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Internationalist



Struggle to Forge a Vanguard Is Key

A Revolution Is Brewing in Mexico



Lynsey Addario/New York Times

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Front-page photo: Protest in Mexico City against bloody cop attack on Oaxaca teachers, June 14.

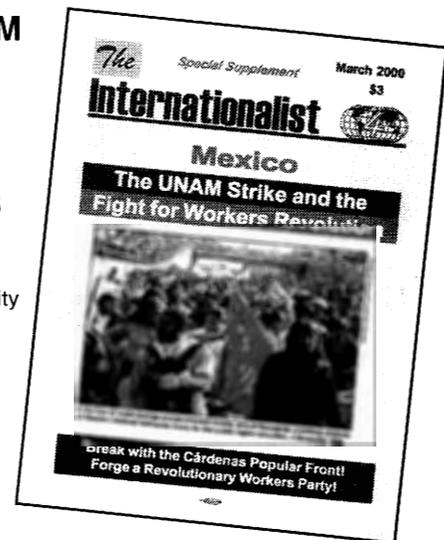
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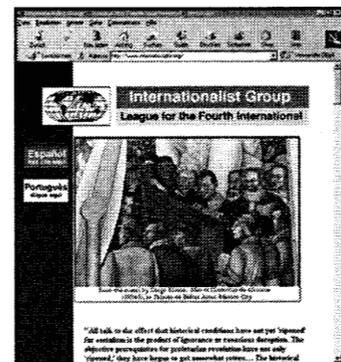


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January-February 2007

The Struggle to Forge a Vanguard Is Key

A Revolution Is Brewing in Mexico

As 2007 dawns, Mexico is reeling from ten months of sharp class conflict. A new government has taken office vowing to employ “the full weight of the state” against those who defy it. Felipe Calderón, the reactionary president imposed by the Federal Elections Tribunal over massive protests, wants above all to assure Wall Street and Washington that he will “preserve economic stability.” The appetites of the head of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) for a “strong state” are evident, but he comes into office as the weakest government of any in recent history. Not only did protesters shut down the capital’s main square and main thoroughfare for six weeks last summer protesting electoral fraud, workers, peasants and teachers repeatedly defeated police and troops in a series of pitched battles over the last year. Although a six-month mass strike in the southern state of Oaxaca ended with an eruption of cop violence and hundreds of arrests, the tens of thousands of strikers are unbowed. The dramatic clashes of 2006 have sown the seeds of revolution, as the strikes of 1906-07 signaled the coming of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. But the key element for a victorious outcome is absent: a revolutionary vanguard with the program and determination to sweep away the inhuman exploitation and mass poverty of capitalism and set out on the road of international socialist revolution.

The response of Mexico’s rulers to last year’s unrest has been rampant militarization. Twice in recent months, the government of outgoing president Vicente Fox surrounded Congress with a ring of metal barricades and thousands of troops and riot police and kept the area sealed off for days. Calderón was sworn in as head of state by a military officer at a private midnight ceremony in the presidential residence, Los Pinos. He slipped into Congress the next day by a back door for an official appearance that lasted less than five minutes, then ducked out again. The new ruler started off the new year by donning a military cap and jacket as commander in chief of the armed forces to review Mexican Army units in Michoacán, where they



Supporters of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) confront federal police on November 20.

are allegedly fighting drug traffickers. He simultaneously launched a “Plan Tijuana,” supposedly directed at the drug kingpins who dominate the city under Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) mayor Jorge Hank Rhon. But the plan mainly consisted of searching vehicles and carrying out military patrols in neighborhoods considered to be “conflict” zones looking for stolen autos, contraband and networks for funneling undocumented immigrants across the border to the United States. In other words, it was really about getting the population used to police-state controls.

The purpose of this operation is to provide security and “stability” for capital. Calderón explained to the convention of the Mexican Stock Market last October, “As head of the federal executive I am committed to creating an environment favoring investment and employment..., promoting competitiveness,” etc. After the media show of going after *narcos* and *coyotes* is over, his beefed up police apparatus will get down improving the business “environment” by repressing workers and other opponents. In his speech to the stock marketeers, Calderón vowed to maintain Mexico’s “leading position in attracting investment.” Police “reform” is high on the agenda of foreign investors and pundits, who may be annoyed by the pervasive corruption and ties to drug gangs, but were livid at the spectacle of federal

police retreating before youths armed with slingshots and “Molotov cocktails” in Oaxaca last November 2.

The imperialists are getting impatient with the pace of economic “reform” in Mexico and are demanding drastic action. Last fall, the British *Economist* (18 November 2006) published a special survey on Mexico under the title, “Time to Wake Up.” It called on Calderón to be “far bolder than his predecessor in tackling the many vestiges of the old order that are still holding the country back.” These “vestiges” include going after “monopoly power . . . from the teachers’ union to Pemex, the state oil monopoly.” But like Fox before him, the technocratic president tied to the ultra-rightist Catholic secret society El Yunque hesitates to tear down Mexico’s corporatist structure all at once, for fear that the country could come apart. Other provocative demands by the international bankers include extending the sales tax (IVA) to medicine – which Fox tried but failed to push through Congress – and ending subsidies of basic food products, like tortillas. In November, the government raised the price of subsidized milk by 28 percent, while in December it increased the minimum wage by less than 2 pesos (20 cents) a day, not enough to buy one egg and one aspirin. Now the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development is telling Mexico’s government to privatize the *ejidos*, land belonging to peasant and Indian communities. Such calls are designed to provoke a revolt.

The main thing holding it off so far has been the porous border to the U.S., which acted as a kind of safety valve: instead of protesting, the dispossessed headed north. Now the border is being closed, and pressure is building toward a social explosion. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has devastated Mexican agriculture. Millions of poor peasants have been forced off their land because their corn cannot compete on the market with the (highly subsidized) U.S. grains. As trainloads of corn from Iowa headed south on the (now U.S.-owned) railroads to Mexico, Mexican peasants headed north to Iowa to find work in packing plants. Now the situation in the countryside is about to become even more dramatic, as tariffs on imported corn are due to fall from 27 percent to 16 percent this month, and to 0 by January 2008. For a time the *maquiladora* free-trade zone plants managed to absorb many young workers producing electronic goods, auto parts and clothing for the giant U.S. market. But in the last several years hundreds of thousands of *maquiladora* workers have lost their jobs as fly-by-night entrepreneurs shut down plants to head for even lower-wage havens, particularly China. So while racist reactionaries in the United States froth about Mexican workers “stealing American jobs,” their counterparts south of the border rail against the Chinese deformed workers state for “stealing Mexican jobs.”

For more than six decades, the one-party regime of the PRI was able to maintain “economic stability” with a capitalist economy in which key sectors (energy, heavy industry, transport, finance) were in the hands of the state. They fostered the growth of a domestic capitalist class with cheap energy prices and cheap credit, while keeping a lid on labor protest with corporatist “unions” which acted as labor cops for the bosses. Lead-

ers were integrated into the PRI-government apparatus, workers in key industries were thrown some crumbs in the form of job security and social benefits, while wages were kept low and dissidents brutally repressed. Over the last two and a half decades, PRI presidents De la Madrid, Salinas and Zedillo and then Fox of the PAN have been dismantling this semi-bonapartist regime bit by bit. Salinas sold off more than 1,200 state-owned companies to his cronies, making instant billionaires of some and turning Carlos Slim (owner of the privatized Teléfonos de México) into the third-richest man in the world. As the super-rich wallow in dollars, the already miserable incomes of Mexican are falling while social security is gutted. Mexico is hurtling toward a crisis. The only question is the outcome.

“Popular Democracy” or Workers Revolution

Beginning with the deaths of 65 coal miners in the state of Coahuila last February, Mexico has been convulsed by almost uninterrupted labor unrest. When Fox’s labor minister tried to remove the head of the corporatist miners “union,” Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, as punishment for slipping the leash and talking of “industrial homicide” at the Pasta de Conchos mine, more than 300,000 mine and metal workers walked out in protest. Gómez Urrutia called it off after a few days, but steel workers at the Sicartsa-Las Truchas plant in Lázaro Cárdenas (Michoacán) and copper miners at Cananea and Nacozari (Sonora) stayed out on strike for months. The miners lost and were forced back to work with hundreds fired, but the steel strikers won, with an 8 percent wage increase, full pay for strike days, a US\$700 bonus and increased benefits. This victory was a dramatic demonstration of the workers’ power, having occupied the plant and defended it by driving off an assault by federal, state and local police along with marines on April 20, at a cost of 2 strikers killed. But the impact of the strike victory remained limited as the struggle was confined to strictly trade-union bounds.

The cop-military attack on the Sicartsa plant was followed two weeks later by a brutal police assault on peasants and townspeople in San Salvador Atenco, in Mexico state near the Federal District. There, too, the police were driven out, only to return with thousands of federal and state police who brutally beat and arrested hundreds. Several dozen women protesters were sexually molested and raped after being detained. This set off worldwide protests initiated by the “Other Campaign” of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). But by far the largest struggle was that launched by striking teachers in the state of Oaxaca, which began in late May and lasted until the end of November. On June 14, the murderous state governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, ordered an army of several thousand riot police to evict a strikers’ encampment (*plantón*) in the center of Oaxaca city. But the 40,000 teachers fought back and drove out the cop attackers. From then until the PFP invaded at the end of October, the state capital was in the hands of the strikers and their allies of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO).

The story of that convulsive struggle is recounted in a series of articles in this issue (pages 15-43) and the previous

issue of *The Internationalist* (No. 24, Summer 2005). Following the violent arrest of hundreds and imposition of a de facto state of siege in Oaxaca on November 25, the focal point of mobilization has shifted to the demand for immediate release of the detainees, several dozen of whom are still in jail, and dropping the trumped-up charges. More than 20 strike supporters were killed over the course of the six-month battle. But while the PRI governor-assassin Ruiz Ortiz crows victory and his PAN allies in Mexico City proclaim that it's all over, the working, poor and indigenous people of Oaxaca continue to fight. On January 6, "Three Kings Day," when children in Mexico traditionally receive presents, the APPO held an event to give toys to the children whose parents are behind bars, prisoners in the class war. Typically, the state government sent riot cops to keep the kids out of the Plaza of Santo Domingo, claiming the need to "provide security for tourists." Hundreds of children showed up anyway, some with signs saying the best present would be for Ruiz to leave (*La Jornada*, 7 January).

While keeping up the struggle, it is time to take stock and draw the lessons of more than half a year of hard combat. What are those lessons? The APPO leaders who have not been jailed are focused on getting their comrades out of prison, particularly APPO spokesman Flavio Sosa, a demand that should be taken up by the entire workers movement, in Mexico and internationally. Militant sectors want to settle accounts with Enrique Rueda Pacheco, the leader of the 70,000-strong Oaxaca teachers union, Section 22, SNTE-CNTE, who broke ranks and ordered strikers back to work at the beginning of November, leaving APPO supporters alone on the barricades. Thousands of teachers refused to obey and now rightly want to throw out Pacheco for strikebreaking. At the same time, the leader of the national corporatist teachers "union" (SNTE), Elba Esther Gordillo, has cashed in on her crucial electoral support to Calderón, placing her agents in control of the secretariat of public education, and setting up a new Section 59 in Oaxaca made up of teachers who scabbed during the strike. Meanwhile, combative students and youth who played a key role in the victorious November 2 defense of Oaxaca University sharply denounce the APPO leaders for abandoning them after November 25.

The militants' complaints are utterly valid, but by posing the issue in essentially personal terms, on the terrain of simple militancy vs. betrayal, they fail to address the political reasons for the "moderates" stab in the back. The basic fact is that the leaders both of the APPO (Sosa) and of the Oaxaca teachers union (Rueda Pacheco), as well as of the new scab section of the national SNTE, *all are supporters of the bourgeois populist Party of the Democratic Revolution*. Sosa, while he may affect the look of a student radical, is a national counselor of the PRD, who in 2000 even joined those PRDers calling to vote for the rightist Fox as a "lesser evil" to the PRI. While they engaged in combative tactics locally, nationally they looked to the PRD. APPO's support to PRD presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the July 2 elections was seen by many Oaxaca strikers as a "tac-

tical" move against Ulises Ruiz Ortiz: a vote for AMLO against URO. But for the APPO leaders it was strategic. When they traveled to the capital for negotiations, they sat down in the PRD *plantón* in the Mexico City Zócalo. And just as López Obrador didn't intend his street protests to challenge the bourgeois state, which they didn't, the Oaxacan leaders quite consciously never raised demands going beyond the limits of capitalism.

Yet the pitched battles in the streets of Oaxaca that defeated police attacks, the erection of thousands of barricades throughout the city, the takeover of several dozen towns around the state by striking teachers, the teachers' "police" squads that kept order in the occupied state capital – these aspects of a hard-fought class struggle did *begin to* present an implicit challenge to the capitalist regime. But they lacked an explicit revolutionary political perspective. Many radicals seized upon these initial steps to present a picture of the struggle in Oaxaca as if it were *already* a revolutionary situation, or on the verge of becoming one. This make-believe vision was synthesized in the propaganda that circled the globe about a Oaxaca Commune. We warned (see "A Oaxaca Commune?" page 36) that this substituted fantasy for fact, and that in any case, the goal of Marxists would not be an isolated commune in the most economically impoverished state of Mexico but a revolutionary proletarian mobilization throughout the country and particularly in the capital. We also emphasized that those who

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equated the Oaxaca struggle with the 1871 Paris Commune in terms of “democracy” misread the *class* nature of the latter, which Marxists from Marx and Engels to Lenin and Trotsky hailed as the first *workers government* in history.

