is being proposed as a way of “organizing” the work force without taking on the company itself. Stern even thinks such associations are so removed from shop-floor struggle that they are better created by community organizations rather than unions.

### WAL-MART NOT “ROGUE” CAPITAL

It is notable that the struggle against Wal-Mart is painted by the labor bureaucracy as an attempt to take on a rogue operation of capital. One union website goes so far as to claim that Wal-Mart has been rejected by the “establishment.” The message that should be sent is just the opposite: that Wal-Mart is representative of capital. Since the end of the post-World War II boom, the general trend has been the elimination of the good industrial jobs of the past and their replacement by more and more low-wage service jobs as the alternative to unemployment. Given the fundamental economic crisis, low wages are justified as a necessity for profit-making and “competition.” (See our pamphlet *The Specter of Economic Collapse*.) Since the company and the capitalists in general will continue to press their attacks, the working class needs to prepare a class-wide defense.

While there are differences, the emerging campaign against Wal-Mart is fundamentally similar to the much-publicized unionization attempt at the J.P. Stevens textile company in the late '70's and early '80's. That effort included incremental, legalistic organizing, combined with a boycott and public relations aimed at gaining public sympathy against another capitalist company painted by the labor heads as a greedy “rogue” that was picking on powerless workers. (See *Socialist Voice* No. 3) It was conducted by the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, a predecessor of UNITE. It didn't work. Although a heroic textile worker inspired the Hollywood hit *Norma Rae*, only a sliver of the company was organized, and the union otherwise accepted Stevens' open shop after years of effort.

Today's situation holds even less promise for such a strategy. Wal-Mart has far greater resources than J.P. Stevens ever had. And the economic, social and political environments are even more hostile for a campaign that relies on moral suasion rather than working-class power.

To be sure, the mounting resistance to Wal-Mart is giving it real hassles. It has a growing public-relations problem. It has already had to pay out millions in fines and court costs for unpaid overtime, sexual discrimination cases and the like; it now faces the largest sexual discrimination suit ever and a billion-dollar federal lawsuit charging it with selling clothing made from forced labor. It has to finance a growing legal and lobbying staff and has been obliged to ramp up its already cultish-like internal atmosphere. It faces major battles in its urban expansion drive – and the unionization threat.

But the company continues to grow and make money. And most importantly for our class, the vast potential power of its million and a half-member workforce and their working-class supporters at large has been untapped. Wal-Mart can't be fought effectively without understanding that rather than a “rogue” capitalist outfit, it is actually in the vanguard of today's capitalism; all capitalist success is based on squeezing out profits, and increasingly in the U.S. as much as around the world, profits depend on lowering wages. Wal-Mart is just most blatantly and boldly showing the way.

### REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY FOR THE STRUGGLE

The stark reality, as we have emphasized, is that not even the limited goal of unionizing Wal-Mart will be accomplished



*Union members en route to demonstrate at a Wal-Mart in Latham, NY*

without a drastic shift from the strategy the union bureaucracy is pursuing. A positive guide from history is the wave of class explosions that shook the country in the 1930's. These were not legalistic card authorizations but pitched battles involving masses of workers willing to break the law, face down troops and take on the bosses at the heart of the company operations. Illegal strikes, general strikes and factory occupations were favored tactics.

Moreover, these upheavals were not simply based on an “economic” calculation that unions were a beneficial idea. They were the result of social movements that reflected and furthered the change in consciousness of whole sections of the masses. They were about not just unions but a wide range of working-class needs. Therefore they threatened to go far beyond the bounds of trade unionism, even if that was the initial form they took.

To be sure, the movements of the '30's had limitations. These included the success of reformist and Stalinist leaders in keeping the struggle within the bounds of supporting the Democratic Party. The movements also generally failed to champion the causes of oppressed groups like Black workers, Mexican workers, women workers and the unemployed. Still, they teach lessons about the radical forms the struggle needs to take to make radical change, which the unionization of Wal-Mart would inevitably be.

But a real strategy goes far beyond that. It must incorporate the truly mass and militant approach by which unions were forged. It means preparing the ranks for strike action and employing illegal as well as legal tactics: simply relying on the “slow wheels of justice” through obedient observance of the NLRB's procedures will play right into the company's hands. Mass pickets to keep out scabs, composed of members of various unions, will be necessary. It means championing the demands of oppressed groups (and not just in Wal-Mart alone) – notably women, who constitute nearly three-fourths of the hourly workforce. Blacks and Latinos will also play increasingly prominent roles. Such an effort, coupled with an attack on the low-wage economy, could win massive support among workers who see no way out. It needs to reject the bureaucrats' suicidal reliance on the Democratic Party in favor of a politically class-conscious strategy.

In most any battle, social or military, there are strategic

points where the battle is or should be waged in concentrated form. Wal-Mart is no exception. The struggle, from dramatic battles to everyday legwork, demands focus. Despite past setbacks, Las Vegas is an example of such a flashpoint. With its modest but real tradition of fighting Wal-Mart, and a relatively high concentration of both Wal-Mart stores and unionized labor (by the UFCW itself and NUP unions), Las Vegas could be an inspiring battleground if the power of labor were actually organized behind the Wal-Mart workers. A mass labor campaign there could back a well-organized and militant fight by Wal-Mart workers, including the weapons of mass picketing and a general strike to support the struggle.

Similar situations and similar actions can be expected in the urban areas Wal-Mart is being compelled to move into, with the contentious conditions we have already seen. In particular, urban Wal-Marts will see recruitment of a volatile group of workers that Wal-Mart bosses and the work culture they have created are not used to; they will have trouble controlling them in the same way they do more isolated groups of workers.

### **DEMANDS ON THE UNIONS**

While there will always be such strategic concentrations, if the struggles are conducted along the mass, radical lines we are sketching in, a spread of rebellion is truly possible. There are compelling objective reasons for such a rapid development. Wal-Mart has already shown its penchant for isolating centers of rebellions through measures like store closings; how flexible they can actually be in the face of a class-wide movement is another matter. At any rate, the gradual, store-by-store approach will never wash; the mass union drives of the past never succeeded that way either. As well, the necessary massive struggle, particularly as it enlists other sectors of labor, must include a strategy of spreading throughout Wal-Marts nationally and internationally. At the same time, it can hardly be expected to stop at Wal-Mart; it will be part of a wide-ranging intensification of struggles of workers and the oppressed in general.

The fight against Wal-Mart, even starting in one city, has to have a political strategy for spreading and building solidarity with other workers: it has to be part of a fight for a decent living union wage for all workers; it must demand equal pay for equal work for women and men, for Black, Latino and white.

Placing the necessary demands for struggle on the unions today means placing them on the union bureaucracy. It is in their capacity as union leaders that the bureaucrats command the resources to carry out such a struggle. We have to force them to lead a real fight, or expose the fact that they won't. We don't expect the bureaucrats to behave like revolutionists, but we do demand that they take their own rhetoric of defending the unions and organizing seriously. The UFCW is certainly a union saddled with a particularly boss-loving leadership; but regardless of the specific union involved, such demands have to be made as part of the fight against the current misleadership.

### **A CLASS-WIDE BATTLE**

Furthermore, the demands have to be made on all the unions, because the fight against Wal-Mart has to be a fight of labor as a whole. HERE President Wilhelm has stated: "No one union can organize Wal-Mart. We need to face this in a comprehensive way." Absolutely right! But militants must press him to back up what he says with a real battle. Wilhelm rose to prominence through his leadership of HERE in Las Vegas. The commitment of HERE to strike action and picket lines to keep out scabs in that flashpoint would be a very concrete and meaningful way to "face" Wal-Mart. The SEIU's Stern and the rest of NUP must also be

pressured to back their public fervor to organize Wal-Mart with mass, militant actions.

We do not expect the bureaucrats to willingly embrace such a fight. But mass pressure can force them to carry out serious actions. It has been demonstrated that rank and file workers will respond to serious, militant battle strategies. If such a strategy is offered now, it can mean successful fights that whet the ranks' appetites for more militant struggle and leadership. As well, if the bureaucrats refuse and the ranks are sufficiently energized, they will begin fighting to replace the dead-end leadership they are burdened with.

At no point do we hide the truth from our fellow workers; our goal is to build a revolutionary party leadership for the working class and to replace the current miserable lot that rule the unions. Pro-capitalist leadership must be replaced in the course of the struggle. And this will happen as workers' consciousness gets raised in action, combined with the intervention of revolutionaries as an integral part of the battles.

One likely path of development could mean a seemingly modest struggle initially: a fight for trade-union rights focused on selected flashpoints. But we cannot overstate the notion that even those modest goals will demand radical methods of struggle that will in turn rapidly raise the stakes in general. How much the momentum for that course of struggle is generated from within Wal-Mart and how much from other areas of struggle is an open question. Explosions in other sections of the working class could have an electrifying effect on the hundreds of thousands of poorly-paid Wal-Mart workers, and this may be how the struggle begins.

Whatever the particular course, the consciousness of the ranks is critical. Revolutionary workers cannot create this consciousness by themselves, or substitute for it. But we sense the building anger of the working class, the percolating, suppressed militancy of Wal-Mart workers, and we believe the potential for a break-out explosion and the search for revolutionary leadership is enormous. Even now we can provide direction by pointing to the actions possible by the existing organizations of the working class and even by the existing leadership – actions which both reflect and propel the combativeness of the ranks and their desire for a better way to live and work. Even now we can reach the most advanced workers with this strategy.

There should be no illusions about the possible costs involved in this struggle, even given the best possible course of action and the development of revolutionary leadership. There must be high risks taken. There will be setbacks and casualties. But the battle is vital and one way or another virtually inevitable. And the casualties already inflicted by Wal-Mart and the system on all workers today are far greater than what will happen when the struggle is no longer a one-sided class war. Any action by Wal-Mart workers will inevitably gain the sympathy and support of vast sections of the working class here and abroad, in a far deeper and more extensive version of the support given the United Parcel strike that was decisive to that victory in the late 90's.

It is past time for a real fightback. This fight can secure real gains, but these could be rendered only temporary given the deepening capitalist crisis and the consequent offensive against the workers. We can't expect a stabilization of "labor relations" like that after World War II; at best there will be an interim period before the question is posed as to whether these and all past gains will be wiped out or the workers will take decisive action. It is through the course of this and other battles that the masses of workers can be won to the need for a revolutionary party and the revolutionary overthrow of a system that for nearly a century has outlived its usefulness.●



## ***Class, Race and the Polarization of U.S. Politics:***

# **Why Bush Won**

George W. Bush's victory in November shocked and frightened millions of people around the world who are outraged by the bloody U.S. imperialist war on Iraq and threatened by the increasingly arrogant superpower. The result also added to the fears of millions of working-class people in the U.S. – especially Blacks, Latinos and immigrants – who face accelerating racism, declining living standards, stepped-up repression and the widening war which they have increasingly grown to question.

The fact that 58 million Americans voted for Bush, including a sizeable minority of working-class voters, staggered many on the left who had signed on to the John Kerry campaign. But the truth is that the workers, oppressed people and anti-war fighters who voted for Kerry were also horribly misled. Despite the bitter polarization which characterized the campaign, both sides agreed on one central point: the election was about how to build “a stronger America” – what was the best way to maintain the U.S. as the dominant world superpower. That is, in voting for Bush or Kerry or even Ralph Nader, Americans were supporting the world's most avaricious and deadly ruling class. They were participating in choosing which mass murderer could best cut the throats of the world's workers, including their own.

This loathsome election seemed to prove that U.S. capitalism and its ruling class are unchallengeable. But the reality is opposite. Despite its momentary ups and downs, the economy is in a profound crisis, the war in Iraq promises to become an even worse nightmare, social and political eruptions are looming around the globe, and the rivalry between the European and American imperialists is deepening.

And for all its contradictory character, the election showed that the line-ups on both sides expressed the underlying class division in capitalist society. The hatred of workers for their bosses, along with their fears, frustration and anger, was evident just below the distorted surface. As the crisis of the system deepens, this fire below represents the potential for an explosive working-class struggle. Therein lies the hope that revolutionaries see even in an election where one political monster overcame a brother under the skin.

### **U.S. IMPERIALISM AND THE WORKING CLASS**

The election was about the fate of the world and the international working class and oppressed peoples, but only Americans were allowed to vote. Caught up in nationalism, those U.S. workers who voted chose solely on the basis of what they thought was good for them. That way of seeing the world seemed so obviously natural that bourgeois journalists never even thought it was worthwhile to point out. Yet millions of people in vast areas of the world are suffering superexploitation and repression at the hands of U.S. imperialism. Concern over the fate of American soldiers in Iraq was a prominent issue. But the fact that 100,000 Iraqis



*George W. Bush used imperialist wars, the far-right movement and the Democrats' refusal to mobilize their supporters to win a second term. Workers need to break with both capitalist parties.*

have died in the conflict, revealed in a study made public shortly before the vote, was largely ignored.

The nationalism of the U.S. working class has real roots. Marx taught us that social categories like “classes” are not things but relationships. Thus the “labor aristocracy” – a privileged section of the working class which has a temporary material stake in the preservation of capitalism – is a relative phenomenon. (And it isn't simply confined to those with an actual stake; poorer workers often act like aristocrats if they aspire to that status.) There is a significant layer of the U.S. working-class which has secured important gains. In particular, white workers have an aristocratic relationship over the majority of Black, Latino and immigrant workers. But at the same time, U.S. workers as a whole are aristocratically better off, and therefore more loyal to “their” capitalist system and its national interests, than are workers in most of the world. So it is no accident that American workers feel that their jobs, wages and living conditions depend on a strong United States, especially now in such fearful times.

However, the American working class is not hopelessly corrupted. Workers were never handed their gains; they had to fight for them. Still, the rulers benefited by gaining a stable base from which to exploit so much of the world's labor power. This in turn enabled them to concede a small portion of their profits to continue buying off workers at home. Now the economic crisis is undermining the ability of the system to continue paying off the workers. As the attacks on past gains inevitably deepen, the already frustrated U.S. working class will inevitably erupt in a struggle that will reveal bourgeois elections to be the side show they really are. Workers who were led to believe that they were first-class citizens – the “middle class” – will become especially explosive as they realize that they have been conned.

## DIVISIONS IN THE WORKING CLASS

The 2004 election brought home the fact that the U.S. political scene is intensely polarized. The fundamental polarization in capitalist society – between the ruling-class capitalists and the working class – was expressed in a highly distorted fashion. Rather than a reactionary ruling-class party facing a progressive working-class party, modern U.S. politics has always featured two parties which serve the tiny ruling class and which therefore must appeal, in different ways, to the majority. Neither party can win elections without finding a popular base of support in the professional middle layers, the petty bourgeoisie and above all the huge working class.

The polarization has become more bitter as the economic situation decays and popular anger mounts. Despite Bush's claims of success, millions have seen decent jobs closed down and living standards grow ever more precarious. The real reason is that profit rates have been falling in the long term, not just in the 2000 recession but generally throughout the long downturn that ended the post-World War II boom around 1968-70. The economic crunch has forced the capitalists to battle with each other for every bit of profit they could squeeze out of workers here and abroad. It has pushed them to loot their own Federal treasury even more rapaciously than usual. In particular, it has accelerated their attack on the gains they ceded to workers under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and to Black people under Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Average wages allowing for inflation, for example, are less than they were in 1970.

The growing economic inequality has reached record levels: the chasm between the wealthiest layers and the majority is expanding. As one illustration, the richest 1 percent already owned 20 percent of social wealth in 1980; its share has more than doubled today. Contrasting with their riches are rising levels of poverty, homelessness, joblessness, job insecurity and low-wage jobs, health care costs, bankruptcies and small business failures. On top of this are the sharp contrasts within the working class. White households have a median net worth 11 times that of Latino households and 14 times that of Black households. Black people's net worth plummeted by 16 percent, starting under Clinton and accelerating under Bush. The lower sections of the middle class and the petty bourgeoisie have also suffered under the profit-gorging attack.

The increasingly vicious combat between the Republican and Democratic politicians at the top reflects the economic fragility. The mad scramble for the untold millions of dollars poured into the coffers of both parties shows various bourgeois interests seeking to ensure their rewards. The anger at the base, which the politicians have succeeded so far in diverting from class struggle, inflames the polarization within the middle strata and, above all, within the working class.

## THE BUSH VOTERS

With the country split down the middle, Bush had the advantage of a far-right and religious movement that had been built over decades. Originating in the 1960's with the presidential campaigns of Barry Goldwater, George Wallace and Richard Nixon, it finally crystallized under Ronald Reagan as a dynamic voting bloc. It included Southern Protestant whites of all classes and many petty-bourgeois and working-class elements in the Southwest and Prairie states. Despite past mutual hostility, a bloc was also forged with an important sector of the Northern blue-collar white Catholic suburban labor aristocracy, the so-called "Reagan Democrats."

A central theme that demagogically unified these disparate forces was a form of populist racism pitting the "middle class"

and "Middle America" against liberal "welfare state" bureaucrats and Blacks, to whom the bureaucrats were allegedly funneling benefits derived from taxes paid by white small businessmen and workers. Since then, sometimes overtly but more often in coded words, racism has been the tool for dividing and derailing the working class. Even though overt racism was suppressed in the 2000 and 2004 elections, it was obvious in the Republican ballot-rigging shenanigans in Florida then and Ohio now. It is even more obvious in the fact that the two parties in the South are divided almost exactly on racial lines.

The religious-reactionary-racist hard core of the Republican voting base expanded under the recurring economic crises. The "terrorist threat" triggered by September 11, 2001 added support. The born-again Texan Bush II seized the opportunity. In 2004 his base was mobilized even more effectively than in 2000, as a result of Bush's bold right-wing strokes in office and of added efforts by the cabal of preachers and talk-radio demagogues.

There is a terribly perverted class attitude underlying the individualistic, populist, racist and sexist beliefs of Bush's base among workers. It leads them, like the lower strata of their petty-bourgeois allies, to hate the upper-class liberals and their underlings in government, the corporations, the media, Hollywood, the professions and the universities. They believe that there are two kinds of rich people: those who want them to survive and those who favor darker "lower class" people at their expense. With the male-dominated traditional family already undermined by declining wages and the need for women to work, the liberals paraded their contempt for "family values" by supporting abortion rights, unwed mothers – and now gay marriage, no less. In contrast, Bush & Co. seem to want to fight the torrent of degeneration they so deeply fear. The poorer layers of Bush's voters were uncomfortable with his financial giveaways to venal corporations. But they too felt that his positives outweigh his negatives.

Bush's base saw him as a tough-minded supporter of a powerful America. They connected American primacy in a competitive world and their own well-being. Constantly feeling under attack and impotent in their own lives, they wanted a man in power who would stand up to the foreigners who dared attack and insult the God-blessed U.S.A. Bush could be too cosy with the big corporations, but crisis demands a hard man with hard answers to hard problems, they thought.

## THE DEMOCRATIC VOTERS

There was a highly significant difference between the relations of the two big bourgeois candidates to their bases. Bush's supporters eagerly defended and voted for him, whereas Kerry's had no particular liking for their candidate: their loyalty was to the Democratic Party, and they particularly hated Bush. Support for the Democrats in the big cities and heavy industry zones in the Northeast, Midwest and West Coast is of long duration. Traditionally, the Democratic Party had a base among urban immigrant and unionized workers as well as the liberal urban middle class and the intelligentsia. And over the years it won a large and stable base of Black voters. All these sectors see themselves as dependent on government in an uphill battle to get jobs, equal rights, a decent income and social benefits.

Today the American working class contains huge numbers not only of Blacks and Latinos but also of Middle Easterners and Asians, including many immigrants. People of color feel the deadly grip of persistent racism, which they see playing a strong role in the Republican bloc. They know that they are not favored by government; they see that the playing field is not level and is getting more uneven. Immigrants understand that they were allowed to come here to work at low wages, so decent and equal

pay is a natural aim.

Given the racial and ethnic diversity of the urban workforce, there is some sense of unity in dealing with the bosses, although racism and gross inequality persist. These remain strong because of the absence of mass unifying working-class struggles. But large-scale industry creates and maintains patterns of working-class cooperation on the job. Moreover, the big cities are sophisticated cultural and information centers. Even though the wealthy gain most from these benefits, urban life itself gives workers a broader horizon than small-town residents.

The fact that in recent history it was the Democrats who had to cede gains to Blacks, Latinos, immigrants and unionized workers is a major factor in urban working-class hostility toward Republicans. Aware of the continuing attack on their jobs, wages and benefits, these workers blame the giant corporations linked to Wall Street and the Republicans. Moreover, even though most blue-collar workers are alienated from the middle-class anti-war protests, those in big cities tend to turn against imperialist wars more rapidly than others. The greater degree of class consciousness, racial empathy for oppressed people abroad and the “third world” origins of many immigrants encourage suspicion of imperialist actions.

Bush himself is particularly disliked for his open attack on working-class living standards, his trampling of civil liberties and his disdain for the rights of women and gays. Middle-class and urban workers increasingly oppose Bush’s war. Workers of color understand his barely concealed contempt, despite his embrace of upper-class and unthreatening Black people like Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice. Bush and his running mate Dick Cheney openly represent the most predatory corporations and run a genuine welfare state for their capitalist cronies. Their close ties to unabashed looters like Enron and Halliburton are a further slap in the face.