For a Leninist-Trotskyist Workers Party

The various tendencies of the centrist and reformist Mexican left adopt a fundamentally anti-Marxist view of the relationship between democratic and socialist struggles. All of them call for a new constituent assembly or revolutionary convention, harking back to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917. And their identification of “people’s assemblies” with soviets, the organs of *proletarian* rule in the Russian Revolution, is common to the vast majority of the left in Latin America. When a “National and Indigenous Peoples’ Assembly” was formed in Bolivia at the height of the 2005 worker-peasant uprising, a chorus of ostensibly revolutionary leftists proclaimed this APNO to be “soviets on the altiplano.” That body turned out to be stillborn, as we in the League for the Fourth International pointed out at the time, and was never more than a cartel of left-talking bureaucrats. So when the APPO in Oaxaca took shape with undeniable mass support, those who were disappointed in Bolivia took heart and again proclaimed the advent of “soviets,” this time in the indigenously heartland of Mexico. This *disoriented* the struggle by implying that what was needed was simply to intensify and radicalize the APPO’s struggle instead of transforming and extending it to the powerful industrial proletariat.

As in every class battle, the question of leadership is key. The struggle in Oaxaca suffered a serious setback and temporary defeat, but it could flare up again tomorrow. What the Oaxacan masses require is a vanguard with a proletarian revolutionary program instead of all the talk about an amorphous “people” including sectors of the bourgeoisie. Just before the crackdown in Oaxaca, Zapatista Subcomandante/Delegado Zero Marcos declared, “We are on the eve of a great uprising or a civil war” (*La Jornada*, 24 November). After the repression of November 25, Juchitecan painter Francisco Toledo said he felt Oaxaca is “almost on the verge of a civil war” and that the “Oaxacan political class has to disappear in order to change the situation in the state” (*La Jornada*, 4 December 2006). Today the immediate issue posed is to free the Oaxacan detainees. In Spain in the 1930s, the struggle to free thousands of Asturian miners imprisoned after the failed uprising of 1934 was a key factor leading to the Civil War of 1936-39. But that struggle was hijacked and subjugated to the bourgeoisie through the *Popular Front*.

The Grupo Internacionalista has called repeatedly to break from the popular front around López Obrador and the PRD, just as we warned for years that the Cárdenas popular front was diverting workers from organizing a class struggle against the PRI regime. Contrary to those who deny the existence of a popular front in Mexico, this front has now been formally constituted with the signing of a document of “strategic alliance” between the “independent” pro-PRD unions, several peasant groups and López Obrador’s Broad Progress

sive Front (FAP), including the PRD, the Party of Labor (PT) and the Democratic Convergence, all of them bourgeois parties. As new struggles loom, over Calderón’s plans for privatization of electrical energy for example, it will be crucial to call on the unions, such as the SME (Mexican Electrical Workers Union), to break from the popular front with AMLO and the PRD, and to instead fight to build a revolutionary *workers party*. After the battle of Sicartsa and throughout the struggle in Oaxaca, we called for the formation of *workers defense committees* against the repression ordered by the PAN, PRI and PRD. As the SNTE led by Gordillo tries to victimize Oaxacan teachers for their courageous strike, the GI calls on teachers and workers throughout the country to break the corporatist straitjacket by building unions with class-struggle leaderships, separate from and opposed to all the bourgeois parties.

The reverse suffered by the Oaxacan masses is the result above all of the bourgeois-democratic program of their leaders which was incapable of leading them to victory. It is necessary to politically rearm to go forward. This is an inevitable part of every serious class struggle. As Karl Marx wrote about the French workers’ struggles of the mid-19th century:

“Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, storm more swiftly from success to success On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their opponents only so the latter may draw new strength from the earth and rise before them again more gigantic than ever, recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible...”

–Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852)

The Trotskyists of the Grupo Internacionalista insisted from the beginning on the need to place the struggle on a firm *class* basis and extend it to the “heavy battalions” of Mexico’s working class. The goal cannot be limited to “democracy,” however popular or even revolutionary this is made out to be. Even if the murderous governor of Oaxaca were dumped, even if the “neo-liberal” policies of recent Mexican governments were replaced (and AMLO’s program was only for “neo-liberalism with a human face”), the teachers and indigenous peoples of Oaxaca would still be condemned to a life of poverty and oppression, as they were for decades under the PRI. The goal today, not in the distant future, must be to organize to prepare a *workers revolution*, from Oaxaca to Mexico City to the heart of imperialism. And that requires the leadership of an internationalist, revolutionary workers party, built on the program of permanent revolution and tempered through intervention in the class struggle and the fight to forge Trotsky’s Fourth International anew as the world party of socialist revolution. ■

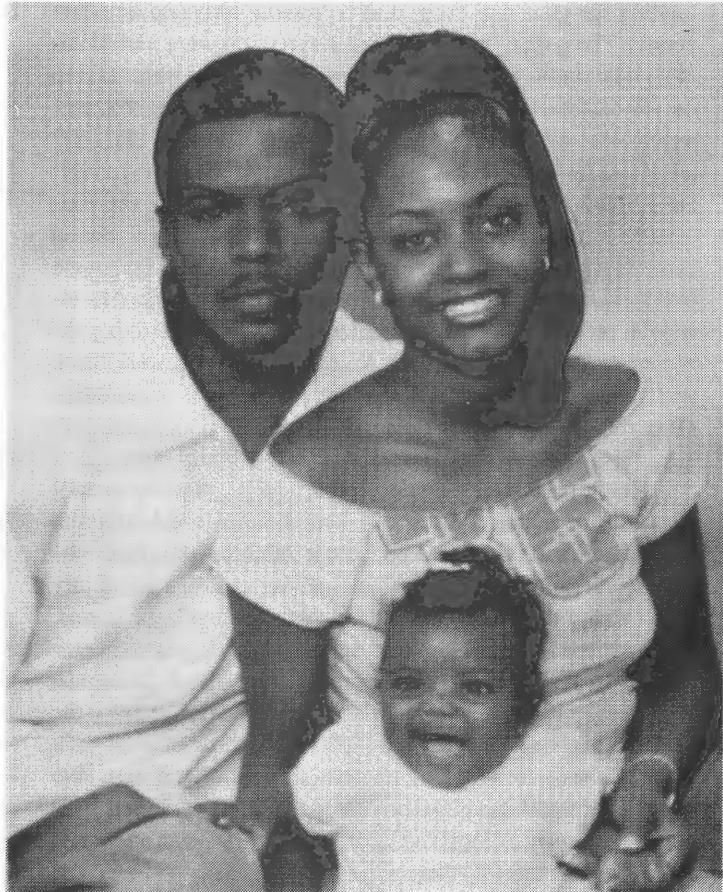
Sean Bell Gunned Down on His Wedding Day – Mobilize Workers’ Power Against Police State Repression!

50 Bullets: Racist NYPD Cop Execution, Again

DECEMBER 5 – In the early morning hours of November 25, a squad of New York City police surrounded a car of three unarmed black and Latino men, and unleashed a hail of bullets: 50 shots in total. The killer cops murdered the driver, 23-year-old Sean Bell, on the day he was to marry his fiancée and the mother of the couple’s two children, Nicole Paultre. Sean’s friend Joseph Guzman, 31, was critically wounded by eleven bullets, while another friend in the car, Trent Benefield, 23, was hit three times. Even though neither had done or were charged with anything, both were shackled to their hospital beds until protesters forced the police to remove the handcuffs, and they are still hospitalized. Meanwhile, the police are on a rampage, terrorizing the Queens community with a racist dragnet arresting witnesses.

While the media babble on about the “fog of the moment,” “contagious shooting” and other claptrap, this was an execution by the cops. As the New York Police Department desperately tries to find someone to frame for the bloody crime their cops perpetrated, angry demonstrators recalled the 1999 murder of Amadou Diallo in the doorway of his home by a police death squad that fired off 41 shots. Where Mayor Rudolph Giuliani inflamed protesters with his vociferous defense of the police and attempts to smear their victim, his successor, Michael Bloomberg, has tried to cool things out, giving hypocritical condolences to Sean Bell’s family and companion, describing the fusillade of police bullets as “excessive,” and lining up Democratic politicians, first and foremost Al Sharpton, to back his lying claim that a fair investigation was underway.

Yet the stark reality is that there is not going to be an investigation to find out the truth of what happened that night but only a cover-up. As always, the bourgeois politicians are going to stand by their police, who are the armed fist of the bosses, the backbone of the capitalist state. Their task is to “serve and protect” the interests of the exploiters by riding roughshod over the exploited. Not that there is much to “investigate”: even if the cops managed to “find” a gun after digging up every block around the scene of their crime, it would still be racist police murder. What’s needed is to mobilize power – the power of the multiracial working class along



Family photo of Sean Bell and his fiancée Nicole Paultre with their daughter.

with black, immigrant and other oppressed “minority” populations who together are the overwhelming majority of New York – to put a stop to police brutality. And that will take nothing less than *socialist revolution*.

Soon after Sean Bell and his friends left Club Kalua at 4 a.m. on November 25 after having a bachelor party on the eve of his wedding, a squad of plainclothes cops went after them. Trapping Bell’s Altima sedan between an unmarked van and an unmarked car, the police got out and began their deadly shooting spree. A white cop let loose 31 rounds, emptying an entire clip from his rapid-fire Glock automatic, re-

It Will Take Socialist Revolution to End Police Brutality

loading and firing off another. Police bullets were flying all over the place, hitting a lamp in a living room, breaking windows in a nearby AirTrain facility. But not a shot was fired in response. The cops said Bell had rammed them; the surviving victims say they were trying to escape what looked like a carjacking. The lead undercover cop claims he identified himself as police; at least five witnesses plus the victims say the police never showed badges or identified themselves in any matter until after the shooting.

Amadou Diallo was gunned down by a squad known as the Street Crimes Unit which prowled the Bronx supposedly looking for guns and drugs and repeatedly arresting innocent people. The police "perps" in Bell's execution were part of another elite outfit, the Club Enforcement Unit, who were staking out 88 establishments in Queens looking for drugs and prostitution. The white cop who fired 31 shots has more than 600 arrests under his belt. The professional squad apparently didn't have time to plant a "drop gun" on their victims, as the cops usually do. So the police have been desperately trying to dig up some "evidence" of a weapon or a mythical "fourth man" in the bullet-riddled car who somehow miraculously managed to escape in order to exonerate the killers. The press is claiming the killing was not racist because several of the cops were black and Latino. But the fact is that police gunmen overwhelmingly shoot minority "suspects"; the race of the individual cops isn't key, it's the system of repression that is inherently racist.

Going back over the years, protesters recalled the unending series of killings like that of Patrick Dorismond, killed in Manhattan in 2000 by an undercover narcotics detective who said he thought the young man was a drug dealer; a grand jury didn't indict the cop. Many of the victims have been Latino, like Anthony Baez, choked to death while playing football outside his Bronx home in 1995; the killer cop walked. Columnist Bob Herbert in the *New York Times* (30 November) recalled the police execution of 10-year-old Clifford Glover, shot in the back in 1973; the 1976 killing of 15-year-old Randolph Evans, shot in the head; and grandmother Eleanor Bumpurs, killed by a police shotgun blast inside her apartment in 1984 in an attempted eviction. More recently there was the case of Malcolm Ferguson, murdered in 2000 by police only blocks away from where Diallo was shot to death; his mother, Juanita Young, who has persisted in fighting police brutality, was arrested in her home the day after Bell was killed by cops who kicked her in the chest and back. And this pattern of racist police murder isn't limited to New York: just last month 92-year-old Kathryn Johnston was killed in her Atlanta home in a "no-knock" police drug raid.

The list is endless: hundreds of victims of police brutality around the country in an unbroken string of racist repression. But this is not just "business as usual." The "war on terror" unleashed by the government of Republican George Bush with the full support of Democrats in Congress has led to the intensification of police terror in the U.S. The U.S.A. Patriot Act legalized a raft of measures for domestic spying and arbitrary detention of immigrants. Over 2,000 immigrants, overwhelmingly of Arab and Near Eastern origin, were rounded up and held incommunicado for months after the 11



Internationalist photo

September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington. Thousands more were deported without any pretense of due process. Shortly after the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, NYPD police killed 57-year-old black grandmother Alberta Spruill in her apartment with a flash grenade; and in California, cops fired on an antiwar protest at the Oakland docks, wounding at least six longshoremen. After the pervasive use of torture by U.S. occupation forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and at the Guantánamo prison camp was revealed, the government has moved to legalize these war crimes as well as warrantless wiretapping and other police-state measures.

Right now there is a concerted "bipartisan" effort by the partner parties of U.S. capitalism to keep the lid on New York. Democrat bigwig Al Sharpton (a former FBI informer), now considered respectable by a bourgeois establishment that previous shunned him as a "rabble rouser," is talking about some kind of mass civil action along with Jesse Jackson where they can chant "No justice, no peace" without disturbing anything. NYC city council member Charles Barron has called for the removal of NYPD chief Ray Kelly (whom Sharpton supports) and wants the now-Democratic Congress to investigate. Yet Democrats, black and white, seek to keep protests limited to pressuring the government and line up silently behind Republican mayor Bloomberg on TV to show their support. Still, when Democratic councilman Thomas White Jr. told a crowd of 300 outside the hospital where Joseph Guzman and Trent Benefield are convalescing, "We are not going to be angry," the crowd responded, "Oh yes we are."