Kerry’s supporters, like Bush’s, desperately wanted a way out of the foreign and domestic crises which seem to be piling up. They too felt that their economic well-being depended on American power in the world. They too experienced September 11 as a gross insult by foreigners who didn’t seem to know their place in the world; they too wanted a tough response. However, they saw no benefit in alienating powerful allies, and they worried about Bush’s unconcern about raising the level of hostility toward the U.S. throughout the world. Increasingly, they saw Iraq as a disaster caused by Bush.

But Kerry and the Democrats are as much tools of imperialism as are Bush and the Republicans. Kerry was caught between the anti-war sentiment of his base and his own need to responsibly serve U.S. capitalist interests, and therefore to support the war and the occupation. Consequently, he hemmed and hawed about the war. Despite his campaign slogan “For a Stronger America,” he vacillated and *was* weak. For reasons we will point out below, he was timid on domestic economic and social issues as well, so his supporters could never match the enthusiasm of Bush’s volunteer political corps.

#### **THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY GRAVEYARD**

A dramatic increase in voter registration brought the turnout in November to 55 percent, well above the 50 percent level characteristic of the recent presidential elections. Normally a big turnout means that more lower-income workers are voting, which favors the Democrats – but not this time. Bush won essentially the same states as in 2000, but he also handily won the popular vote that he narrowly lost last time. The reason was the more dynamic conservative mobilization that meant the difference in a couple of closely contested states and built up bigger margins in

states already won.

Unlike Kerry, Bush had no qualms about mobilizing his supporters. Given their present direction, they constitute no threat to stability and certainly no threat to capitalism. Bush’s cadres see no need for extra-legal or illegal action, because they feel they can get what they want from elections. On the other hand, Kerry worked hard *not* to ignite his base. With Bush facing a debacle in Iraq and a crisis-ridden economy, the Democrats were handed every opportunity to win. But when the ruling class senses enormous anxiety and rage building up among workers of all sorts, it fears inflammatory populist appeals – let alone class-directed appeals. Therefore, while Kerry tried his best to emphasize economic issues, he kept his pledges to create more jobs and offer better health care benefits to modest and uninspiring levels. Although he chose John Edwards, known for his populist rhetoric, as his running mate, they soft-pedaled his appeals during the campaign.

Another example of Kerry’s loyalty to the ruling class: the tight race in Ohio, where hundreds of thousands of provisional ballots remained, many cast by Black voters. These might have challenged Bush’s margin of victory, but rather than face weeks of governmental instability as in Florida in 2000, Kerry quickly conceded so as to reassure the bourgeoisie that Democrats stand for stability.

Generally a larger section of the big bourgeoisie favors the Republicans, because of the latent volatility and potentially anti-capitalist nature of the Democrats’ working-class base. Nevertheless, many bourgeois Republicans are contemptuous of the anti-scientific “moral” outlook of the petty bourgeoisie and backward workers who vote for their party, but they appreciate the class division and the stifling of the working-class struggle that Bush’s base represents. Likewise, the liberal wing of Wall Street and its middle-class allies favor the Democrats as the party that can better conciliate, restrain and entrap the working class, not inflame it.

The Democrats’ working-class electorate, organized through trade unions or led by civil rights advocates, remained largely uninspired during the 2004 campaign by a party that fears them and now offers them so little. The election was a major defeat for the labor bureaucracy, which poured millions of dollars and huge

## **Marxism, Interracialism and the Black Struggle**

### ***A Proletarian Revolution* pamphlet by Sy Landy**

An overview of the Marxist understanding of revolutionary proletarian interracialism and the historical course of the U.S. Black struggle. The pamphlet discusses the political failures of both integrationism and nationalism in detail, and develops our notion of Black liberation through socialist revolution as the alternative.

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resources into the Democratic campaign. The bureaucrats reflect the perceived interests of the better-off labor aristocrats. Acting in support of their ephemeral stake in the system, as opposed to the interests of the working class as a whole, they avoid mass struggle and choose the suicidal electoral path. Their man Kerry got two-thirds of the union-members' vote, which made up about a quarter of the entire electorate; non-union workers went mainly for Bush.

In the early 1970's, the industrial working class was beginning to explode in protests and a wave of strikes, both wildcat and official, which often threatened to get completely out of hand. Working overtime, the liberal labor bureaucracy steered the fighting workers into pinning their hopes on the then suddenly militant-sounding Democrats. Since then, the unions have fled the industrial battlefield, lost large numbers of members and made the term "labor movement" into a sick joke. Now unions show workers no way out of their worsening economic conditions.

Likewise with the Black struggle. In the 1960's, the liberals in Lyndon Johnson's administration began doling out benefits as a concession to the ghetto revolts, riots and strikes. A crucial angle was the rapid expansion of the Black middle class, relying on government jobs and programs, and acting to contain, defuse and detour the mass struggle into the Democratic Party graveyard. The number of Black Democratic elected officials – especially mayors of powder keg cities – expanded enormously. Arriving just in time to preside over the slow but steady undermining of Black economic and social gains, they helped deter the explosive masses in a way that white politicians alone could not have accomplished.

The women's movement suffered a similar fate. As its middle-class leaders became more entangled in Democratic politics, they rapidly conservatized and misled their base. So the anti-abortion machine gained speed and reached the point of endangering the landmark Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision. And now the quest for women's equality is being buried under the deluge of male chauvinist "family values" propaganda.

In the absence of major labor, Black and women's struggles, the radical right emerged as the only alternative claiming to have

answers for beleaguered Americans. The taming of working-class revolts in the ghettos and in industry, rather than quieting the right-wing reaction, fed grist to its mill. The white backlash against Black gains accelerated, and the radical populist "Republican revolution" grew as the economic crisis deepened – thanks to the Democrats and their "movement" helpers.

The latest example of the betrayal of a militant struggle is that of the anti-war movement. Disgracefully, it quickly moved from the streets into the Democratic Party and accepted the pro-war Kerry as its champion. The middle-class social pacifist leaders not only surrendered to the "Anybody But Bush" steamroller, but went along with the "don't rock the boat" strategy and kept virtually silent on the war. Shamefully, the Abu Ghraib horror revealed in April and the first Fallujah massacre in May were met with no mass protest actions to speak of. This enabled Kerry to wobble even further to the right, promising that he would not only "stay the course" in Iraq but that he would wage this and further wars more competently than Bush.

### BUSH AND KERRY'S DIFFERENCES

Both parties and their candidates represent U.S. imperialist capitalism, but not necessarily in the same way. They reflect different sectors of the ruling class and the attitudes of their voting bases. But this time the needs of imperialism allowed little room for maneuver. A seemingly startling fact about this bitterly polarized election was that beneath the insults, the programs of the two candidates were very much alike on crucial issues like the Iraq war, the "war on terrorism" and in major respects on the economy. And while important differences existed on social issues, the two contenders were not polar opposites even there.

Given Kerry's commitment to continuing on the bloody imperialist course in Iraq, the election could not serve as any sort of referendum on the most immediate issue facing the U.S. and the world. Kerry shared the "Bush Doctrine," that the U.S. has the right to make unilateral, pre-emptive attacks on any country, a policy actually initiated by ex-president Clinton over Yugoslavia and during the 12-year bombing campaign against Iraq leading up to the current invasion. Both imperialist candidates threatened to

use military force against Iran and Venezuela. Of course, both endorsed Israel's escalating repression of the Palestinian people. There were differences over tactics, with Kerry favoring a more friendly approach to the European imperialist powers while Bush leaned toward bullying them. Both wanted them to accept Washington's continued dominance.

Domestically, the issues of decent jobs, wages and health care that dominate the life struggles of millions of Americans were given rhetorical treatment, not concrete answers. The differences were real but less profound than voters were led to believe. Bush's tax cuts for the wealthy displayed his class interests openly. Kerry was subtler: his insistence on balancing the federal budget as his overriding domestic priority meant that even his modest pledges were close to empty. No attempt was made to mobilize working-class support with a clarion call for universal health care. There was no call for public works and the jobs that would go with them. There was no Kerry crusade against Bush's pals, the CEO's notorious for corporate looting. Such



*German workers march against government austerity program (see our report, page 2). U.S. workers need mass militant struggles, not bourgeois elections, to fight capitalist attacks.*

appeals could have electrified Kerry's base but would have violated the Democrats' fundamental loyalty to capital – at a time when the system must reduce benefits given workers, not add to them.

Like most Democratic politicians, Kerry supported Bush's Patriot Act just as he had endorsed Clinton's racist drug laws and expansion of the death penalty. But Bush and Kerry did disagree on significant "moral" and social issues. Kerry defended the right to abortion, stem cell research and opposed Bush's threatened constitutional amendment banning gay marriages. Both candidates favored "civil unions" as opposed to gay marriages. This was widely and correctly understood as an attempt by Kerry to make yet another concession to the right.

While Bush stood adamantly for his hard radical conservative program, Kerry wobbled as best as he could in a rightward direction. This was done to reassure Wall Street and to try to scratch out votes from the center and the right. In the end, Kerry might have gained a bare handful of moderate "swing voters," but he not only failed to divert any appreciable sector of Bush's base, he just appeared more vacillating and opportunistic – and did not inspire the Democratic base.

The successful capitulation of the trade union leaders in choking off mass working-class action, coupled with the treachery of the "movement" leaders which killed mass mobilizations and protests, were the keys to the campaign. They enabled Kerry to move to the right while promising little to his supporters, who felt they had nowhere else to go. Kerry had to swing back and forth a bit on the war and the economy, on the one hand, and to stand for something liberalish on social issues, on the other, in order to maintain his voting support. But in the tug of war between his own capitalist class and his voting base, he felt comparatively little pressure from his demobilized supporters. So much for the crackpot realism of the left "movement" leaders.

In the end, the difference between Bush and Kerry was that Bush stood for something – a tough America that pretended to defend white American working people as well as the rich. The Democrats unconvincingly nodded toward the right and stood for bumbling indecisiveness. Increasingly desperate workers will have no alternative way out of our worsening conditions until our class creates its own revolutionary party.

## PRO-IMPERIALIST LEFTISTS

Bush claims that his victory proves that the American people support his policies. That is a lie: a majority now say that the Iraq war was unjustified; a majority thinks Bush has hurt them economically. Nor do the 55 million Kerry voters agree with his insistent support for the war or the consequences of his call for a balanced budget. That millions of workers voted for anti-worker candidates and for the imperialist massacre of fellow workers abroad testifies to the tragic irony of American politics.

Much of the responsibility lies with the John Sweeneys and the Jesse Jacksons, the Al Sharptons and the Andy Sterns – the pro-Democratic Party misleaders of working-class organizations and the oppressed Black masses who led their followers once again to defeat. But a good share lies with the lower echelon left leaders and anti-war organizers who tailed them. The list of those who supported Kerry and who also claim to hate imperialism reads like a Who's Who of the radical left. It includes Michael Moore, Noam Chomsky, Tariq Ali, Howard Zinn, Doug Henwood, Immanuel Wallerstein, editors of magazines as varied as *New Politics*, *Z* and *Social Anarchism* and leaders of pseudo-revolutionary socialist groups like Solidarity. There were also outfits like the Communist Party, the Committees of Correspondence, the Democratic Socialists of America and the

Freedom Road Socialists who regularly commute across the class line. (We have detailed the capitulatory role of the pro-Nader wing of the left in previous issues.)

After Kerry's defeat, many in the phony left denounced those of us who remained true to our class and its revolutionary interests. We are supposedly responsible for the attacks which will be launched by Bush. Of course, had their candidate won, they would have had to share responsibility for Kerry's assault on workers everywhere. They already have blood on their hands because they helped maintain the myth that electing an imperialist president is even a partial answer.

As authentic communists, we regret that we were not strong enough to field a candidate who would have openly told the truth: that the working class could only accomplish its goals through socialist revolution, not through deathtrap elections. Mass action and the threat of potentially revolutionary upheavals is the only way the exploited and oppressed have ever won tangible gains. Workers do need a mass party, but one of our own: a party to represent our real historic interests as well as our immediate needs – a revolutionary party.

Today only a handful of radical workers and oppressed recognize these needs and tasks. A somewhat larger number can be won away from holding their noses and supporting the Democrats and be won to fighting for authentic communism. This small group of workers is crucial; they are the nucleus of the future mass working-class revolutionary party which must be built on firm political grounds, starting now. What passes for a left in America today is also small but it is deadly: it appeals to the same layer of advanced radicalized workers and fighters – and helps lead them to cut their own throats by voting for Democrats.

As the economic and political crisis inevitably worsens across the world, we must fight for the revolutionary road and the re-creation of an authentic internationalist and interracialist proletarian party. What Bush and his tough radical nationalism and chauvinist answers use to attract his frustrated base today is only a foretaste of what is to come. The vacillating no-way-out Democrats are the best recruiters for the right-wing cadres. Revolutionaries must fight for a genuine working-class alternative which champions militant mass actions, including general strikes, in defense against the capitalist onslaught. Such actions can bring together workers with diverse political views into struggle, including workers who voted for Bush, and help unify the working class. Such struggles teach the power of the united working class as the alternative to bourgeois politicians. They can raise class consciousness to new heights – if revolutionaries do their job, tell the truth in the course of the struggle and thereby help defeat counterrevolutionary reformism.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Ironically, revolutionaries are the best champions of reforms and the defense of immediate gains under capitalism. When reformists and liberals say that full employment and high wages for all can be securely won under this system or that wars and racism and nationalism can be eliminated short of the destruction of the system, they are falsifying reality. Capitalism depends on an army of unemployed in order to depress wages. Its profits depend on deepening the exploitation of workers. It cannot exist without pitting race against race and nation against nation in an unending war of all against all.

Communist revolutionaries fight for the defense of the working class and for further gains, because victories help workers survive and mass struggle teaches our class its social power. Whenever we fight together with fellow workers for immediate goals, no matter their present illusions, we say the truth: it will

take revolution, not simply reforms, to achieve our class interests. An abundant society, where humanity no longer has to fear poverty and its associated horrors, demands that our class, not the capitalists, rule.

For example, we fight every manifestation of racism. We point out that the racist division of American society is the bedrock of the capitalists' divide-and-conquer rule in this country. It is the basic cause of the suicidal division of the working class between the Bush and Kerry camps. As economic conditions worsen, overt racism will inevitably move to the forefront of the bourgeois attack once again. We note how many liberal reformists – including Black misleaders – stand for soft pedaling demands for racial equality in order to “build workers' unity”; once again they accommodate to the right instead of standing foursquare for the truth that nothing progressive can ever occur in America without smashing the racist caste line.

Another example: workers obviously want jobs at decent wages. Revolutionaries fight for *jobs for all* and a program of public works. We call for a *sliding scale of hours* that divides the necessary work among all available workers. We fight for that today but point out that so rational an advance could only occur under a workers' state. Today, workers rightfully view the introduction of labor-saving technology as a threat to their jobs. Under a workers' state, workers would welcome such advances, because they would produce more goods and lessen their toil on the job – thus doubly improving living conditions for all.

The history of humanity is centered around the history of struggle for survival in a world of scarcity. For millennia humanity could not produce enough to securely provide the essentials of food, shelter and clothing for all. This led to class society, where the bulk of resources went to the rulers while the producing classes lived in want. Wars, starvation and oppression that aimed at securing added shares of scarce resources were inescapable.

The advent of capitalism meant that for the first time, accumulation of goods and the means to produce them was built into the system; by the most brutal means, capitalism whiplashed into existence a modern working class along with other advanced forces of production. Through conquest and trade it expanded across the world. For the first time in history, it was possible to

produce abundance and thereby begin to rid the world of class domination and its inevitable wars, national, racial and gender chauvinism, starvation and plague.

However, what drove capitalists to accumulate was the profits derived from the labor power of the huge proletariat. Abundance would eliminate profit. Therefore the system itself became the major barrier to progress. By the time of the First World War, the system had become imperialism, a reactionary form of capitalism that superexploited and looted the bulk of the world for the benefit of the few. Wars for domination and conquest became massive and ever more destructive. Starvation was endemic once again; racism and national chauvinism became rampant. Even in the economically advanced countries, when the economy inevitably overproduced, depressions wiped out the gains. All the horrors of scarcity worsened as the capitalists competed and ultimately warred with each other for diminishing profits. And when wars ended, the victorious imperialists re-set their world system of repression and superexploitation.

Nevertheless, capitalism has by now created a mature international working class. When workers take power and run the world, we will plan production to obtain abundant goods, not the profit-gouging that maintains scarcity and divisiveness. A socialist society is now on the order of the day. It will come only through the seizure of power by the working class and the end of capitalist rule. As the worker-run society moves closer to its goals, class society – the exploitation and oppression of human beings by other human beings – will be undermined. The economic roots of war, national chauvinism, racism, will be destroyed.

A classless society will then be born which would know none of those pestilential social idiocies. Then at last, humanity will have the freedom and the wherewithal to attend to its real business: the fruition of our culture, the advance of our collective and individual development, and the understanding of our world.

There is only one party that today's nucleus of American workers must begin to build and support: the future revolutionary party of class-conscious workers. We need no condescending saviors: it will be working class, interracialist and internationalist – a section of the re-created Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution.●

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## COFI/LRP report

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*continued from page 2*

**Correction.** In *PR 71*, the DGB was mistakenly labeled as “one of Germany's strongest unions.” This is technically incorrect, because the DGB is the umbrella organization for all German unions. It is therefore the strongest representative of organized labor in Germany.

### COFI PUERTO RICO

COFI work in Puerto Rico focused on the Puerto Rican Teachers Union leadership's campaign to disaffiliate from the U.S.-based AFT federation in the AFL-CIO. At various delegate meetings, we defended unity with mainland teachers. We have stood hard against both the AFT's bureaucracy and the narrow nationalism that disarms workers here who have been facing increasing government attacks and company union disaffiliation attempts. We have distributed LRP literature at these events.

COFI in Puerto Rico has also taken a stand against the war in Iraq by distributing anti-war propaganda. We have come to the defense of Hector Rosario, a University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez

math professor who was suspended from work and pay for anti-war activity, which led to a sit-down camp and hunger strike by Rosario and students.

We attended the UPR worker education seminars at Ponce and Aguadilla, where we distributed copies of our political resolution and took part in lively debate against repressive labor legislation in Puerto Rico. We have also been active in defense of the water workers' strike, which has endured over a month now and which has also been under escalating strike-breaking attacks by the FBI, IRS and National Guard. The authorities have seized documents and accounts and union offices and searched union leaders' homes, with promises of arrests to come based on the USA Patriot, Taft-Hartley and RICO Acts. In our interventions we called for a general strike, particularly in the lead-up to the general elections, because of the state's attacks.

### LRP/U.S.

#### Anti-War Activities

After the protests against the Republican Convention in last August and early September, there was almost no anti-war protests during the election campaign. The “Anybody But Bush”

crowd worked overtime to keep the anti-war movement on the sidelines so that they could throw all of their efforts into electing the imperialist war criminal, Kerry. The absence of a single serious protest in the wake of Abu-Ghraib set the tone for the six months leading up to the election. With the election out of the way, small anti-war protests began to occur again.

In New York, one demonstration run by NION (Not in Our Name) drew only fifty people on November 9th. An ANSWER demonstration on November 13 drew between 200 and 300 in Union Square. The turnouts were particularly disappointing since they took place during the U.S. assault on Fallujah, a murderous war crime that called for massive protests.

In Chicago, a protest on November 8 against the Fallujah battle was called by the Chicago Committee Against War & Racism (CCAWR), the all-purpose left bloc which formed at the time of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. The turnout of 120 was a far cry from the 20,000 who took Lake Shore Drive at the start of the war; it exposed the misleaders' policy of putting mass action on the back burner to avoid embarrassing the Democrats. Having learned nothing from this or from Kerry's support for the war, the leaders persisted with the pathetic chant, "Not my president, not my war!" – a slogan which could only feed illusions in the Democrats. Some marchers joined with our contingent in chanting anti-imperialist slogans to counter the leaders' chauvinist calls to "bring our troops home."

In both cities sales of *Proletarian Revolution* at these actions were unusually high, despite the poor turnouts. Although many activists were too demoralized by the defeat of their presidential candidate to show up, those who did included a sizeable percentage of people looking for revolutionary answers.

### Electoral Forums

In both New York and Chicago, LRPers participated in conferences and public forums held by the International Socialist Organization to condemn the ISO's support of Ralph Nader, a minor bourgeois politician. Our main point was that revolutionaries can debate whether or not to lend critical support to a reformist workers party in a given situation, but the ISO's endorsement of Nader put it on the other side of the class line. We also punctured the ISO's efforts to portray Nader as a progressive figure, exposing his reactionary positions on immigration, abortion and the war in Iraq. (See "Endorsing the Lesser Imperialist" in *PR 72*.) The ISO's revolutionary pretensions are exposed as flimsy by their enlistment in the campaign of a candidate who calls for the continuation of the imperialist occupation of Iraq, trying to conceal it under U.N. auspices.

At several sessions we confronted Nader's running mate, Peter Camejo, with his leaders' position on Iraq and asked how the ISO could attack this imperialist policy in anti-war meetings while promoting it in the election. The ISO barely even tried to defend their candidate, making it especially clear that their endorsement was a cynically opportunist maneuver.

### CHICAGO LRP

On the labor scene, on November 12 we attended a rally called by the Chicago Teachers Union and backed by SEIU 73 and SEIU 888 to protest Mayor Daley's "Renaissance Plan" – a racist, union-busting program to privatize public education. The main speakers blamed President Bush while ignoring the leading role of Governor Rod Blagojevich and Mayor Richard Daley, both Democrats. The bureaucrats could have mobilized many more workers; nevertheless, at about 1200, this was one of the biggest labor demonstrations in Chicago in a few years.