The latest police execution brought together once more the families of the victims. Amadou's mother, Kadiatou Diallo, a Guinean immigrant, traveled from Baltimore for

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Statement of the Internationalist Group to September 15 Oakland, California Rally

Mobilize Workers Power to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!

Mumia Abu-Jamal is the foremost class-war prisoner in the United States today. His case is the signal proof that there is no justice for the oppressed in the capitalist courts. As a former spokesman of the Black Panther Party, Mumia was subjected to the government's murderous repression under the infamous COINTELPRO program. He was framed and sentenced to death for his calls for revolution. The threat of execution continues to hang over his head 25 years later because the racist rulers are determined to silence the eloquent "voice of the voiceless."

The Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International, has fought since its inception for workers action to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. Our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil in April 1999 initiated the first labor action for Mumia's freedom, a state-wide work stoppage by the teachers of Rio de Janeiro. The Brazilian teachers linked their action to the West Coast port shutdown by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union in the United States for the demand to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. This is a taste of the kind of workers power that will be required to liberate our courageous brother.

Mumia's conviction was no aberration but the normal working of the legal system designed by the slave masters to keep black slaves in the chains of perpetual bondage. We call not for a "new trial" by this bourgeois injustice system which has condemned thousands of innocents to die, while U.S. imperialism lays waste to Afghanistan and Iraq in the latest of its countless wars of conquest and pillage. Rather, we appeal to the working class to mobilize its tremendous class power to free Mumia and defeat the imperialist war abroad and the bosses' war against the poor, minorities, working people and immigrants here. ■



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Bulletin of the Rio de Janeiro state teachers union (SEPE), reports on April 1999 strike action for Mumia: "Rio Schools and U.S. Dock Workers Stop Work and Demand Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal."

boletim do
Sepe

Associação dos Professores do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Educação do Rio de Janeiro - Sindicato CVT e CEEJ

Educação do Rio e portuários dos EUA páram atividades e exigem libertação de Mumia Abu-Jamal



Profissionais de Educação do Rio e portuários norte-americanos paralisaram as atividades para exigir a libertação do jornalista e ativista do Movimento Negro dos Estados Unidos, Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Do 23 de abril ocorreu a paralisação dos professores e funcionários das escolas públicas. Neste dia, a categoria debateu com os alunos a história de Mumia. Ele é um preso político condenado à morte em um processo na Justiça norte-americana totalmente irregular e injusto.

Nas páginas seguintes, Boletim do Sepe analisa o movimento no Rio para a libertação de Abu-Jamal.

Growing Working-Class Opposition as Prodi Continues Berlusconi Policies

Italy: Popular Front of Imperialist War and Anti-Labor Attacks

DECEMBER 31 – Ever since the “Unione” – Italy’s governing coalition of assorted ex-Christian Democrats, ex-Stalinists and Greens – came into office last April, it has relentlessly pursued two goals: slashing labor costs at home to make Italian industry “competitive” and militarily occupying foreign countries according to the dictates of U.S. imperialism (and its Israeli allies). From the standpoint of the Italian working class and the oppressed masses of Africa and the Middle East, not a euro cent’s worth of difference separates the former “center-right” government of Silvio Berlusconi from the “center-left” government of current prime minister Romano Prodi. The Italian capitalists, on the other hand, are for the moment banking on Prodi’s popular front – which includes, in particular, Rifondazione Comunista (PRC, Party of Communist Refounding), whose leader, Fausto Bertinotti, now shamelessly presides over the Chamber of Deputies of Italian imperialism. Sometimes referred to as “far left” in the bourgeois press, the PRC’s policies are utterly reformist, often to the right of the pro-capitalist policies of the Italian Communist Party of the past.

Bertinotti’s capitalist masters are hoping that he and Prodi will take up where Berlusconi left off, dismantling labor protections and conducting imperialist military adventures. Prodi knows his assignment: during the election campaign, in his nationally televised debate with Berlusconi, Prodi intoned, “We have to lower labor costs. We have to give a push to the system.” Now the Prodi government has rammed through an austerity budget with multi-billion euro cuts in health, local government and education, while resuming the dismantling of the public pension system begun in 1995. In addition to raising the age of retirement, according to a “memorandum of understanding” between the government, unions and industrialists, beginning next year workers’ severance pay (TFR) will be funneled into privatized pension funds that will “invest” in the stock markets while minimum state pensions are cut to the bone. All this is done with the support of the union bureaucracies, which are setting up their own pension funds to get in on the specu-



Italian war minister Arturo Parisi (left) and prime minister Romano Prodi (right) send off “peace-keeping” force to Lebanon to act as border guards for Israel.

lative feast. And now the government is preparing the privatization of the state airline, Alitalia. The PRC, having supported the first Prodi government (1996-98) which privatized Telecom Italia, slashed job protections and set up concentration camps (CPTs) for undocumented immigrants, is also backing this attack on workers’ livelihoods.

But the assault has not gone without protest. On November 4, 150,000 demonstrated in Rome to demand an end to *precarietà* (temporary jobs). On November 17, some 1.5 million workers struck against the budget law, with over 300,000 demonstrating in the streets. Among the protesters were many students, while the striking workers were mainly from the various syndicalist rank-and-file committees (Cobas, SLAI Cobas, CUB) and the left wing of the CGIL (Italian General Labor Federation, led by the PRC). Then on December 7, the top union bureaucrats visited the largest factory in Italy, Fiat’s Mirafiori plant in Torino, for the first time in 37 years, to sell the budget. The workers weren’t buying. “Bertinotti betrayed us,” shouted one worker to general applause. “We shouldn’t be a rubber stamp for the government” said another to Luigi Angeletti of the so-

Break with the Popular Front – Build a Leninist-Trotskyist Workers Party

Luca Bruno/AP



Banner calling for “generalized strike” in November 17 workers demonstration “against the budget of war and job instability.”

cial-democratic UIL union federation, reminding him that “these governments are no friends” of the workers. Raffaele Bonanni, head of the formerly Christian Democratic federation, CISL, was booed as were others of the bureaucrats. Workers bombarded CGIL leader Giuglielmo Epifani for two hours with complaints about the threats to pensions. But in the end, despite the workers’ boos at Mirafiori, the budget sailed through parliament without a hitch.

Immigrants and immigrant workers have been a particular target of attack. The latest case was a racist assault on a camp of Rom (“gypsies”) on December 21. The week before, they had been evicted from a camp in Milano. They were supposed to be temporarily lodged in a tent city in nearby Opera, but when buses with 75 Roms arrived, a racist mob had drenched the tents with gasoline and burned them. Half of those thrown out into the December cold were children, including a number of newborn babies. The attack was spearheaded by fascists, both skinhead *squadristi* (attack squads) and supporters of the fascist party Aleanza Nazionale, along with the virulent anti-immigrant racists of the Lega Nord (Northern League). The assault was also “tolerated, if not openly supported, by many citizens who voted for the center-left” (*Il Manifesto*, 30 December). Local authorities responded by holding a “dialogue” with the vigilantes. The camp has since been reestablished with a police presence, but the racists are still there menacing it and the mayor (member of the Left Democrats) says they can only stay until March. The situation cries out for a massive workers mobilization to sweep away the fascist scum and teach them a lesson with proletarian power. But the reformist misleaders haven’t lifted a finger to defend the Rom.

On the military plane as well, the Italian popular front has gone out of its way to maintain continuity with Berlusconi. After nine months in office, it finally withdrew the Italian contingent from Iraq, while reconfirming its commitment to, and even increasing the budget for, Italian troops in the NATO occupation of Afghanistan. On top of this, the Unione is now

providing border guards for Israel. On August 29, Prodi stood pompously on the deck of the navy’s flagship, the light aircraft carrier *Giuseppe Garibaldi*, and blessed his troops departing for Lebanon. The *Garibaldi* (what a misuse of that great revolutionary’s name!) steamed from Brindisi at the head of a flotilla carrying 2,500 soldiers in addition to naval personnel. They make up the largest component of the multinational “peacekeeping” force summoned by Washington and Tel Aviv in the wake of the U.S.-backed Israeli invasion of Lebanon. While the Zionist militarists laid waste to much of the country, using U.S.-made cluster bombs against the civilian population, the

Hezbollah militia fought the Israeli army to a standstill in southern Lebanon.

Having failed to do so by military means, Bush and the Israeli rulers turned to the United Nations to seek to disarm Hezbollah through diplomacy and an occupation army of the European imperialists. While the right-wing opposition makes a show of criticizing this military adventure, even the “communist” Bertinotti declares himself “happy” that Italy “has returned as a force for peace in the Mediterranean area” (AGI, 26 August)! Recently, foreign minister Massimo D’Alema of the Left Democrats (DS) visited the troops in Lebanon warning of possible attacks on this phony “peace force” by Al Qaeda. Meanwhile, Israel crows that the Italians are doing its bidding (“Italy: World Won’t Tolerate Syrian Arms Shipments to Hezbollah,” *Haaretz*, 1 September). In January, Italian general Gerometta will assume command of the entire 15,000-strong UNIFIL force. For now, the “Italian Joint Task Force” is concentrating on building good relations with the predominantly Shiite Muslim local population. But that will change as soon as they try to enforce UN Security Council resolution 1701 calling for disarming Hezbollah.

Parliament must vote to renew authorization for the Afghan expeditionary force this month, putting left-wingers in the PRC in a quandary. Last summer most of them voted “yes” to the Afghan war while claiming to oppose it. Not so long ago, in 2003, millions demonstrated in Italy against the U.S. invasion of Iraq, but today only a few thousand participate in protests demanding Italian troops get out of Afghanistan and Lebanon. The bulk of the Italian left may make tepid criticisms of Prodi’s foreign policy and oppose the “cowboy” antics of George Bush and the U.S. imperialists in the Near East. But rather than fighting for socialist revolution, most of the “antiwar” forces yearn for a “peace-loving” *Italian* imperialism. Revolutionary internationalists call instead to drive *all* the imperialists out of the Near East, and for proletarian mobilization to defeat imperialist war.



Media mogul Silvio Berlusconi, then prime minister. *Il cavaliere* openly sports his bonapartist ambitions, bragging that he is “greater than Bonaparte.”

From Mussolini to Berlusconi

Berlusconi’s regime was the continuator of the right wing of the Christian Democracy (DC), the dominant bourgeois party of postwar Italy, created with CIA and Vatican money and populated with ex-fascists and *mafiosi*. The mission of the DC was to salvage Italian capitalism from the wreckage of Mussolini’s fascism, at a time when the discredited and disorganized bourgeoisie faced an increasingly militant proletariat, a significant section of which had kept its arms from the partisan struggle against the Nazis. Under the leadership of Palmiro Togliatti and the Italian Communist Party (PCI), loyal to Stalin’s alliance with “democratic” imperialism, the DC was allowed to reconstitute the capitalist order. An excruciatingly accurate depiction of this scene closes Bernardo Bertolucci’s film, *1900*, when at a workers tribunal at the end of World War II the boss is told, “*il boss non esiste più*” – the boss is no more – until the official PCI representatives arrive, disarm the people and permit the boss to proclaim, “*si, il boss ancora esiste*” (yes, the boss still exists).

For the next thirty years, through the working-class explosions in the 1960s and ’70s, the PCI tops (and their supporters in the CGIL unions) functioned as loyal “labor lieutenants of capital.” This culminated in the PCI’s “historic compromise” of the mid-’70s, when the PCI deputies gave essential parliamentary support to DC government of Giulio Andreotti (and fingered factory workers as Red Brigade members to the police). Try as they might, however, the Stalinist misleaders could not save Andreotti and his mafia- and fascist-ridden party, which finally broke apart in the early 1990s under the weight of a series of corruption scandals that had begun a decade earlier. The PCI/CGIL tops tried to prove their reliability to the capitalists by sacrificing the *scala mobile* (the cost-of-living escalator that adjusted wages for inflation), in a July 1992 accord with the employers and government, and gutting other workers’ con-

quests won in the *autunno caldo* (hot autumn) of 1969. But instead of putting a popular front in power, this demoralized the workers and brought in the first Berlusconi government of 1994-96.

The “center-right” Berlusconi I government fell amid internal squabbling and working-class discontent. New elections led to a “center-left” government under former Christian Democrat Romano Prodi, who lasted a bare two years (1996-98), to be replaced by another popular-front cabinet led by former Stalinist D’Alema of the DS, whose government escalated attacks on the workers. This, in turn, led to the electoral victory in 2001 of the Berlusconi II government, which remained in power for the full five-year period. In national

elections last April 10-11, the alternate leadership of the Italian ruling class, the Unione coalition, won by a razor-thin margin and installed the Prodi II government. The narrow outcome – barely 25,000 votes separated the two blocs in the Chamber of Deputies, out of a total of about 38 million cast – was largely due to the Unione’s insistently anti-working class program, which promised to make life worse for workers than under Berlusconi. But the cyclical alternation of right and “left,” between Berlusconi and Prodi, masks the underlying drive by the entire bourgeoisie to dismantle the remains of the postwar “social state” and boost Italian “competitiveness” by undoing labor gains.