The defense of public education from the bosses' austerity



LRP banner at Million Worker March, October 17.

attacks is being played out on a number of other fronts. Chicago LRPers attended demonstrations in support of the faculty strike against the City Colleges; this strike settled on November 15, and preliminary indications are that the settlement represents a victory. We are also supporting Earl Silbar, a long-time militant in AFSCME Local 3506, who faces possible firing for his refusal to cross the strikers' picket line. On November 18, we joined a spirited demonstration of about 150 students, teachers, employees and activists outside his hearing at Truman College. The protesters entered the building and chanted support for Earl.

The LRP is participating on the picket lines at Northeastern Illinois University (NIU), where faculty and staff went on strike on November 19 after a five-month impasse. The struggles are beginning to generalize, and LRPers are attending citywide meetings of students and teachers. These can be a forum to discuss the bi-partisan offensive against working-class education.

The Chicago LRP has continued regular literature sales at NIU. At our table, discussions have focused on the elections and the war in Iraq. Here too *PR* sales have been unusually strong.

### NEW YORK LRP

New York LRPers traveled to Washington on October 17 for the "Million Worker March." A separate account of this event is on page 17.

As part of our ongoing work at City College, this fall the LRP held three public meetings. The first, in September, dissected the Kerry, Bush and Nader presidential campaigns. The second, in October, analyzed the Iraqi resistance to the imperialist occupation of Iraq. Finally, on November 11, we held a post-election forum discussing what the results mean for the working class.

Also at City College, we had been trying to force the ISO to debate Nader for months; in September, under pressure, one of their leaders accepted the challenge – only to renege later (as we predicted in *PR 72*). In October, disguising itself as "Students for Nader," the ISO called for a debate on the presidential election. We again accepted publicly, only to be excluded from the podium by this opportunist sect that could only defend Nader from right-wing attacks. Nevertheless, when the debate occurred on October 14, LRPers and supporters dominated the discussion from the floor, attacking the anti-working class campaign of Nader as well as those of Bush and Kerry. ●

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# Million Worker March Misses the Mark

A “Million Worker March” (MWM) was called for October 17 in Washington, DC. Far from drawing a million workers, it attracted five to ten thousand labor activists and radicals, many of whom were Black militants. Despite the super-inflated call, the fundamental problem wasn’t the limited turnout. It was that the political purpose proclaimed by the MWM leaders was super-inflated as compared to its reality.

The MWM was billed as the beginning of a movement based on the “independent mobilization of working people across America” that aimed “to restore our democracy, secure power for the overwhelming majority of working people and restore America.” While speakers described serious issues facing the working class, including the Iraq war, unemployment and health care, they were decidedly short on what is to be done in terms of action, and vague as to a program for real change.

Denied a permit to march, the MWM was confined to hanging around and half-listening to speeches and songs in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Sadly, that jibed with the march leaders’ message, which was anything but the fiery proclamation of a new day in America that would “secure power for the overwhelming majority of working people.”

## DEMOCRATIC PARTY TILT

It wasn’t just that the program of ideas and action failed to meet the needs of American workers. A number of the more radical speakers called for a “fighting workers’ party.” But they didn’t counterpose it to MWM’s actual program and direction, a barely concealed effort aimed at preventing the most angry and disgusted militants from breaking from the Democrats.

No positive endorsement of Kerry and the Democrats could have kept the radicalizing workers the MWM sought to attract within the Democratic Party fold. So indirect endorsement was the order of the day.

For example, the MWM’s “mission statement” contained sharp attacks on the Bush administration, as it should. But by not criticizing (or even mentioning) the Democratic Party and John Kerry, it implicitly aimed at drumming up support for Kerry. Likewise, the original resolution that initiated the MWM, passed by the International Warehouse and Longshore Union’s (ILWU) Local 10 in San Francisco, called for “this event [to] coincide with all labor-organized voter registration drives planned for the next election” — in other words, to supplement the push to get out votes for Kerry. This call was echoed by keynote speaker Martin Luther King III, who urged workers to set up telephone trees to reach people to vote “against Bush.”

Behind the MWM program were several Black trade union officials, like Clarence Thomas of ILWU Local 10, Chris Silvera, Secretary-Treasurer of Teamsters Local 808 of Long Island New York and president of the National Teamsters Black Caucus, and Brenda Stokely, president of AFSCME District Council 1707 in New York City. Their pro-Kerry line was masked by rhetoric about “independence from all politicians” and “acting in our name.” In their hands, the MWM was a move to deflect any left-moving trend — and to seek some bargaining power with the Democratic politicians. The “independence” line also served as a cover for mild-left organizations like the Workers World Party

and Socialist Organizer, who helped build the MWM but couldn’t openly support Kerry.

Of course, most of the bureaucrats who run the unions at the national level were hostile to even the vaguely radical pretensions of the MWM. But the organizers apparently expected the AFL-CIO would endorse their effort, or at least not hinder it. Instead, the labor tops sent out a letter advising unions to ignore the MWM, primarily because they saw it as a distraction from campaigning for the Democrats. Nevertheless, a number of local and state officials of the same unions endorsed the march, mid-level bureaucrats who cannot ignore the rising anger and questioning at the base.

## NO CALL FOR ACTION

A rally of five to ten thousand workers would have been an attention-grabbing success had it squarely come out against both the Republican and Democratic parties right in the middle of the electoral campaign. Especially since it contained so many Black and Latino workers, it would have been a declaration of war against the Democratic Party, which has served to divert and bury every progressive movement since the 1930’s.

Since it sought to attract radicalizing militants, the MWM’s list of demands included a number of basic reforms that workers indeed have to fight for. It also included seemingly far-reaching demands, evidently put forward by the march’s more left endorsers. But without openly calling for a break with Democrats and the creation of a working-class party, such points serve as a baited trap.

Demands like “Extend democracy to our economic structure so that all decisions affecting the lives of our citizens are made by working people who produce all value through their labor” would have made sense only if it was explained that such a workers’ democracy only be achieved via a socialist revolution. And the patriotic call to “restore America” (which America?) gave a nationalist focus to a rally opposing the Iraq war, which should have had a firm internationalist outlook.

Most damning was the absence, in the MWM’s call and in the speeches in Washington, of any concrete action strategy needed for a genuinely “independent mobilization of working people.” Despite the bosses’ attack, in the call for the MWM the word “strike” never appears.

A contingent from the League for the Revolutionary Party attended the MWM, not to endorse its program but to solidarize with those workers who came to the event looking for a radical new fightback. We argued for revolutionary politics and against the MWM’s pro-Democratic strategy. We set up a literature table in front of our banner, “General Strike Against Budget Cuts, Layoffs and Anti-Union Attacks!”, and our sales teams circulated through the crowd. We pointed out that the working class can only become conscious of its own power through mass actions like a general strike which would choke off profit-making and inherently challenge capitalist state power.

We found numbers of workers looking for answers and interested in talking to us. They represent a current among the working class today that wants to fight and can be won to building a working class party with a revolutionary program of actual class struggle.●

## Iraq

*continued from page 1*

the occupiers received ample assistance from bourgeois forces among Iraqi Sunnis and Shi'ites, as well as Kurds.

Fallujah's fighters succeeded previously in driving back U.S. assaults. The key to their success, however, was not their ample military skill and ruthlessness, but the simultaneous uprisings of the Shi'ite majority who had been brutally oppressed by the Baathists. In April 2004, during the U.S.'s first attempt to subdue Fallujah, Shi'ites rallied in protests and organized donations for its victims. Fallujans responded similarly to U.S. attacks on Najaf and other Shi'ite cities. Whatever the cynical ends of the communal leaders, who called for solidarity, the positive mass response showed the potential for bridging the sectarian religious and ethnic divisions that had been sowed by both colonial and Iraqi rulers.

The Sunni resistance is dominated by groups of former members of Saddam's dictatorship who are widely hated for their vicious oppression, particularly of the Shi'ite masses. There are also the ultra-reactionary Sunni terrorist organizations, which brand as infidels both foreigners and Shi'ites. They targeted not just agents of the occupation but also do-gooder aid workers and even truck drivers and other workers (often from neo-colonial "Third World" countries like Turkey) for ambushes, abductions and grisly executions.

Searching for soft targets they could attack without the risks involved in confronting the U.S. forces, these Sunni groups launched murderous attacks on applicants and unarmed recruits to the new Iraqi army. The recruits, drawn overwhelmingly from desperately poor Shi'ites, have refused to fight every time the U.S. has ordered them to and could easily have been won to the struggle. Further, Sunni terrorist groups are suspected, with good reason, of numerous bombings of Shi'ite and other political and religious gatherings.

As months of these attacks wore on and killed more civilians than imperialist invaders, the sense of solidarity among Iraqis opposed to the occupation waned. Among Shi'ites in particular, the anger at years of oppression by Saddam and his mostly Sunni henchmen came to the fore.

### THE SHI'ITE RESISTANCE

The U.S. made a major breakthrough in subduing the Shi'ite resistance in August. Its third offensive against the armed forces of radical Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr again met with fierce resistance. (See *PR 71*.) But Sadr's forces could not win the battle. They not only lacked the necessary firepower, but more crucially, their reactionary acts had also succeeded in isolating them from the broad masses of Shi'ites. Sadr had won support among workers and poor with a populist message of opposition to the imperialist occupation. But the areas controlled by Sadrists suffered from their vicious Islamist practices, most notably aimed at women. Also, the Sadrists often used military tactics that unnecessarily endangered the civilian population.

Supreme Shi'ite religious leader Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani had been searching for a way to balance between the masses' hatred of the occupation with his desire to collaborate with the U.S. The increasing animosity of the Shi'ite masses toward the Sunni resistance, coupled with the deadlock between the U.S. and Sadr, gave him the opportunity he had been looking for.

Sistani refused to explicitly side with Sadr in the Najaf battle, instead calling for an end to the fighting by both sides and a negotiated solution. The deal he finally brokered got Sadr to agree



*The question answers itself.*

to disarm his militia and direct his forces into participating in the coming U.S.-dominated elections. In return, Sistani promised to allocate a quota of seats in the future parliament to Sadr through a common Shi'ite electoral ticket, one that would unite anti-occupation forces with the major pro-imperialist Shi'ite parties. Sadr agreed to the U.S. and Sistani's terms, and with that the fate of Fallujah was sealed.

### A COSTLY VICTORY

The U.S. certainly scored victories in dividing the armed Iraqi opposition, forcing Sadr to retreat and destroying Fallujah. But for the U.S., every step forward in Iraq leads deeper into the mire. While the Sunni resistance was certainly set back, it is far from defeated. In the first days of the U.S. offensive, Sunni fighters initiated armed actions across the country, including taking over for days the city of Mosul, which is much larger than Fallujah. Since then they have launched numerous attacks on occupation forces across the country. Furthermore, the U.S.'s devastation has hardened the Sunni masses' opposition to the occupation. As a result, it seems likely, at this point, that almost all Sunni political groups will boycott the planned elections. The tactic of terrorizing Iraqis so that they fear to vote, instead of trying to convince them, shows how reactionary the Sunni insurgent leaders are.

Not only would a Sunni boycott rob the future government of claims to be representative. It would also deny the U.S. its aim of balancing the various religious, ethnic and national powers against one another. Significantly, two prominent Sunni clerics were assassinated after calling for a boycott of the elections. In late November, when Sunni and Kurdish factions called for a delay, U.S. ambassador John D. Negroponte, showing just who is in charge, asserted "National elections will be taking place on the 30th of January."

Tensions are also rising among the Shi'ites. Sadr at first demanded more seats on Sistani's ticket. In the absence of a large Sunni vote, Sadr could be tempted to run independently. However, one of his aides called for a boycott in response to Fallujah and was promptly arrested by the U.S. Sadr had no choice but to organize protests in his defense, and thousands rallied for him in Baghdad. As we go to press, it is unclear whether Sadrists will be on the United Iraqi Alliance slate that Sistani is organizing.

While the U.S. continues to insist that the elections will go

ahead on January 30, it is difficult to imagine how they will, with the Sunni resistance undefeated and promising to attack voters. Further, there is pressure for the elections among Shi'ites who are anxious to wield political power after so many years of oppression. But the masses also understand that no matter what government is formed, real power will remain in U.S. hands.

The one thing certain is that no new government will be able to hold power without a massive U.S. military presence behind it. A year and a half after Bush's self-promoting "mission accomplished" stunt aboard an aircraft carrier near San Diego, the imperialist mission is even further at sea.

### THE NEED FOR REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

It was inevitable that if bourgeois-clerical forces continued to lead the resistance, it would inevitably collapse into sectarian warring. The only alternative is to mobilize the workers and poor around their common class interests in a struggle against imperialism as well as local bourgeois forces. This struggle can only be led by genuine communists who are committed to ending the entire capitalist system.

As previous issues of *PR* have pointed out, the Iraqi working class has a long history of struggle and socialist organization. It continues to suffer horribly under the occupation, but it has waged recent strikes in the oil industry, as well as made efforts to organize trade unions and protests around issues like unemployment and the need for essential social services. Expanded struggles could spark the masses of the entire Middle East to rise up against their own rulers and their U.S. backers.

Revolutionaries in Iraq would champion and participate in every such struggle they could. But the workers' movement will not be rebuilt through trade union struggles alone. The main issue on the minds of the masses is the imperialist occupation; they burn to end it. They know their other demands will find no satisfaction outside of this struggle. Indeed, that is why they remain trapped in supporting the bourgeois anti-occupation leaders in spite of policies that are often repulsive to the masses of workers and poor.

Socialists would fight for united mass struggle for all the masses' democratic rights – from ending the occupation, to self-determination for the Kurds and ending ethnic and religious

persecution, to women's liberation from sexual oppression. But they would also explain in the course of struggle that capitalism can only exist based on oppression and exploitation. Democracy and freedom can only be secured by the rule of the workers and poor established through a socialist revolution that overthrows imperialism and local bourgeois forces.

To achieve these ends, it is of the greatest urgency that revolutionary socialists advocate the most effective and thoroughgoing struggle against the occupation. We are for a *mass* insurrection that would swamp the present sectarian and elitist efforts. In preparing such a struggle revolutionaries would seek to organize militias and councils of the workers and poor independent of the bourgeois forces. Revolutionaries would take the lead in organizing armed self-defense of the masses against attack by U.S. forces, seeking to arm and train the masses. To unite the diverse sectors of the population, revolutionaries would call for a united struggle for a revolutionary constituent assembly. We would stress that such an assembly could only be organized by a revolutionary workers' state. The proposed January elections, in contrast, would set up another puppet assembly subject to the U.S. These elections should be boycotted as an imperialist fraud.

In this struggle, revolutionaries would make absolutely clear that the imperialists are the main enemy; we oppose the occupation forces in every conflict with Iraqis. However, revolutionaries would also seek to lead armed defense of the masses against terrorist and criminal attack. And revolutionaries would warn that the bourgeois leaders of the resistance will continue to betray the struggle with religious and ethnic fighting, on the one hand, and deals with the imperialists, on the other.

This is the Leninist tactic of *military support*, whereby revolutionaries agree to fight the same enemy as the insurgents while not giving the bourgeois resistance an ounce of political support. With such tactics, they could win the confidence of the masses across religious and ethnic lines and expose leaders like Sadr when they retreat. And in the course of struggle, more and more workers and poor could learn that to win their democratic rights and open the way to vastly improving their lives, not just the occupation, but capitalism itself has to be overthrown.●

— December 9, 2004

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## Draft

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*continued from page 24*

susceptible to the moods and attitudes of the masses and more accessible to revolutionaries. In a drafted army, as the U.S. rulers found out during Vietnam, the class distinction between the lower ranks and the officer corps becomes sharper and the discontent of the working-class ranks accelerates, even to the point where officers have been "fragged" (killed or injured) by their own troops. Moreover, a drafted army allows the workers to receive essential military training, crucial for the defense of their class struggles and for the success of revolution in the future.

Since Leninists oppose all bourgeois armies, the LRP does not favor an anti-draft movement, which would objectively stand for a mercenary army. Instead we work to educate workers and soldiers about the imperialist and class character of the bourgeois military as a whole and the need to overthrow the capitalist state through working-class revolution. We presented and fought for the Marxist position in 1980, after President Jimmy Carter had re-introduced draft registration and triggered a new student-based anti-draft campaign. We produced articles, leaflets and the pamphlet "*No Draft*" *Is No Answer*, which also included numerous

analytical statements by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, the now hidden history of the communist position.

Virtually the entire left in the U.S. today stands for the opposite course, embracing the pacifist sentiments rife among middle-class liberals in their opposition to draft renewal. Thus in actuality the left supports the maintenance of the mercenary/ hybrid military the ruling class fields today. We face the same battle that the Bolsheviks fought during World War I, against the social-pacifists ("socialists" who called for disarmament) who undermined the fight against the social-patriots ("socialists" who supported the bourgeois government's war).

### ANOTHER DISTORTED ATTACK

When we briefly re-stated our position in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 66, we were attacked by a number of leftists for allegedly calling for a revived draft, despite our explicit statements to the contrary. The most extensive response came from Tim Hall of the Detroit-based Communist Voice Organization (CVO) in the May 2003 issue of their magazine. Hall tried to argue that Lenin's legacy, as well as the experience of the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960's and '70's, proved the correctness of the anti-draft position. He also claimed that the Congressional bill to revive the draft "received acceptance" from



Summer 1917: Red Guard patrols Petrograd. Bolshevik military policy won soldiers to the revolutionary cause.

the LRP, an outright lie that we exposed in our reply, “The Leninist Position on Conscription,” in *PR* 69.

Hall responded with a new article, “The LRP Surrenders to Militarism and the Threat of a New Draft.” (*Communist Voice*, March 2004.) He begins by objecting to the polemical tone – “strident” and “factional” – of our reply, complaining that we called him “dishonest” and that we said that the CVO group “descends from the Stalinist tradition that has its own notorious devotion to fabrication.” (He protests that the CVO broke from Stalinism years ago.) Well, our tone was appropriate to Hall’s fabrications. And like Lenin, we take life-and-death issues seriously. Hall still doesn’t acknowledge that he misrepresented our position, although he no longer repeats the initial lie. That’s progress, but it’s not yet honesty.

Hall characterizes the “gist of the LRP’s reply” this way:

**To oppose the resumption of the draft is to support the imperialist mercenary (non-drafted) military. The only way, according to them, to bring about the overthrow of the bourgeois war machine is to accept militarization, remain silent about the resumption of the draft, go into the military and from there organize the soldiers for revolutionary class struggle.**

The first sentence of Hall’s summary is accurate. Significantly, he never replies to our charge that he and others with his position objectively support keeping the ruling class’s mercenary army. And Hall is also right that we call for revolutionaries who are drafted to go with their class, join the military, learn its lessons and work within it to advance class struggle and revolutionary consciousness.

But Hall’s “gist” also states that we remain silent about conscription and implies that we support imperialist militarism. Not true: once again, we openly oppose *all* capitalist armies. The militarism we endorse is proletarian militarism. We oppose every imperialist war, and as we have reported in *PR*, LRP comrades have achieved some notoriety in the media for publicly blaming U.S. imperialism for the terrorist attacks and for solidarizing with the Iraqi resistance against U.S. occupation. (See our reports in our Winter 2002 *Supplement* and *PR* 71.)

## LENIN ON MILITARISM

Hall’s major criticism is that we abandon the struggle against militarism, and his chief method is to try to enlist Lenin on his side. But Hall has a hard time dealing with the real Lenin. Given the evidence we have produced of Lenin’s true views, he comments about our “voluminous quotes” that they “obviously raise

the question of what was Lenin’s stand on militarization and conscription.” He goes on to say, formally correctly but with a hint that he will choose very selectively what he cites from Lenin, “We are Leninists, but we are not Leninists because we accept every phrase of Lenin’s writings like religious people do the Bible, the Koran or the Talmud.”

Dogmatism is indeed foreign to communist thinking. We have learned much from and are inspired by Lenin’s writings on raising workers’ consciousness through revolutionary work in the class struggle, methods which were instrumental in the victory of the Russian workers’ revolution; the Bolsheviks’ work among soldiers helped produce the troop revolts in World War I. Nevertheless, in several articles and in our book on Stalinism we have explained differences we have with some of Lenin’s positions on other questions. Hall, in contrast, never gets around to specifying just what in Lenin he disagrees with. Moreover, there is a difference between rejecting particu-

lar ideas and rejecting the essence, and Hall’s argument comes out against the essence of Lenin’s position on capitalism and its war machines.

Hall spells out what he calls “both aspects” of “Lenin’s stand on militarization and conscription”:

**He saw them as horrors that had to be resisted by the workers and as inevitabilities that could not be prevented or eliminated until capitalism was overthrown. Similarly, he called for resistance to capitalist exploitation as absolutely necessary for the militant organization of the working class, but he also held that exploitation could not be prevented or eliminated until capitalism was overthrown. More, he held that the faster the development of capitalism, the nearer the day of socialist revolution.**

Hall claims that the LRP sees only the second aspect of these “horrors” – the inevitability, not the need to resist.