Working-class opposition to the right-wing regime had been massive since Berlusconi took office in 2001 with an agenda of privatizations, attacks on union protections, pensions and civil liberties (disguised as a U.S.-style campaign against “terrorism”), as well as a racist offensive against immigrants. Berlusconi dispatched 1,300 troops to Afghanistan and 3,000 to Iraq in support of U.S. imperialism and its wars, to the outrage of the whole of the Italian working class, most students and a large part of the petty bourgeoisie. As a result, Italy became a huge stage for demonstrations of protest and resistance. A series of combative industrial and service worker strikes culminated in a 10 million-strong general strike in October 2003, and the two largest demonstrations in postwar Italian history, both of which took place in Rome. In 2002, 2 million demonstrated against the government’s economic policies, and the following year 3 million marched against Italy’s participation in the U.S. imperialist onslaught in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the face of such widespread opposition, the Italian bourgeoisie failed to bring the workers to heel. For five years it backed Berlusconi’s coalition, which in the main consists of four parties. *Forza Italia* (a soccer slogan, meaning “Go Italy”), the largest of the four, received 24 percent of the vote

in 2006; it was created with Berlusconi money and Vatican support to rally demoralized elements of the defunct mafia-ridden Christian Democracy. The *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance), the second party in Berlusconi's coalition (receiving over 12 percent of the 2006 vote) is the new name of the Italian fascists. It was changed from Mussolini's "Movimento Sociale Italiano" in 1995, as part of the fascists' efforts to sanitize their image (including kicking out the dictator's granddaughter and dressing up their leader, Gianfranco Fini, Berlusconi's foreign minister, in a business suit instead of a black shirt). The third component is the *UDC/DC*, remnants of the old Christian Democratic Party (7 percent), and the fourth is the racist, anti-immigrant *Lega Nord* (Northern League, 4.5 percent), led by Umberto Bossi, a bribe-taker given to screaming vulgarities and threats of violence against other politicians.

Despite the new names, the center-right "Pole of Liberty" coalition thus brings together all the usual suspects of post-war Italian capitalism: the super-rich, Vatican operatives, corrupt politicians, big-time criminals, fascists and racist thugs. But it is an uneasy alliance. The founding principles of *Lega Nord*, for example, were hatred of Italian national unity and love for "Padania," a mythical Nordic-style land to be formed by the secession of northern Italy from the Mezzogiorno (the poor southern regions of Italy). Bossi brought down the coalition once before, in 1994, ending Berlusconi's first, short-lived reign. Greed for money and power, and hatred of the working class, however, brought Bossi back in the fold, and he became Minister of Reforms in the second cabinet.

For five years the strategy consisted of crude frontal assaults against the hard-won gains of the Italian working class, which, damaging as they were, ultimately proved insufficient to break worker militancy. Berlusconi's last-ditch effort was an attempt to grab more power through forcing changes in the 1948 Italian constitution. When he lost in parliament, he called a national referendum. Bossi loudly proclaimed that he would move to Switzerland if it didn't pass. Its decisive failure in late June (61 percent voted "no") was in part due to heavy resistance in the South, where sensitivity to any scheme involving Bossi runs high. In response to the defeat of the referendum, Marco Formentini, *Lega Nord* representative in the Euro-parliament, sneered, "*Italia fa schifo, gli Italiani fanno schifo*" (Italy stinks, the Italians stink). The workers will remember these names and reckon with them appropriately, as the partisans did with many at the close of World War II. But the 1943-45 workers uprising against Mussolini and the retreating German imperialists was sold out and proletarian revolution blocked by the Stalinist PCI and social democrats through a popular front with right-wing Catholic politicians.

Berlusconi's Bonapartist aspirations and megalomania (*Il cavaliere* has described himself as "greater than Bonaparte" and the "Jesus Christ of politics"), as well as his brazen use of political power to advance his private commercial interests, may have put off some bourgeois backers, but the decisive factor for them was his failure to gain the deep cuts in labor costs they demanded. As Maurizio Beretta, chief of

Confindustria, Italy's powerful syndicate of capitalists, portentously remarked, "the problem of pensions is a rather delicate one" (AGI, 11 September). So in the face of tenacious working-class resistance to Berlusconi, the capitalists seek to serve their purposes with the less blunt instrument of the *Unione*. And who better to understand the bourgeoisie's concerns than Prodi, himself Confindustria's chief during the 1980s and again in 1993-94?

From Berlusconi I to Prodi II: Imperialist War and Anti-Worker Attacks

L'Unione is a classic "popular front" that binds the workers to their class enemy by means of an alliance between sections of the ruling class and the mass organizations of the working class (parties and unions). Its program is capitalist austerity "at home" and imperialist militarism abroad. Berlusconi's fascist-ridden wing of the bourgeoisie has been temporarily sidelined by this election, but his replacements are eager for the chance to discipline the workers.

The largest bourgeois component of the *Unione* is the *Margherita* (Daisy), the reconstituted liberal wing of the old Christian Democratic Party (a/k/a the Aldo Moro wing). *Margherita* is closely allied with the *Left Democrats* (DS), one of the two largest splinters from the defunct Italian Communist Party. The "Ulivo" (Olive Tree) lash-up of ex-Christian Democrats and ex-Stalinists resembles the "historic compromise" – the desperate attempts in the late 1970s by the PCI under Enrico Berlinguer to formally subordinate itself to Giulio Andreotti's Christian Democrats. This came to an abrupt end in 1978 with the kidnapping and murder of Moro, the main Christian Democratic proponent of an alliance with the PCI. The ex-Stalinists of the DS, however, have moved much further down the road of class collaboration, and today the Ulivo bloc constitutes the bourgeois core of Prodi's government, with over 30 percent of the popular vote and 220 seats (out of 630) in the Chamber of Deputies. Prodi appointed old-line Stalinist bureaucrat Giorgio Napolitano as President of the Republic.

Because of its open hostility to the working class, however, the Ulivo could not hope to form a government by itself. Many workers remembered how in 1998-99 when D'Alema was prime minister his government pushed through anti-strike laws and tried, unsuccessfully, to gut the pension system. The Ulivo's plan to continue and even quicken the pace of the Berlusconi-initiated attacks on pensions and welfare spending requires that it have more credible allies to the left – those with closer ties to the working class and Italy's large and heterogeneous milieu of *contestazione* (active opposition). Among these allies are the *Greens* (who got 2.3 percent of the vote in April); *Rosa nel Pugno* (Rose in the Fist, 2.6 percent), the new name of the old Radical Party, now fused with a splinter from Bettino Craxi's corrupt Socialist Party; and the more traditional Stalinists of the *Party of Italian Communists* (PdCI, 2.3 percent). But the linchpin of the popular front is the *Partito di Rifondazione Comunista* led by former CGIL militant Fausto Bertinotti, who is now Prodi's Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies.



Giorgio Borgiala/AP

Rifondazione Comunista leader Fausto Bertinotti (left) and Democratic Left leader Massimo D'Alema during April 2002 general strike against plan by right-wing Berlusconi government to make it easier to fire workers. Now Bertinotti and D'Alema are part of popular-front government that is pushing to "flexibilize" job security.

The PRC received 2.2 million votes (5.8 percent) in the Chamber and 41 deputies, and 2.5 million in the Senate (7.4 percent) and 27 senators. Rifondazione's vote totals are up by well over half a million over 2001, and represent the hopes of the most class-conscious Italian workers. Unfortunately, these hopes are misplaced. The PRC leadership, no less than that of any of its Unione bloc partners, is deeply committed to preserving the rule of the Italian capitalists. To prove this to all the world, Prodi with Bertinotti's support, called for a series of early votes to renew the Italian commitment to the imperialist war in Afghanistan. Bertinotti was able to deliver every time. In the decisive vote in July, the tally in the Chamber of Deputies was 549 in favor, 4 against. The Unione and the Berlusconi opposition were in complete agreement – but for four dissenters. These were from "Sinistra Critica," which poses as a left opposition within the PRC, constituted of largely of supporters of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), followers of the late Ernest Mandel, and the International Socialist Tendency, supporters of the line of the late Tony Cliff, who considered the Soviet Union "state capitalist."

In the Senate, however, the margin between center-left and center-right is a mere two votes (158 to 156), so the bourgeois popular front needs all 27 PRC senators on every vote – no dissents, no absentions, no absences. If the Prodi regime loses a

single key vote – such as the proposal to continue the war in Afghanistan – it could fall, opening the possibility for Berlusconi & Co. to return to power. So the Unione has posed every key vote in parliament as a motion of confidence in the government. Bertinotti and Franco Giordano (the new PRC secretary) use this device to cajole and threaten their left-wing critics, who have obliged them every time. In advance of the Senate vote on the Afghan "mission" last July eight senators – from Sinistra Critica, the PRC majority, the Greens, and the PdCI – issued a proclamation: "Non alla guerra, senza se e senza ma!" ("No to the War, Without Ifs or Buts!") – the main slogan of the antiwar movement). This pacifist slogan masks the need to fight the *imperialist* war with *class war* by mobilizing the power of the proletariat to *defeat* "their own" bourgeoisie. As it turned out, however, all eight self-styled "left oppositionists" ended up obeying the discipline of the popular front and voting *for* the war on Afghanistan.

While Mandelites and Cliffites formally claim to be Marxists and, to one or another degree, cite Leon Trotsky, in reality they seek to drag Trotsky's name and the revolutionary Marxism it stands for through the mud of class collaboration. From Brasília to Rome, these groups join repressive capitalist regimes, including (where they can) as cabinet ministers, while calling themselves revolutionaries. From the beginning of the 20th century, this kind of "ministerial socialism" was derided by genuine Marxists. These reformist *anti-Trotskyists* are following in the footsteps of Stalinism and Social Democracy. Throughout his life Trotsky resolutely opposed the popular front, whether in power or out, as a tool of a weakened capitalist class that seeks to enlist the working class – through the agency of reformist workers parties – in engineering its own defeat. In China in the 1920s, in France and Spain in the 1930s, he warned that the popular front prepares the way for disaster for the working class. Only in Russia was catastrophe averted – because the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Trotsky overthrew the popular-front Provisional Government led by Kerensky and established a revolutionary workers and peasants government.

Livio Maitan and the Bitter Fruits of Italian Pabloism

After Trotsky was assassinated by a Stalinist hireling in August 1940, and particularly in the aftermath of the Second World War, in which many leading Trotskyist militants were murdered by the fascists and the Stalinists, the Fourth International leadership fell to less experienced comrades. They began to ignore the fundamental lessons of the Bolshevik Revolution. Ultimately, a liquidationist program was advanced by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, who under the impact of the anti-Soviet Cold War theorized that the Stalinists could be pressured into "roughly outlining" a revolutionary policy. Pablo's conclusion was a policy of "deep entrism," ordering sections of the Fourth International to dissolve their own small organizations into the mass Stalinist Communist Parties. Subsequently, the Pabloites and Mandelites would tail after the Algerian FLN, Castro/Guevaraist guerrillaism in Latin

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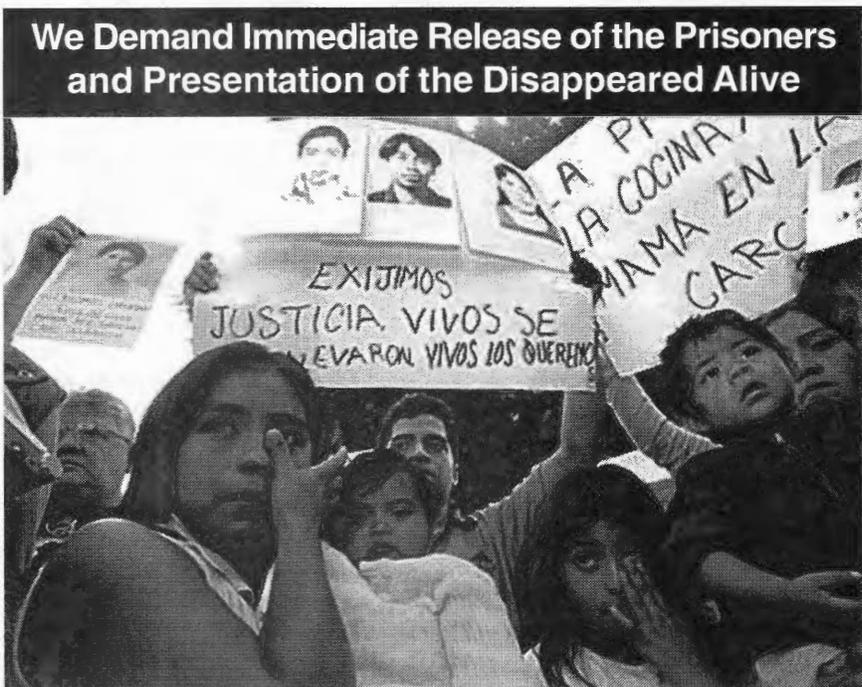
State of Siege in Oaxaca, Arbitrary Arrests in Mexico City Break Calderón's "Firm Hand" With Workers Struggle

The following is a translation of a statement of the Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International, and distributed in Oaxaca, Mexico City, Guadalajara and Tepic, Nayarit.