But Hall is dead wrong about Lenin. First, it is simply false that Lenin saw conscription as something that “had to be resisted by the workers.” *Lenin spent decades as a leader of Russian communists, and there is not one example of his party ever calling on workers to resist the draft.* Nothing Hall cites or could cite gives any evidence of Lenin ever supporting draft resistance, and there is overwhelming evidence of just the opposite, summarized in our pamphlet and in *PR* 69. As Hall himself wrote in a lucid moment in his first article, “Lenin said the workers should not recoil in horror at compulsory military service but should utilize it to acquire military training that will help them overthrow the bourgeoisie.”

Hall gets around his lack of evidence by sleight-of-hand. Since Lenin opposed any support for the bourgeois military, he was opposed to a drafted bourgeois army; therefore he must have been for resistance to conscription.

Here is how Hall puts it:

**In my article I illustrated Lenin’s opposition to a bourgeois standing army with a quote from 1916: “On the question of a militia, we should say: We are not in favor of a bourgeois militia; we are in favor only of a proletarian militia. Therefore, ‘not a penny, not a man,’ not only for a standing army, but even for a bourgeois militia, even in countries like the United States, Switzerland, Norway, etc.” The LRP conveniently ignores this resolutely anti-militarist quote because it firmly establishes what I call the first aspect of Lenin’s attitude towards militarization and conscription.**

Of course, even in the “not a penny, not a man” sentence (which comes from his article “The Military Program of the Proletarian Revolution,” *Collected Works*, Vol. 23), Lenin indi-

cated his resolute opposition to *any* bourgeois army, not just a drafted militia. Resistance to conscription is not part of Lenin's vocabulary here any more than anywhere else. (As for the LRP "ignoring" this excellent sentence, it is reproduced in its full context in our *"No Draft" Is No Answer* pamphlet.)

Hall goes on:

**The statement clearly shows that Lenin did not abandon the fight against militarism once he had developed his analysis of imperialism. But the LRP is blind to this. In fact, the quotation of "not a penny, not a man" for a standing army comes from the same Lenin article from which the LRP takes their lengthy quote which includes the words "full speed ahead!" I guess if you want to be just a tad dishonest about Lenin's views you can quote the part of Lenin's article that seems to agree with you and ignore the part that refutes you.**

As for imperialism, from World War I on Lenin saw imperialism (advanced capitalism) as the biggest barrier to socialism, rather than pre-capitalist formations. His attack on capitalist militarism now stressed the danger of imperialism and its *magnified* militarism and wars. In this context, his "full speed ahead!" likens bourgeois militarization to bourgeois development of industry through brutal factories and trusts, as well as to the forced movement of women into industry. The passage, which we previously cited in full, concludes:

**We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism!**

**With the necessary changes that argument is applicable also to the present militarization of the population. Today the imperialist bourgeoisie militarizes the youth as well as the adults; tomorrow, it may begin militarizing the women. Our attitude should be: All the better! Full speed ahead!**

Lenin neither demanded nor supported bourgeois militarism. But he obviously insisted on taking advantage of it to enhance the revolutionary position.

In PR 69 we also reprinted Lenin's early article, "Anti-Militarist Propaganda and Young Socialist Workers' Leagues," which describes how revolutionary Marxists in the early 20th century carried out educational activities aimed at young soldiers. Hall thinks this article undermines our position because it shows that Lenin hated bourgeois militarism. In fact we reprinted it for that very reason, and because it shows how revolutionaries approach newly-called-up soldiers – not by advocating draft resistance but through class-conscious revolutionary propaganda that will help "the troops become increasingly less reliable" for the bourgeoisie.

Hall obviously has trouble understanding what he can only see as a contradiction in Lenin's writings on militarism. He sees Lenin's support for anti-militarist propaganda, on the one hand, and, on the other, his "voluminous" statements in a militarist spirit like the ones we cited. But there is no contradiction, only a dialectical connection. Lenin hated imperialist militarism, but he also saw that the bourgeoisie's inevitable militarization in wartime was a route through which the proletariat could acquire military training and weapons and could strengthen its class consciousness and rebelliousness. Unlike Hall, Lenin understood that bourgeois militarism had to be fought with militaristic, not pacifistic, methods.

In another work that we have not previously cited, a speech in 1917 about the 1905 Russian Revolution, Lenin sums up his opinion in a passage that almost appears to be aimed at Hall:



*New York, 1980: Middle-class pacifism proved powerless against U.S. war drive.*

... the history of the Russian revolution, like the history of the Paris Commune of 1871, teaches us the incontrovertible lesson that militarism can never and under no circumstances be defeated and destroyed, except by a victorious struggle of one section of the national army against the other section. It is not sufficient simply to denounce, revile and "repudiate" militarism, to criticize and prove that it is harmful; it is foolish peacefully to refuse to perform military service. The task is to keep the revolutionary consciousness of the proletariat tense and train its best elements, not only in a general way, but concretely, so that when popular ferment reaches the highest pitch, they will put themselves at the head of the revolutionary army. ("Lecture On The 1905 Revolution," *Collected Works*, Vol. 23.)

Although the CVO claims to be "Marxist-Leninist," its approach is far from Marxist and Leninist. Hall sees a contradiction in Lenin but does not have the guts to say so openly, referring only to the "two aspects" that he claims to agree with. But he is left asserting without any evidence that Lenin's "fundamental outlook" was anti-militarist, pure and simple. For "communists" to talk about something like militarism without asserting its specific class content is a sure giveaway. There is a fundamental difference between bourgeois militarism and proletarian militarism. Hall's arguments are consistent not with Leninism but with social-pacifism, the outlook that tries to deal with war and militarism by calls for peace and abstention from military service. In all his dueling with quotations from Lenin, it is telling that Hall never once cites Lenin's continuous venomous hostility to the social-pacifists. With good reason, as we shall see.

### **CVO NEUTRAL TOWARD IRAQI RESISTANCE**

For an organization that prides itself on learning from Lenin, the CVO has a nakedly social-pacifist position on a live issue directly related to imperialist militarism today: the Iraq war and occupation. Lenin, of course, stood with every oppressed people in their struggles against imperialism. In this spirit, the LRP does not just call for the U.S. to get out of Iraq. We side with the armed resistance to imperialism and stand for the military defeat of the imperialist forces.

And that is something the CVO does *not* do. For all their talk about overthrowing the imperialist military machine, when it comes to an actual war where the imperialist military is under

fire, the CVO in effect calls down a plague on both houses. In opposing both the U.S. occupation and the armed resistance, it fails to offer “military support” to the Iraqi fighters harassing and administering political defeats to the imperialists.

When the Iraq war was looming in 2002, *Communist Voice* ran the headline “Opposing both sides in the war crisis” – that is, both the imperialist invaders and the Iraqi forces. And under the current occupation they denounce both the imperialists and the armed resistance, who “fight the occupation to impose their own brutal rule.” (CV, August 25.)

It is true that the resistance is currently led by reactionary bourgeois and Islamist forces who often compromise with the imperialists, oppress the masses – women especially – and are reckless with the lives of Iraqi civilians. But even the CVO admits that “the Iraqi workers and poor are boiling with rage at the U.S. occupation, and the more the occupation has tried to crush their opposition, the stronger the revolt has grown.” Proletarian revolutionaries have to participate in the armed revolt as an independent force and find tactics to win the anti-imperialist fighters to a working-class leadership.

The CVO observes that the resistance is largely led by reactionaries and correctly calls for building independent working-class organization and a revived class struggle in Iraq. “We need to support the workers in Iraq getting organized in their own interests,” they say, specifying “their own unions, revolutionary political parties, unemployed organizations, women’s rights groups, etc.” But they say nothing about how these organizations should relate to the guerrilla struggle, which has mass support. They do not advocate that workers should organize their own armed militias to fight, even temporarily, alongside the bourgeois-led resistance. Talk about “remaining silent” in the fight against imperialist militarism!

In contrast, Lenin and the Bolsheviks gave military support to Kerensky’s counterrevolutionary bourgeois Provisional Government in 1917 in Russia, when it was confronted by a military putsch led by the counterrevolutionary bourgeois general, Kornilov. At the same time, the Leninists maintained their independence and conducted a blistering political attack on Kerensky’s reactionary regime.

This approach was generalized by Bolshevik-Leninists as a tactic for temporarily siding with bourgeois nationalists on the battlefield to resist imperialist repression. While communists never abandoned their internationalist condemnation of nationalism of any kind, this tactic enabled them to align themselves with the colonial masses and to support their right to self-determination, even when the masses fought under bourgeois leaderships. They fought the main enemy, imperialism, rather than maintaining a shameful neutrality. (For a full discussion of the Marxist method of “military support,” see PR 59.)

Neither the CVO nor the LRP can now do much more than state positions on such questions. However, the CVO’s line is similar to that of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq, which also justifies its neutrality on the scene in Iraq by citing the reactionary political programs of the insurgent leaders. As we wrote of the WCPI in PR 72, “their abandonment of the anti-imperialist struggle in the name of socialism can only drive the masses away from socialism and into the arms of the reactionaries.”

#### **ANTI-DRAFT ACTIVITIES IN THE 1960’S AND 1970’S**

After making a hash of Lenin, Hall devotes the rest of his article to “scenes from the 60’s anti-war and anti-draft movement.” In his first article, Hall had claimed that the anti-draft movement during the Vietnam War proved that the LRP is wrong to refuse to build anti-draft campaigns. Our reply argued that Hall

falsely identified the anti-draft activities as the height of the movement’s anti-imperialist consciousness. We showed how the anti-draft activities in the 1960’s reinforced the middle-class leadership of the anti-war movement and objectively worked to the detriment of developing a revolutionary current based in the rebellious working class in the ghettos and in industry.

Instead of answering us, Hall argues against positions we don’t hold. Hall falsely claims that the LRP has an “Archie Bunker” view of the 1960’s: “In the LRP’s 60’s only middle-class boys, not workers, hated and resisted the draft.” This is hardly our view, since we wrote: “As the war went on, working-class opposition to the war became more and more massive. It was greater among Black workers but also grew rapidly among white workers. But it did not translate into significantly greater identification with the anti-war protests.” Nor did we say that only middle-class youth opposed the war. Instead we noted that “Aiming at the draft re-enforced the barrier between the middle-class anti-war activists and the workers, who as the war dragged on shed their illusions in the imperialist cause.” Draft resistance was possible for some individuals, mainly middle-class and upper-class. But it was not and could not be an option for the great majority of working-class youth.

Hall attempts to disprove the Archie Bunker straw man by presenting some “scenes” from the work of the Cleveland Draft Resistance Union in the 1960’s, which he participated in. “We advertised and conducted draft counseling, which attracted mostly proletarian youth, Black and white, who came through in a constant flow.” These accounts are intended to prove that there were many working-class youth who were open to talk about draft resistance. But anecdotal assertions are no answer to our argument that workers in general saw anti-draft activities as out of the realm of their possibilities.

In our article we discussed the impact of anti-draft agitation on the working class, because for us the key to both ending the war and turning the imperialist war into an offensive against capitalist rule was the consciousness of the workers as a whole. Small-scale recruitment of a few working-class contacts to an anti-capitalist study group could very well have occurred. But anti-draft actions had a negative impact on the direction of the consciousness of the mass of workers in the U.S., at the time that workers were becoming increasingly hostile to the war and to the American ruling class. We wrote:

**Most working-class youth who were drafted saw no other option. In the beginning of the war, patriotism spurred their acceptance. That soon wore off as reality set in, but young workers saw no alternative. The draft protesters were often seen by working-class draftees and their families as incomprehensibly naive or spoiled and cowardly rich brats. Those who concentrated on draft dodging deepened the gap. The anti-draft program pointed to no way out, had no content relevant to workers and was therefore not revolutionary.**

For all his “scenes,” can Hall deny that the anti-draft movement as a whole appealed to middle-class students far more than working-class youth?

Hall also sneers at the LRP’s acknowledgment of the most famous draft resister, Muhammad Ali, who risked going to jail rather than submit to the draft. “The LRP implies in their article that draft resistance was a white thing. Amusingly, they are then forced to admit the example of Muhammad Ali’s draft refusal, while treating it as isolated.” But of course it was, as we said, “exceptional in more ways than one.” Ali’s status as an outspoken black militant, who also happened to be the world heavyweight boxing champion, prevented the authorities from

imprisoning him because of what he symbolized for Black people. In the end, a Supreme Court decision granted him conscientious objector status.

Ali was extremely courageous, but his choice of conscientious objection to the war did not open up an option of draft resistance for the vast majority of poor working-class Black draftees. Can Hall seriously deny that working-class youth, including Black and Latino workers out of proportion to their numbers in society, were used as cannon fodder in the war – in contrast to the substantial numbers of middle- and upper-class students, like George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, who were able to find ways to avoid military service?

### **SOCIAL-PACIFISM IN THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT**

Grasping at straws, Hall claims that “Like the SWP of the 60’s, the LRP today ridicules militant anti-draft actions as ‘confrontationalist.’” This too is breathtakingly dishonest. We opposed small group macho tactics that merely disguised the pacifist moralism behind much of the anti-draft activities; we advocated instead mass militant anti-war protests and taking the anti-war struggle into industry. We supported the mass “confrontationalist” ghetto revolts, which didn’t even put forward a conscious anti-war program but had an enormous impact on the war. The uprisings frightened the bourgeoisie, which also knew that it dare not use its draftees to try to quell them.

The Socialist Workers Party of that era, on the other hand, organized large passive demonstrations dominated by bourgeois liberal Democratic Party politicians. It policed them politically, to keep them within the bounds of a single-issue anti-war campaign that their bourgeois friends could accept. The anti-war struggle was thus subordinated to the leadership of liberals who opposed the losing and unpopular war only in order to maintain imperialism itself.

Yes, the SWP wanted nothing of class confrontation. It was the true heir of the World War I social-pacifists, whom Lenin denounced for their effective alliance with ruling-class patriots who opposed the war. The social pacifists, he wrote, were “much more harmful and dangerous to the labor movement, because they hide their advocacy of alliance with the former under a cloak of plausible, pseudo-‘Marxist’ catchwords and pacifist slogans.” (This quote too comes from the article “The Military Program of the Socialist Revolution.”) The “Marxist” social-pacifists called for peace and disarmament, whereas for Lenin the idea that a bourgeois state could possibly disarm created dangerous illusions which could only disarm the working class. That is exactly the same argument Leninists have with the anti-draft social-pacifists of today.

As to Hall’s claim that the SWP’s views on the draft in the 1960’s were similar to the LRP’s today, by the 1970’s under Jimmy Carter the SWP was in the thick of the anti-draft campaigns. (See our article “Marxism and the Draft: A Reply to the Social-Pacifist SWP” in *Socialist Voice* No. 9.) That is, on the draft issue the SWP ended up in the same camp as the CVO. Hall’s left social-pacifism – he and his comrades counseled draft resistance to working-class youth – bred the same illusions as the SWP’s right-wing version, which was directly in league with imperialist patriots.

### **CLASS AND THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT**

In concluding comments, Hall says that the LRP downgrades the importance of the anti-war movement altogether. He says that for the LRP “the positive elements of the movement are overlooked and the movement often belittled” as a result of “the non-materialist, philosophically idealist nature of the Trotskyist

## ***Further Reading...***

- **“The Leninist Position on Conscription”** (article in *Proletarian Revolution* No. 69 – includes “Anti-Militarist Propaganda and Young Socialist Workers’ Leagues” by V.I. Lenin)
- **‘No Draft’ Is No Answer** (LRP pamphlet)
- **“Marxism and the Draft”** (article in *Socialist Voice* No. 9)

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outlook.” (For someone who objects to “factional” rhetoric, the charge of philosophical idealism is thrown in without the slightest evidence or explanation.) “The LRP measures the movement against certain abstract, dogmatic yardsticks, finds the movement wanting, and condemns it arbitrarily,” he complains.

In fact, we pointed to the immense opportunities that were missed in the 1960’s because the movement failed to develop a revolutionary leadership. Fundamentally, Hall objects to our class characterization of the anti-war movement as “middle-class.” He claims in effect that insistence on the absolute centrality of the working class for revolutionary change is a rigid, idealist attempt to force history into pre-conceived forms.

Hall’s phrase-mongering about philosophical idealism reflects his hostility to Trotskyism, part of the ideological baggage the CVO has not discarded from its Stalinist past. Hall not only shows disdain for Marxist principles learned through over a century of class struggle; he also evades our discussion of the real material shifts in class forces – the rising strike wave and the ghetto upheavals. Because the leadership did its best to keep the anti-war movement within the limits acceptable to the Democratic Party liberals, thousands of young people newly won to subjective opposition to capitalism and imperialism were trained in reformism and social-pacifism, not revolution.

Hall and the CVO are dodging the proletarian revolutionary tasks they claim to stand for. They are part of the soft social-pacifist left that is horrified by the Iraq war but seeks a way out without challenging the roots of the bourgeois military machine. Just as they find excuses to avoid calling for an imperialist defeat today in Iraq, they also take the position – nominally held by most imperialist politicians today – of flatly campaigning against a drafted army. As well, they are neutral in an anti-imperialist military struggle and in effect supporters of an imperialist mercenary army. Some “communist” voice!

The American ruling class will soon need a more massive army and National Guard, both for its aggressions abroad and for use against the inevitable upsurges that will arise in response to its harsh anti-working-class attacks at home. A military draft is indeed in the picture. If revolutionaries follow Leninist rather than pacifist lessons, we will be able to repeat what Lenin said in his fine article on anti-militarist propaganda:

**As time goes on, there are more and more Social-Democrats [i.e., communists] in the army and the troops become increasingly less reliable. When the bourgeoisie has to confront the organized working class, whom will the army back? The young socialist workers are working with all the enthusiasm and energy of the young to have the army side with the people. ●**

## Why “No Draft” Is No Answer

### *Military Crisis Triggers Talk of Conscription*

As the U.S. becomes increasingly bogged down in Iraq, America’s rulers are getting more concerned that their armies lack the manpower not only to defeat the Iraqi resistance but to intervene elsewhere around the world. In September, the Defense Science Board, a panel of national security advisers to the Pentagon, concluded that inadequate numbers of troops mean that the U.S. “cannot sustain our current and projected global stabilization commitments.” That is, the dominant imperialist power has to be able to wield more military muscle against national struggles and mass eruptions. During the presidential campaign, George W. Bush and John Kerry both made warlike threats toward several countries, including Iran, Syria, Somalia, North Korea and Venezuela.

For years, Washington has had to maintain an army combining hard-core volunteers with working-class youth recruited out of economic necessity. Now, stretched thin in Iraq, the military has sent into battle Reservists and National Guard troops who never expected to fight abroad. Re-enlistment is down, and “stop-loss” orders have forced thousands of soldiers into involuntarily extended tours of duty – a “back-door draft.” Repeated assurances by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld and Bush that they have sent all the troops that commanders in Iraq requested have been exposed as lies. And although the Pentagon insists that it prefers to stay with the present semi-volunteer hybrid army, it clearly lacks enough troops to meet the U.S.’s imperialist needs. A hybrid army is inevitably transitory.

Given this reality, rumors have circulated that a draft would be re-instituted some time after the November election. Bush and Kerry both had to make explicit promises not to do so, and Congress went out of its way in October to vote against reinstating the draft. But the crippling gap – and the rumors – remain. With

good reason: both ruling-class parties are prepared to bring back conscription should the needs of U.S. imperialism demand it.

At the same time, they fear to do so. Throughout the history of capitalism, conscripted armies have proved to be a double-edged sword, especially during times of social crisis. For example, the massive revolt of drafted troops in Russia during the First World War was key to the success of the Bolshevik revolution. And the U.S. ruling class is well aware that its draft had to be ended during the Vietnam war, because of the explosive build-up within the ranks coupled with struggles breaking out at home. Today, Washington is also aware of the seething anger now developing at home over unemployment, low wages and the lack of health care. Discontent is rising in the military ranks in Iraq, including the recent refusal of troops from South Carolina to follow orders for a dangerous mission in unsafe trucks. The ruling class is caught between its need for conscription and the fear that a drafted army could get out of hand.

#### THE MARXIST POSITION ON CONSCRIPTION

Many anti-war activists and left groups have been discussing a campaign to oppose a draft. The League for the Revolutionary Party has long argued against an anti-draft campaign: we say that opposition to the capitalist military machine will be weakened by focusing on opposition to the draft specifically. Calling for “no draft” is no answer to the deadly power of imperialist militarism.

Our basic attitude on the military is that we oppose any and all bourgeois armies – drafted, mercenary or hybrid. We are for a workers’ militia, an army totally independent of and opposed to the capitalist state. However, until it is overthrown by revolution, the capitalist state must retain a military force. If there is no conscripted army under capitalist rule, there has to be a mercenary army. As Lenin stressed, only absurdly utopian pacifists can imagine an imperialist state without an armed fist. For that reason, a campaign against the draft within the context of reforming capitalism amounts to a campaign in favor of a mercenary army.

When workers’ struggles become powerful they inevitably come up against the military power of the capitalist state. To win, workers must defeat or divide the army. Revolutionaries therefore prefer the capitalist state to have to deal with a potentially rebellious conscripted army rather than a mercenary force. A mercenary army trains an elite corps of professional soldiers relatively isolated from the masses, even though many come from layers of the working class itself; in many respects it serves as a police department for the imperialized sectors of the world, just as the National Guard often does at home.

A conscripted army, on the other hand, is more  
*continued on page 19*



*White House war council, March 2003. U.S. will soon need more troops for Iraq and other imperialist interventions.*