DECEMBER 8 – The new Mexican government of Felipe Calderón is starting out under the sign of mass repression. Following the brutal crackdown of November 25, when the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) attacked participants in the Seventh Mega-March in Oaxaca, a genuine state of siege has been imposed on the state. Currently the number of those arrested is estimated at 500, of whom some 300 are still behind bars. To those must be added approximately 100 who were jailed in previous weeks, some 60 disappeared and 21 opponents of the bloody Oaxaca governor Ulises Ruiz killed. Now the manhunt has spread to the capital with the arrest Monday night (December 4) of Flavio Sosa Villavicencio, the most prominent spokesman for the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO). Although he had three federal injunctions against arrest, Sosa was yanked out of a taxi in the Colonia Roma neighborhood of Mexico City along with four other APPO members. The next day, the murderers of the American journalist-activist Bradley Will were released.

The aim of Mexico's new head of state and his sinister Interior Minister Francisco Ramírez Acuña is to carry out a "quinazo." They are looking to deliver a fatal blow to the mass strike that has convulsed Oaxaca for more than half a year. The PAN (National Action Party) president wants to repeat the "exploit" of PRI president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, another president who entered Los Pinos [Mexico's White House] amid protests against massive electoral fraud. Salinas began his six-year term by sending the army to arrest the leader of the Mexican Oil Workers Union, Joaquín Hernández Galicia (known as La Quina). He was able to get away with this because of the lack of a powerful response on the part of the workers movement. Today the League for the Fourth International and its Mexican section, the Grupo Internacionalista, are calling for a *national strike against repression* and for *workers actions internationally to demand the immediate release of all those arrested and the presentation of the dozens of disappeared alive.*

Upon taking office on December 1, Calderón stressed his supposed openness to dialogue. "I formally reiterate my invita-



March of relatives of Oaxacan detainees in Nayarit, December 3.

tion to a dialogue of all political forces. For the good of Mexico, this dialogue cannot wait," he said. Despite this formal declaration, two days later the leading spokesman of the APPO was apprehended by the Federal Investigation Agency (AFI) after leaving a press conference where he announced coming talks with the federal government. Nor is it the first time this has happened: on February 28, Flavio's brother Erick Sosa was picked up two hours before scheduled talks with the delegate of the interior ministry (Gobernación) in Oaxaca. If the murderous governor Ulises Ruiz wants a "peace" of the graveyard, the repressive president seeks a "dialogue" behind bars. Imitating the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who in 1902 dispatched Yaqui Indians captured in Sonora to far-off Yucatán, in 2006 the interior ministry, already under the supervision of Ramírez Acuña, has deported 141 Oaxacan prisoners to Nayarit.

Every day that passes the number of arrests climbs; house-to-house searches continue, along with kidnappings in the streets of anyone "suspected" of being an APPO supporter. They want to intimidate the large majority of the Oaxacan population, consisting of indigenous and working people, which has fought to remove Ruiz. They keep piling up the most absurd charges against those arrested, including sedition, kidnapping, robbery, injury, damaging property of others, plunder, etc. The authorities' aim isn't so much to prove that crimes were committed but to keep opposition leaders out of action. That's why they are



Oaxaca teachers staged 48-hour walkout demanding immediate, unconditional freeing of arrested protesters.

carting them off as “highly dangerous” prisoners to federal prisons far from Oaxaca. A witchhunt against teachers’ union leaders of Section 22 of the SNTE/CNTE is underway: at least 90 Oaxacan teachers are presently under arrest. However, the teachers of the Valles Centrales region refuse to be intimidated: they have threatened to go back on strike if they don’t get satisfaction by today, December 8.

Ruiz is trying to create in Oaxaca the conditions of a bonapartist dictatorship, while Calderón, who received the presidential sash from a military officer in a private ceremony, is proposing to govern with a “firm hand.” His new interior minister (who as governor of the state of Jalisco orchestrated the brutal repression in May 2004 of demonstrators against the Iberian-American Summit in Guadalajara) is notorious for his use of torture against “rebels.” His favorite technique seems to be breaking prisoners’ fingers, a practice which several of those arrested on November 25 have suffered. He likes to make mass arrests “so that others can learn.” In the face of the drive toward a police state, it isn’t enough (although it is quite necessary) to undertake a campaign of defense of legal rights; a mobilization of working-class power in a *national strike* is urgently necessary, with powerful national work stoppages by the most directly affected (teachers, university professors) and combative (electrical workers, steel workers) sectors.

Following the bloody action of the PFP in close collaboration with Ruiz Ortiz’ state Ministerial Police, the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) is now trying to coopt and channel (i.e., contain) the struggle in Oaxaca. Now, but not earlier when the strike movement was mounting, the Zapatistas’ “Other Campaign” is calling for actions on December 22 (after its bogus “national work stoppages” on November 20 and December 1, which just happened to be holidays). PRD Congressmen are promoting a bill for “amnesty.” What do the Oaxaca teachers, workers and students who for more than six months heroically resisted all attempts by the bosses, their parties and their government to crush them have to be pardoned for? Nothing! Their real “crime” – which led to the present “ungovernability” of Oaxaca – has been the refusal to bow to the demands of the ruling class.

The response of the Mexican working class to the repressive onslaught must be a crushing display of its own power, infinitely greater than that of the bosses, their state and their parties.

Mexican workers must understand that if the bourgeoisie manages to defeat the struggle of their Oaxacan brothers and sisters, they’re next in line to face brutal capitalist attack. The “reform” of the energy industry has already been prepared. Electrical workers, miners, teachers must beat the murderous privatizing governments to the punch and go on strike *now*. Although Ulises Ruiz and Felipe Calderón have managed to impose themselves, neither one will be able to govern in normal circumstances. The escalating repression is inexorably creating the conditions for a colossal explosion of class struggle. In order to go from defensive struggle and turn it into a revolutionary offensive, what’s needed is above all a revolutionary leadership. The Grupo Internacionalista calls on workers to break with all the bourgeois and bosses’ parties (PRI, PAN, PRD, PT, Convergencia, PVEM and others) and undertake the construction of a workers party that fights for a workers and peasants government and international socialist revolution. *In order to defeat the escalating counterrevolution, it is necessary to take up the banner of permanent revolution.* ■



Felipe Calderón to attorney general Medina Mora (ex-head of the federal police): “So, Eduardo, settle Oaxaca for me in 15 minutes.” Calderón’s predecessor as president, Vicente Fox, had promised to settle the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas in 15 minutes.

For a National Strike Against Repression!

State of Siege in Oaxaca, Preparations in Mexico City

The following is a translation of a leaflet put out by the Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International.

NOVEMBER 30 – As Mexico is preparing to hand over power from President Vicente Fox, of the right-wing clerical National Action Party (PAN), to fellow PAN member Felipe Calderón, the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca is under a state of siege, while in the Federal District (Mexico City) preparations are underway so that the capital will awaken December 1 under a virtual police state. The outgoing president promised to carry out the dirty work of putting an end to the mass strike in Oaxaca before his successor took office. For his part, the “president-elect” – by the vote and grace of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal – promises to bring down “the full weight of the law” against those who oppose his taking office and his takeover of the National Congress. Fox’s six-year term is ending, and Calderón’s begins with the *tanquetas* (armored personnel carriers mounted with water cannon) deployed and the pounding of military boots in the streets. The prospect is for a bleak future, and/or an outbreak of fierce class struggles.

Already on November 20, a kilometers-long metal wall was erected around the Chamber of Deputies, on the basis of rumors of an occupation of the legislative palace by “uncontrolled” groups. This provocation produced rancor among the legislators who were harrassed (by police), and anger among residents of near-by neighborhoods, forced to make long detours on foot. Later, on November 28, deputies of the PAN seized the podium in San Lázaro (the Congress building) in order to head off the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which had promised to prevent the swearing-in of the imposed president Calderón. The PAN maneuver precipitated a brawl in parliament the likes of which has seldom been seen in a bourgeois legislative chamber. At the same time, it



Indymedia

Paramilitary Federal Preventive Police behind electrified barbed wire in Oaxaca.

was revealed that at least 50 members of the Presidential General Staff [the chief of state’s praetorian guard] were already in the building. In the early morning hours today, hundreds of Navy troops began arriving to tighten the ring around the Congress and Auditorio Nacional.

We have warned that this attack represents an act of *class* repression directed against the workers, peasants, Indians and working people of the whole country by a capitalist regime which fears an uprising of the exploited and oppressed. It is the follow-up to the series of massacres against steel workers in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán in April, against peasants and townspeople in Texcoco and San Salvador Atenco, Mexico state in May, and the teachers of Oaxaca in June. Even more, it is revenge for the defeats suffered by the forces of “law and order” at the hands of their victims, who in each of these cases ran off the killers in uniform. Against the bourgeois onslaught, the Grupo Internacionalista has urged that *workers defense committees* be formed, independent of the bourgeois parties and state, and a *national strike* undertaken to counter the repressive wave menacing the entire country.

It is also necessary to combat this attack *politically*. To-

**Down with the PRI, PAN and PRD! Break with the
Popular Front! Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

morrow in the capital, thousands upon thousands of demonstrators will go into the streets to oppose the taking of office by "Fecal" (Felipe Calderón), the reactionary technocrat tied to the sinister Catholic order of Opus Dei (heirs of the Franco regime in Spain) and the *cristeros* of El Yunque.¹ Challenging the "bogus president," the beneficiary of wholesale electoral fraud, many identify with Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his PRD. Widely known by his initials, "AMLO" was designated

the "legitimate president" in September by the National Democratic Convention organized by the PRD, and was sworn in at Mexico City's Zócalo (Constitution Plaza, the main square in the capital) on November 20, the anniversary of the Mexican Revolution which the present group in power rejects. However, despite the "progressive" airs they give themselves, AMLO is a bourgeois politician and the PRD is a bosses' party.

The Grupo Internacionalista calls to *break the popular front* which chains large sectors of the working people to the PRD and its standard-bearer, López Obrador. It is this class-collaborationist alliance that has stood in the way of extending the Oaxacan teachers strike to the rest of the country. It also blocked workers action over the police attack against Atenco and the assault on the SICARTSA steel plant. And not by accident. In each case, PRD legislators and officials were jointly responsible for unleashing the repression itself (Governor Lázaro Cárdenas Batel in Michoacán, the mayor of Texcoco Nazario Gutiérrez and the PRD fraction in the Oaxacan legislative assembly). Against the attacks by the bosses' parties, it is urgently necessary to forge the nucleus of a *revolutionary workers party* which fights for a *workers and peasants government* to expropriate the bourgeoisie and launch the international socialist revolution.

Night and Fog Operations in Besieged Oaxaca

Five days ago in Oaxaca, a peaceful march of tens of thousands of opponents of the bloody governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and his Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was brutally repressed by the militarized Federal Preventive Police

¹ The cristero revolt of 1926-29, so-called for its battle cry of "Christ the King," was a war of Catholic reaction against secular education and anti-clerical government measures following the 1910-17 Mexican Revolution. El Yunque is an ultra-rightist secret society based in Guadalajara, Jalisco, which was a center of the cristero revolt. It includes many PAN leaders.



José Carlo González/La Jornada

Donneybrook in San Lázaro Legislative Palace. PAN deputies seize podium in Chamber of Deputies supposedly to block PRD, provoking free-for-all.

(PFP) and PRI paramilitaries. It was the seventh "megamarch" against the murderer-governor since the beginning of the teachers strike at the end of May (see "Mexico: Oaxaca Teachers Repel Bloody Cop Assault," *The Internationalist* No. 24, Summer 2006). On this occasion, the demonstrators added the demand "URO [Ulises Ruiz Ortiz] and PFP Out of Oaxaca!" When demonstrators arrived at the historic center of the city, they began setting up new barricades around the PFP, entrenched in Oaxaca's Zócalo behind electrified barbed wire. Suddenly police sharpshooters on the rooftops began firing off hundreds if not thousands of tear gas canisters. Soon dozens of automobiles were set on fire along with several offices of the state government. Combing the streets in search of anyone suspected of being a sympathizer of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), the police arrested more than 140 people in the long night of November 25 (see "Oaxaca, November 25: The Night of the Hyenas," page 20).

In the following days, the PFP and Oaxaca state Ministerial Police have carried out house searches, checked identity documents of passengers on public transport and kidnapped defenseless pedestrians in the streets. "Dozens of convoys of ministerial police prowl the city, each composed of five pick-up trucks with 8 police with assault rifles in firing position," reports an APPO bulletin. "We have run out of tolerance," says the commander of the PFP. Police say they have arrest warrants for 300 people, and intend to arrest the entire State Council of the APPO. In a display of police lunacy, the PFP talks of "at least 100 people of Cuban, French and Venezuelan origin, who 'have financed and advised' the 'radical groups'" (*La Jornada*, 29 November). To prevent mobilizations demanding the freeing of those jailed, the authorities transferred 141 prisoners to a federal prison in the state of Nayarit. None of the arrested have been able to talk with relatives or lawyers. When representatives of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), a government outfit, were

able to examine 17 of the inmates, “they said that all had been severely beaten” (*La Jornada*, 30 November).

As of yesterday, according to the Oaxaca daily *Noticias* (30 November), the number of those arrested is estimated at 250, of whom 90 are teachers of Section 22, SNTE-CNTE, whose six-month strike resisted the whole gamut of repression and threats by the PRI state government. Others of the arrested include 13 from Oaxaca’s “Benito Juárez” Autonomous University (UABJO), six from the Oaxaca Institute of Technology, and one from the Secretariat of Health. In addition, a human rights investigator linked to the United Nations was seized, and at least 39 disappeared have been reported (including 13 women). The general secretary of the Union of Workers and Employees of UABJO, Rosendo Ramírez Sánchez, declared that “in Oaxaca individual rights have been canceled.” He roundly denounced a “military occupation in gray uniform. We are living under a state of siege, with state terrorism.” Students at the School of Medicine reported three people killed, whose bodies were dragged off by the repressive forces. As they were announcing this in an outdoor press conference, they were fired on by cops from a pick-up truck passing by at high speed.

The pirate radio state of the PRI death squads, “Citizens Radio,” called to burn down the offices of the Oaxaca New Left (NIOAX), headed by Flavio Sosa, one of the most prominent spokesmen of the APPO; only a few hours later, the building was torched. The federal government pretended to be open to dialogue, but three hours before the scheduled start of talks, state police arrested Erik Sosa, Flavio’s brother and himself a member of the Assembly’s statewide council. Yesterday in the pre-dawn hours, the various police bodies (federal, state and municipal) launched an operation to dismantle the last barricade, located at the Cinco Señores intersection, site of the victory of thousands of APPO supporters over the PFP hordes on November 2 (see “The Battle of Oaxaca University,” page 23). Later in the day, some 200 federal police crowded the entrance to the University, where Radio APPO has been transmitting over the antenna of Radio Universidad. After three days of massive raids, the population didn’t dare to come out in defense, and the defenders decided to turn over the station to university authorities. Bertha Muñoz, *La Doctora*, the calm and tireless announcer of Radio APPO, along with APPO leaders who had been holed up in the Church of the Virgin of the Poor managed to slip out surreptitiously without being arrested.

Today, despite the massive repression aimed at terrorizing the population, thousands of teachers of Section 22 staged a 48-hour work stoppage, demanding an end to arbitrary arrests, immediate freeing of the arrested and the presentation of the disappeared alive. Two weeks after returning to classes, they threatened to go back on statewide strike. The response of “URO” and his thugs didn’t take long in coming. Ministerial police broke into classrooms of schools that hadn’t yet shut down and violently arrested dozens of teachers in the municipalities of the Central Valleys region. “They dragged out primary, secondary and kindergarten teachers at gunpoint in front of their students,” according to an APPO bulletin.

Tomorrow, the teachers, once more on strike, and the APPO have announced a march to protest against the swearing-in of Felipe Calderón. Several of the APPO and Section 22 leaders are PRDers (among them Flavio Sosa, a national councilor of the PRD, and Enrique Rueda Pacheco), and it is evident that, as they did with their call for a “punishment vote” against the PAN and the PRI (and therefore implicitly for the PRD) in the July 2 presidential vote, they are again seeking to attach their struggle, if only “tactically,” to a mobilization on behalf of López Obrador.

Forge a Proletarian and Revolutionary Leadership!

Until now, the struggle in Oaxaca has been wholly waged under the watchword of democracy. However, as we have repeatedly emphasized (see “Oaxaca Is Burning,” page 21, and other articles of the 10 November supplement to *The Internationalist*), underlying the turbulent mass strike in Oaxaca is the class war. In order to win this battle, a proletarian leadership is required which breaks with all the bourgeois parties on a genuine class program and mobilizes the tremendous power of the working class nationally against the capitalist state. The present leaders of the Oaxacan teachers and their APPO allies, in contrast, have restricted their demands to the confines of the state and have sought the support of bourgeois forces. Thus they call for the removal of the PRI governor by senators of the PAN and PRD. Despite the support of the church hierarchy for sending in the PFP (which they themselves initially accepted), APPO spokesmen have called for the intervention of arch-reactionary anti-Communist pope Benedict XVI. Now they are appealing to the United Nations, that den of imperialist thieves and their flunkies that authorized, after the fact, the U.S. occupation of Iraq.

These calls are made in the name of “human rights,” the myth used by supposedly democratic imperialists in order to subjugate troublesome regimes. The human rights crusade was one of the battle cries of their anti-Soviet Cold War, and the Yankee imperialists even pretend to be defending the rights of women in Afghanistan. The reality, as affirmed in the German version of the revolutionary proletarian anthem, is that “the International will win human rights,” *through socialist revolution*.

Tomorrow the candidate of the Neanderthal right, Felipe Calderón, backed by imperialist companies like Wal-Mart and Pepsi-Cola, will succeed the former Coca-Cola executive Vicente Fox. He will have the parliamentary support of the PRI, bought for the price of keeping Ulises Ruiz in office in Oaxaca. The “PRIAN” (PRI + PAN) government cannot be fought by joining with the PRD, a bourgeois party whose very reason for existence is to maintain capitalist rule by extinguishing workers’ struggles. It is necessary to forge a workers party – revolutionary and internationalist, Leninist and Trotskyist – which fights for the taking of power by the proletariat, supported by the peasantry, the indigenous peoples and all the oppressed.

The “democratic” program has led to a dead-end, because

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AFP

November 25 in Oaxaca: PFP claimed to be reestablishing “tranquility.” Instead they have imposed state of siege, brutally beating and randomly arresting people to terrorize the population.

Oaxaca, November 25

The Night of the Hyenas

By Abram Negrete

Saturday, November 25, began with the seventh “megamarcha” through the streets of the city of Oaxaca, many thousands of people (50,000?) with obvious mass support from the populace lining the streets and repeatedly applauding the demonstrators. Some activists believed it would have been even bigger were it not for the “disappearance” the previous night (by the cops) of two key leaders of the movement, which discouraged some people from going. There were also roadblocks on the main highways leading into town and buses from the key Valles Centrales region were reportedly shut down, preventing many APPO supporters from joining in.

Among those participating in the march were teachers from Oaxaca city, the Costa Chica and many other areas. Some spoke to each other in Zapotec and other indigenous languages. There was a large contingent of health workers, who at one point chanted that if Ulises Ruiz was dying, they would give up the Hippocratic oath [to do everything to aid the sick] and let him die. A large number of community organizations and student groups had banners and signs. The PCM (M-L) had a large contingent with many red flags. Many young people were part of the march, but there were also many grandmothers and grandfathers. The crowd was mark-

edly plebeian in its composition, but there were quite a few professionals and middle-class people as well.

A popular singer, who writes protest songs about the police attacks and other subjects, had a special CD of songs dedicated to Brad Will. A group of five indigenous women teachers from the town of Ocotlán asked me to send their personal greetings to the family of Brad Will, whom they knew. They said he was “always with us in our mobilizations.” They were very happy to hear that Brad’s sisters supported their struggle.

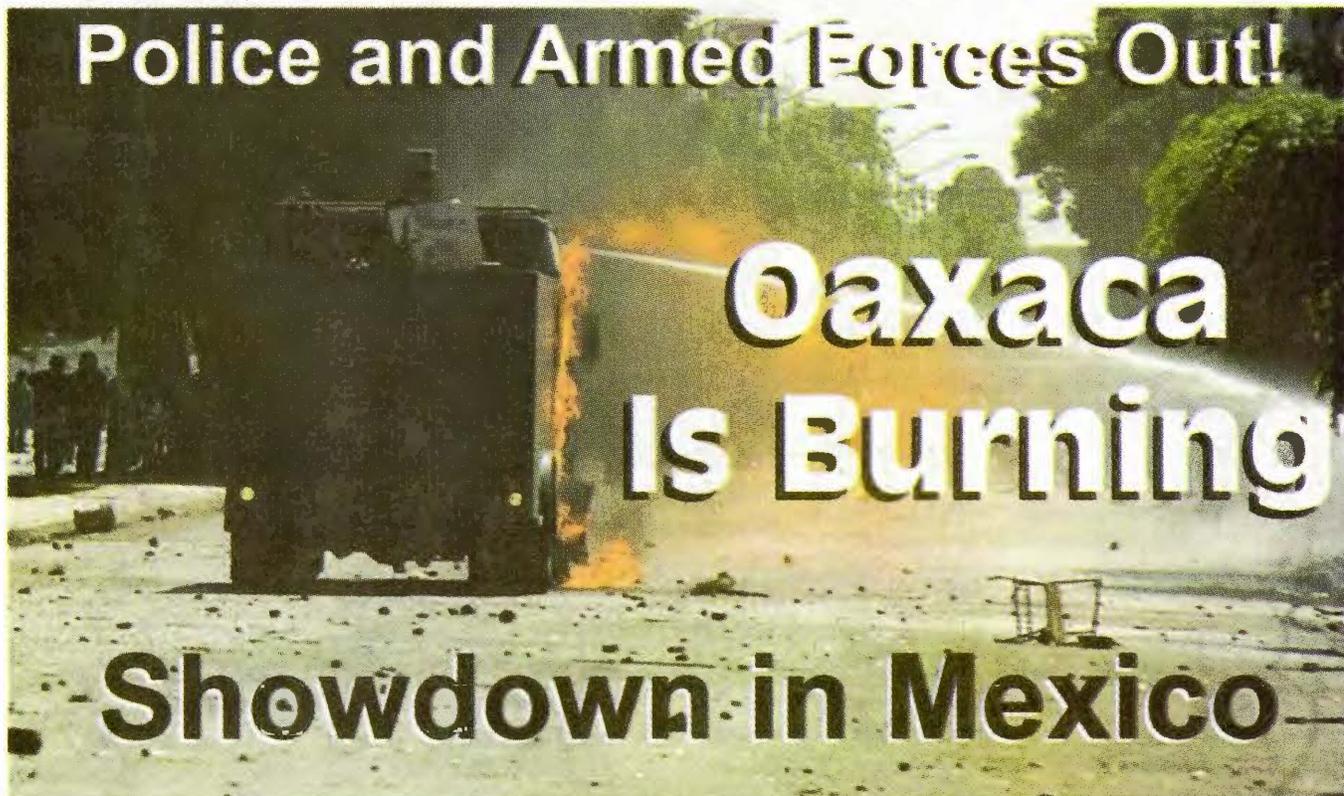
Very interesting was the morale of young people from the barricades, especially the Barricada de Cinco Señores (an intersection), which was key in defeating the Federal Preventive Police (PFP) attack on the Oaxaca University at the beginning of the month. A young man who worked at a hotel mentioned that “people from many surrounding villages, little kids, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, came rushing into town in response to the call to defend the University [on November 2]” and were key to defeating that police attack.

After this Saturday’s demonstration reached the city center, things got “tense” but then turned into the worst situation in Oaxaca since the beginning of the mass protests seven months ago. As we walked down a street near the bus station, I looked

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For a National Strike To Demand

Police and Armed Forces Out!



Tomás Martínez/Reforma

“Cobra” armored personnel carrier with water cannon burned by defenders of Oaxaca University, November 2.

**Down with the PRI, PAN and PRD! Break with López Obrador
And His Popular Front! Form Workers Defense Committees!**

The following is translated from a supplement to El Internacionalista, published by the Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International.

NOVEMBER 10 – One hundred and seventy days after it began, the militant strike and mass rebellion which has convulsed the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, and is now shaking the entire country, has entered its decisive phase. The violent invasion of the state by federal police (PFP) and the armed forces unleashed a wave of opposition throughout the country and is reverberating internationally. It is clear to everyone that the military deployment has not had, at all, the intended effect of intimidating the population. The Oaxacan strikers are heroically resisting the assault by the federal government with the same tenacity that they have demonstrated during more than five months of battling the bloody and hated governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. From the very moment that they arrived in the state, the federal forces have been faced with resistance by battle-

hardened social activists who do not surrender.

In a pitched battle that lasted seven hours around the Autonomous University of Oaxaca named for Benito Juárez (UABJO) on November 2, a powerful blow was struck against the PFP and the army personnel disguised as police (see “The Battle of Oaxaca University,” page 13). To the defeat suffered by an army of several thousand state police in their failed attempt to evict the massive teachers encampment last June 14 has now been added the undeniable defeat of the federal police. Their humiliating flight has had a stunning effect in demoralizing the troops, many of whom are of Indian origin just like those they are repressing. But for the workers and oppressed of the entire country, the militant mobilization of the Oaxacan masses against the attempt to shut down Radio University, and thereby silence the voice and organizer of the resistance, has had an electrifying effect.

On Sunday, November 5, Oaxaca’s sixth “mega-march”

**Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!
Fight for a Workers and Peasants Government!**

was held, bringing out tens of thousands of participants. Demonstrators took several hours to cover the eight-mile route. At the head of the march were relatives of the murdered, disappeared and political prisoners, followed by thousands of teachers from the Central Valleys region of the teachers union, Section 22 of the SNTE-CNTE. They had decided that, contrary to the back-to-work agreement between the Ministry of the Interior (Gobernación) and Section 22 leader Enrique Rudea Pacheco, they would “keep up the fight” until Ruiz Ortiz falls and the PFP leaves. “With Rueda or without Rueda, Ulises is out of here!” they chanted. In the face of repression, the resistance is spreading. For the first time Sunday, communities from the Sierra de Juárez in the northern part of the state were present in the march. But while the strikers celebrate – with good reason – their temporary victory while staying on maximum alert, the repressive forces are preparing a bloody response.

The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) has called for going over to a general offensive. Without a doubt, this is the time to really give it to the governments of the murderous governor Ruiz Ortiz and the heinous president Vicente Fox Quesada. But what will it take to win? The Oaxacan insurgents have already demonstrated incomparable courage and determination. They must not stand alone! In this struggle, the outcome doesn’t depend solely on the working masses of this besieged state, one of the poorest in Mexico. A nationwide mobilization of the working class is urgently needed, along with action internationally demanding: *PFP and armed forces, get out of Oaxaca!* Teachers throughout the country should strike *now*. The encampments and barricades of the Oaxaca teachers and their allies should be buttressed by the strength of the electrical workers of the SME, telephone workers of the STRM, Cananea miners, oil workers, university workers and workers of the *maquiladoras* (free trade zone factories). For more than five months, the Grupo Internacionalista has been calling for a *national strike against the murderous government*. Today it is more urgent than ever to turn this call into reality.

It is also necessary to underscore the importance of *international* struggle against repression in Mexico. For months, the struggle in Oaxaca went practically unnoticed outside the country. However, the murder of a U.S. journalist of the left-wing alternative press, Brad Will, on October 27, sent shock waves around the world. There have been angry protests in dozens of countries and more than 50 cities in the United States. The U.S. ambassador, Tony Garza, who fancies himself a pro-consul of the empire, gave the order for repression: the death of Will “highlights the need to return to the rule of law and order in Oaxaca,” he decreed. President Fox, who up until then had vacillated, immediately dispatched the PFP. Protesting on October 30 outside the Mexican consulate in New York, friends of the murdered activist carried a banner saying, “No State Violence in Brad’s Name – Government Forces Out of Oaxaca.” There were 12 arrests that day, and the protests continue. Our



Arnulfo Moro/Quadrain.com

Striking workers drove out federal, state and local police at Sicartsa steel mill, Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán, April 20.

comrades of the Internationalist Group organized several pickets in New York against the repression in Oaxaca. Their signs declared, “Tlaltelolco ’68, Oaxaca, 2006: Massacres in Mexico, Made in U.S.A.” And in their chants they recalled the Oaxacan teacher murdered the same day: “Emilio Alonso, Brad Will – The struggle continues!”

As always, this class battle must be fought politically. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of Governor Ruiz and President Fox’s National Action Party (PAN) are widely hated for their repressive actions in Oaxaca. Now the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and its standard-bearer, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (widely known by his initials, AMLO) are attempting to coopt the Oaxacan struggle. They are trying to connect it to the massive protests “in defense of the vote” following the July 2 elections and the upcoming November 20 inauguration of AMLO as the “legitimate president” of an “itinerant government.” We warn that just like the PAN and the PRI, the PRD – a bourgeois nationalist-populist party – is not an ally but a class enemy of the teachers, workers and Indians of Oaxaca and the rest of the country. In each of the recent massacres (Sicartsa steel workers in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán in April; peasants and townspeople in San Salvador Atenco, near Mexico City, in May; teachers in Oaxaca in June), PRD authorities and legislators have fully joined in the repression. Thus in order to fight the capitalist onslaught, it is necessary to fight to *form the nucleus of a revolutionary workers party*.

From Popular Rebellion to Workers Revolution: Break with the Popular Front!

Left groups who talk today about a Oaxaca Commune (see page 36) claim that there is virtually a revolutionary situation in the state, if not in the country as a whole. A case in point is the Militante group, which calls itself the “Marxist

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It's Not Over 'til It's Over

The Battle of Oaxaca University

Tomás Martínez/Reforma



Federal police flee from their tanqueta (armored personnel carrier) torched by militant defenders of Oaxaca University, November 2.

NOVEMBER 10 – For more than five months, Vicente Fox bet on wearing down the movement in Oaxaca, but without success. Now repression by intimidation has also backfired. A few short weeks before the December 1 inauguration of the PAN (National Action Party) candidate Felipe Calderón, declared “president elect” by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, and under the international impact of the assassination of U.S. journalist-activist Brad Will, time is running out for the government of Vicente Fox. Despite the earlier declaration by his secretary of the interior (Gobernación), the clerical-reactionary Carlos Abascal, that “in the name of god, we will not carry out any repression,” the government has dispatched thousands of assault troops to Oaxaca.

The president who began his six-year term saying he would resolve the conflict in Chiapas (with the Zapatista National Liberation Army, EZLN) “in 15 minutes,” now pretends in his imaginary fairy-tale country, Foxilandia, that his occupation of Oaxaca has reestablished “order, peace and tranquility.” Oaxacans, who shout in fury while mourning the latest of their 17 dead, know well that the supposed “saldo blanco” (zero casualties) reported by the government is a lie. The body of Jorge Alberto Beltrán, a nurse in the Mexican

Institute of Social Security, killed by the impact of a gas grenade, is there to prove it.

From the moment they entered Oaxaca city at midday on October 29, the troops of the Preventive Federal Police (PFP) – many of whom are from the army’s Third Brigade of Military Police, masquerading as “Federal Support Forces” – have been confronted and surrounded by the working people of the city. Whole families came out to the highway with signs declaring, “*Oaxaca no es cuartel, fuera ejército de él*” (Oaxaca is not a barracks, Army get out). Housewives confronted police outfitted as *robocops* with their gas masks, asking them why they repress the people. When a bus full of PFP cops stopped, neighbors punctured the tires, obliging the police to get off the bus, and later forcing them to retreat.

When the “Cobra” armored personnel carriers known as *tanquetas* went into action, shooting out a high-pressure stream of water mixed with a chemical irritant in order to disperse crowds, residents retreated a few paces, but then went back into the street. It is interesting how this weapon, conceived of as a means of marking participants in “riots” with indelible ink for later identification, is rendered useless when used against an entire population in revolt. After a seesaw



The provocation that set off the battle for Oaxaca University: on the Day of the Dead (November 2), federal police sent a tractor to remove floral offerings to those who died in the struggle.

confrontation lasting for several hours, the troops managed to take control of the city's central square, the Zócalo.

The next day, some 10,000 Oaxacans marched through the streets of their capital occupied by the thugs in gray uniforms, defying the *tanquetas* mounted with water cannon and refusing to be intimidated by the noise of police riot clubs banging against their shields. Spokesmen for the federal Secretariat of Public Security claimed to have dismantled "more than 50" barricades out of the over 3,000 in the city. So now the encampment of the striking teachers has been replaced by a military camp, surrounded by barbed wire.

Referring to the "recovery" of the central plaza by the paramilitary police, a man told W Radio: "They managed to install themselves in the Zócalo. Let's see how they get out." Indeed, the supporters of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), after pulling back step by step as the police troops advanced, have raised new barricades around the PFP, which is now trapped in the center of the city. Businessmen in the historical center are complaining that the military looted their shops, after there was not a single robbery during six months of the strikers' *plantón* (encampment). The APPO encampment was reestablished in the courtyard in front of the Santo Domingo church.

In the face of the fierce resistance by the Oaxacan teachers and their allies, a series of cracks have opened up in the until-now solid wall of state power protecting the blood-soaked governor. The federal government stubbornly refused to declare a "disappearance of power" due to the evident "ungovernability" of the state. Moreover, Fox wanted to keep Governor Ulises Ruiz in place in order to seal an alliance with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to assure its support for the anti-working-class economic "reforms" the PAN has prepared. The PRI, for its part, has declared its irrevocable decision to protect one of their governors, who represent the last redoubt of state power for the former government party that ruled the country for 70 years with its "perfect dictatorship."

In many ways, the virulence of the rebellion in Oaxaca is

due to the fact that the old PRI regime, with its system of corporatist control, while tottering, still rules the state while it has unraveled at the federal level and in much of the country. Now, however, keeping Ruiz in power could become a danger for "national security." On the night of October 30, as soon as it became clear the Oaxacan population was resisting the police invasion, the Senate unanimously voted (with the support of the PRI caucus) an exhortation to the governor to step down. As usual, "URO" refused and ordered his *pistoleros* into the street to stage new provocations.

Then came the confrontation of November 2, the Day of the Dead. While in the rest of the country the population went to the cemeteries to remember their deceased relatives, in Oaxaca in the early morning hours the PFP chiefs brought in a tractor to remove the floral offer-

ings honoring the those who had died in the struggle, which had been placed at a barricade near the Autonomous University of Oaxaca "Benito Juárez" (UABJO). The obvious purpose was to "clean out" the last bastion of the APPO and to shut down Radio Universidad, now the only communications media still controlled by the strikers to inform and alert people as to where to go and how to respond to the attacks.

Although police commanders promised not to attack the university, they soon lobbed tear gas into the campus and sent troops to chase after youth who threw rocks and launched rockets in response. Several PRI provocateurs and cops in civil clothes were heaving objects at the police; when they were arrested, they yelled "we're on your side," and soon after they were released. Dozens of students and local residents, on the other hand, after being captured were sent to a military concentration camp outside the city.

When the urgent appeal of the APPO was broadcast calling on people to come to the University under attack, the response of the population was overwhelming. Videos now available on the Internet show women courageously marching up to the police, trying to take away their riot clubs and shields; legions of housewives with buckets of vinegar and Coca-Cola to revive those overcome by the clouds of tear gas; paving stones and rocks being broken up to provide "munitions" to heave at the PFP; either with slingshots or by hand; and cops (when their supplies of gas ran out) throwing rocks back.

If up until now the resistance had been peaceful, that has changed. Large quantities of "Molotov cocktails" were thrown, transported to the front in supermarket carts. Some of the *tanquetas* caught fire, producing several wounded among the uniformed aggressors. Gas tanks and home-made bazookas were also used. One of them almost hit a helicopter, perhaps the one in which General Héctor Suárez Gutiérrez and chief of the PFP high command Ardelio Vargas were overseeing the field of battle. But the fundamental element was the arrival of thousands of defenders who little by little surrounded the troops.

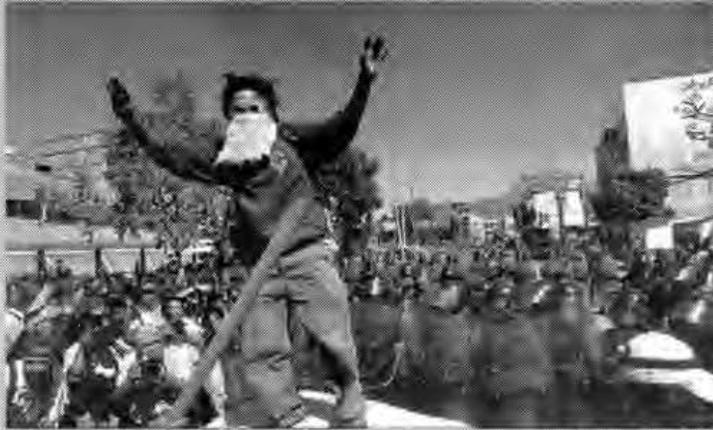
I'm Curious, Mr. Minister, What Are You Laughing About?

Excerpts from a poem by Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti, which was recited by a student during the battle against the federal police attacking the University of Oaxaca, November 2.

From your window
you see the beach,
but you ignore
the slums

Your children
have eyes that
command
but others have
a saddened look

Here in the streets
things happen
that you can't
even talk about



Tomás Martínez/Reforma

Students and
workers are
dotting the i's
and crossing the t's

That's why I say,
Mr. Minister

what are you laughing about
what are you laughing about...

Here in the street
your cops kill
and those who die
are poor people

And those who are
left
crying in rage
are certainly thinking
about
settling the score

Over there in the jail
cells
your men make
the man suffer
and that doesn't work

After all
you are the main
mast
of a ship
that is sinking

So I'm curious
Mr. Minister
of what you're
laughing about

It was a "riot" in a very Mexican style. *La Jornada* (3 November) reported that the combat "gave way to a respite: a student clambered onto the still-smoking remains of an automobile to recite from [Uruguayan writer Mario] Benedetti. No one moved as his voice confronted the police with the poem titled, 'What Are You Laughing About?'" (see accompanying box). The student appealed to those in uniform, saying that he understood that "the condition of the country made them choose between leaving their fatherland or joining this force due to the lack of opportunity," but that "they should be on this side because they are the same as us. Look at their complexion, their hands, they're the same color as us. They are also Huicholes, Mixes, Tarahumaras." The journalist's account ends: "The silence lasted until he got down off the wreck and was seen off with applause."

Appealing to the police invaders not to repress can be a correct tactic under certain circumstances, and suicidal in others. It is a dangerous illusion to think that the police "are also part of the people," as even some groups claiming to be socialist have said. At that moment, it was clear that the cops were under orders not to use their arms; tomorrow it could be different. In contrast to the bulk of the army consisting of conscripted soldiers, the PFP and military shock troops like the military police and the Special Operations Group are not simple "sons of the people" or workers and peasants in uniform. The police and special corps are professional repres-

sive forces, sworn enemies of the workers. They are the armed fist of the capitalist state, which rests, in Friedrich Engels' famous phrase, on special bodies of armed men whose function is to protect the interests of the ruling class.

After several hours of combat (which Mexico City dailies tried to minimize as a "scuffle"), the defenders managed to immobilize one of the Cobra *tanquetas*, then set it on fire with a rocket, forcing the crew to flee from their flaming vehicle. Watching the spectacle with concern, "a retired general of the Mexican Army sent a cellphone text message saying, 'If they stay on in Oaxaca, the condition of the anti-riot vehicles is such that they are going to require (in fact, they already require) maintenance in order to be ready for December 1'" (*Milenio*, 3 November). Minutes after the incident with the *tanqueta*, when their tear gas ran out and the police saw that they were surrounded on each of the five streets leading into the crossroads, the order to retreat was given.

The PFP troops pulled back to the Zócalo or to their improvised military camp in "Love Park" (!) on the outskirts of town. A few hours later, the head of the Secretariat of Public Security, Eduardo Medina Mora, arrived in Oaxaca and gave a press conference in a luxury hotel, insisting that "it wasn't a failure, it was a tactical retreat." *Milenio* observed: "A waiter at the hotel, who upon leaving work put up a barricade in his neighborhood, smiled as he discretely overheard the justifications being offered by the federal official."



Notimex

Military forces returned demoralized to their camps in the Zócalo and "Love Park" after losing battle of University of Oaxaca, November 2.

"PFP Run Off"

Not even the bought-off press could hide the failure of the forces of "law and order." Even as they called the striking teachers and their supporters in the APPO "delinquents," "subversives" and "pseudo-students" comprising a "mob," as well as any other insult that came to mind, they had to report in an alarmed tone that the defenders of the APPO had won the battle for the University of Oaxaca against the federal police. "PFP Run Off," headlined *El Gráfico*. "APPO Repels the Police in the Universtiy," declared *Milenio*. "PFP Forced to Retreat," reported *Reforma* in its front-page article.

The pro-PAN newspaper published a series of accounts which, from several angles of the confrontation, provide an x-ray of what it called "the debacle." They describe how the chief of the sanitation squad with the tractor at the beginning of the clash tried to get his crew to support the PFP. "But they were overtaken. They had to climb into their vans and flee." The *Reforma* article goes on:

"The screaming didn't stop. The PFP had stirred up a hornet's nest. People were coming from all sides. And they were all throwing rocks. From 500 their numbers soon swelled to 1,000, then more and more. They came from various corners, furious.

"The group of *federales* who had held out against the objects thrown at them from in front were hit by two Molotov bombs. On the other side they were jumping with joy. The troops, with military vests, were screaming for help – every minute was an eternity for the men in uniform.

"On the other side, they were fierce. Every stone was wrapped in anger.

"It was 12:15 p.m. when the first *tanquetas* went into action. It gave the troops a respite. Their supplies of gas were also replenished....

"But then the noise of rockets began. The alarm was sounded. People were coming down from all the surrounding neighborhoods. The women with buckets full of vinegar and rags. The men with pipes, sticks and rocks. And the best of



Tomás Martínez/Reforma

Young defenders of Oaxaca University celebrate victory over the militarized police in PFP uniforms.

their arsenal: metal tubes from which they launched rockets at the group of *federales*....

"The gas canisters shot by the police, from a helicopter and the ground, were thrown back by the furious people.

"This provoked a wave of tears, some gasping for air, seeming to find consolation on the shoulders of their comrades after losing their equipment under the hail of rocks.

"Day 166, the fifth day for the PFP in Oaxaca. Without a doubt their worst day. The operation was brought to a halt by rocks, like the Palestinians' *intifada*."

Of course, the Israeli army has responded to the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) by unleashing a bloodbath. For their part, the Mexican military commanders, authors of the 1968 massacre, even if they don't have the colonial mentality of the Zionist occupation army, are no less bloody.

But this time, "they failed," *Reforma* concludes definitively. Of the "appos," the paper says: "The youths didn't realize that they had already won and they chased after the police for almost a kilometer, lobbing rocks and insults." And of the "pefepos": "They returned with their spirits down, and scattered around the Zócalo exhausted. They were defeated police." ■

Oaxaca Is Burning...

continued from page 22

tendency" ... of the *bourgeois* PRD! The main leader of this tendency, Alan Woods, wrote an extensive article on "The Revolutionary Awakening of Mexico" (8 September) in which he refers to "the Popular Assemblies, which are soviets in all but name," while saying that at the national level "elements of dual power are already coming into existence." He claims that all the aspects of a revolutionary situation exist in Mexico today except for a revolutionary party. Woods and his International Marxist Tendency are constantly writing breathless accounts of this sort, having discovered revolutions underway in Venezuela (where they are advising the bourgeois military president Hugo Chávez on Trotskyism!) and Bolivia (where a workers uprising in June 2005 led to the election of the bourgeois populist president Evo Morales). Such claims show, on the one hand, that their authors live in an imaginary dream world, having lost confidence in the revolutionary capacity of the actual proletariat; and, on the other hand, they have redefined (i.e., revised) the revolutionary goals in order to make them consistent with the perspective of a "democratic" (bourgeois) revolution.

Even if there were a fully revolutionary situation or a Oaxaca "Commune," the program put forward by these gentlemen would not be what a genuine Trotskyist party fights for. "All Power to the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca!" proclaims Militante stridently. "For a provisional government of the APPO and the worker, peasant and popular organizations in struggle," says the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (Socialist Workers League). Elsewhere, the latter organization calls for a "workers and people's government of the APPO." Rather than fighting for an organization of the working masses that could set the framework for a *workers* revolution, they look to the current leadership body. It's not the first time. In Bolivia last year, these same groups hailed the "National and Indigenous People's Assembly" (APNO), claiming that this was the equivalent of or "embryo" of *soviets* in the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions. The League for the Fourth International, in contrast, called for the formation of real workers and peasants councils (*soviets*) while showing that the "APNO" was stillborn and nothing more than a leadership cartel of opportunists. The latter put on revolutionary airs in order to hide their own betrayals: at the height of the uprising, APNO leaders made way for a new bourgeois government instead of fighting for workers power (see "Myth and Reality: El Alto and the 'People's Assembly'," *The Internationalist* No. 21, Summer 2005).

In Mexico today, the LTS calls for the APPO "to transform



El Universal

Leaders of the struggle in Oaxaca: Enrique Rueda Pacheco, head of the teachers union, Section 22, SNTE-CNTE, above, and Flavio Sosa, spokesman for the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), when both met with interior minister Carlos Abascal, October 5. Pacheco and Sosa are both members of the bourgeois populist PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) and made common cause with PRD presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). Grupo Internacionalista called to break with popular front around AMLO and PRD and build revolutionary workers party. After negotiating with Sosa for months, federal government threw him in prison as "highly dangerous criminal." We demand immediate release of Sosa and all Oaxacan detainees.



El Universal

itself into an organ based on delegates elected in the districts, neighborhoods and workplaces." Militante/IMT calls for "broad-based, democratic organs of revolutionary struggle, which the day after the victory of the insurrection can be transformed into organs of direct revolutionary democracy" (Woods, 8 September). But even if they were "democratic organs of revolutionary struggle" or if "tendencies for self-organization" of the masses are developing, this would not give the APPO a *proletarian*

class character. All of history shows that the organizations of impoverished peasants and Indians, however democratic, in the absence of workers councils based in the big industrial centers, cannot lead a revolution. The peasantry (a contradictory petty-bourgeois layer) and indigenous peoples (an ethnic category) do not have the social power and coherent class interest characteristic of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Like other intermediate strata, they tend to follow one or the other of the fundamental classes. Certainly, many of the present components of the APPO could be part of workers and peasants councils on a national scale, but these would not be a simple extension of the present Oaxacan organization.

The LTS calls for the APPO to “open the way to a genuine insurrection of the exploited and oppressed and the establishment of a real workers and people’s power in Oaxaca.” To attempt an insurrection in the single state of Oaxaca would be a reformist adventure condemned to failure; in order to take power out of the hands of the bourgeoisie and establish proletarian rule a struggle must be waged nationally. A genuine – and not imaginary – Oaxaca Commune could not last in isolation. Only on a national level can a social revolution be begun, with a workers and peasants government that expropriates the bourgeoisie and extends the revolution internationally, above all to the United States. Elsewhere, the LTS calls on various “independent” union organizations like the National Union of Workers (UNT), the Mexican Electrical Workers (SME) and the National Coordinating Committee of Educational Workers (CNTE), along with the Zapatistas’ “Other Campaign,” to “call a national work stoppage in solidarity and a huge mobilization in the Federal District [Mexico City]” (*Estrategia Obrera*, 21 October). This is nothing more than the “civic work stoppage” that the APPO, the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) and some pro-PRD unions have called for – that is, a *bourgeois* mobilization that is qualitatively different from the national *workers* strike that the Grupo Internacionalista advocates.

What’s key for Oaxacan teachers and their allies in opening the way toward a revolutionary uprising of workers, peasants and all the exploited and oppressed against the bourgeoisie is to fight for *proletarian independence from all the bourgeois parties and politicians*. One has to ask oneself, how is it possible that the teachers strike and popular rebellion in Oaxaca have not had an impact nationally? Where are the workers’ solidarity strikes, the marches of hundreds of thousands in Mexico City to support the struggle in Oaxaca? They haven’t happened. And not by chance: this is the direct result of the role played by the “popular front” around López Obrador’s PRD. Seeing as AMLO was able to call repeated mobilizations of up to 2 million people in Mexico City’s Zócalo; and since the PRD was able to paralyze the streets and avenues in the heart of the capital city from the beginning of August to mid-September, it is obvious that they could have massively mobilized their supporters on behalf of the Oaxaca teachers. Obviously they didn’t do so because the PRD is a bourgeois party, which defends the interests of capital against the working people. It doesn’t want to get mixed up in a **struggle that could get out of hand for the**

ruling class. And the so-called “independent” unions are tied to a sector of the bourgeoisie via the AMLO popular front around the PRD.

Throughout this time, it has also been noteworthy that the Zapatistas have not lifted a finger for the Oaxaca teachers. While López Obrador was off campaigning for the PRD candidate for governor of Tabasco, Subcomandante Marcos continued his tour of the “Other Campaign” in the northern states. The same day that it was announced that Fox would decide whether or not to send federal forces to Oaxaca, Marcos, now known as Delegado Zero, said that he was limiting himself to “seeing and learning” from the struggle in Oaxaca, but “our support doesn’t go beyond that.” Why not? First of all, because “it is a very complex movement,” and second, in order not to give the right-wing an opening to accuse the teachers of being linked to armed groups (*La Jornada*, 27 September). Only *after* repression had been unleashed did he make a call for active solidarity with the Oaxaca struggle. Meanwhile, left groups who tag along after the PRD and the “Other Campaign” also have not mobilized to oppose repression in Oaxaca. What we are seeing is the unity in inaction of parliamentary and anti-parliamentary cretinism. If today, after the invasion of the PFP and armed forces, and above all due to the heroic resistance by the Oaxacan working people and youth, they are calling for a work stoppage or a national “mega-march,” it is only to regain control of a movement that is threatening to slip out of control of the bourgeoisie (PRD) and the armed-for-TV EZLN.

In the struggle in Oaxaca, the second most popular slogan – after “*Ya cayó, ya cayó, Ulises ya cayó*” (Governor Ruiz has fallen) – is “*El pueblo unido, jamás será vencido*” (The people united will never be defeated). The truth is rather the opposite – to the extent that the exploited and oppressed continue to be tied to sectors of the exploiters and oppressors in the name of the unity of the people, they will be defeated over and over. “The people united...” was, after all, the slogan of the Chilean Unidad Popular (whose anthem has been adopted and modified by the APPO), which prepared the way for the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. The latter was installed as minister of defense of Salvador Allende, and a few months prior to the bloody coup of 11 September 1973, Pinochet reviewed the troops [of the Chilean army] in the company of Fidel Castro. Since the 1930s, popular-frontism has led to disaster for the working people: in Spain during the Civil War, leading to the dictatorship of general Franco; in France at the same time, leading to the dictatorship of Marshal Pétain; in Greece, Italy and France at the end of World War II, when it headed off workers revolution; in Indonesia in 1965, leading to the dictatorship of General Suharto, and so on. As Trotsky wrote in the Transitional Program:

“Under the banner of the October Revolution, the conciliatory politics practiced by the ‘People’s Front’ doom the working class to impotence and clear the road for fascism.

“‘People’s Fronts’ on the one hand—fascism on the other: these are the last political resources of imperialism in the struggle against the proletarian revolution.”

Those who claim that there already exists a revolutionary situation in Mexico today, rather than a *potentially revolutionary* one, notably the Militante group and the LTS, base themselves on a simple arithmetical operation: they add the rebellion that has paralyzed Oaxaca to the mobilization “in defense of the vote” in Mexico City and conclude that the country is about to explode. In doing so, they confuse the roiling *mass strike* led by radical petty-bourgeois forces (the APPO) which has confronted the capitalist state power, resisting with everything at hand the onslaught of the murderous repressive forces and rejecting various attempts by its leaders to sell out, on the one hand, and the ultra-peaceful mobilization called by and under the strict control of one of the main bourgeois parties (the PRD), whose aim was to pressure the electoral institutions and which López Obrador simply called off once it had served its purpose. They are not only disparate but counterposed quantities: the PRD leadership is a class enemy of the Oaxacan working people, which seeks to put an end to their strike. What we have here is the mathematics of the popular front. As Trotsky wrote about the ‘Theory of the Popular Front’ during the Spanish Civil War:

“The theoreticians of the Popular Front do not essentially go beyond the first rule of arithmetic, that is, addition: ‘Communists’ plus Socialists plus Anarchists plus liberals add up to a total which is greater than their respective isolated numbers. Such is all their wisdom. However, arithmetic alone does not suffice here. One needs as well at least mechanics. The law of the parallelogram of forces applies to politics as well. In such a parallelogram, we know that the resultant is shorter, the more component forces diverge from each other. When political allies tend to pull in opposite directions, the resultant may prove equal to zero.

“A bloc of divergent political groups of the working class is sometimes completely indispensable for the solution of common practical problems. In certain historical circumstances, such a bloc is capable of attracting the oppressed petty-bourgeois masses whose interests are close to the interests of the proletariat. The joint force of such a bloc can prove far stronger than the sum of the forces of each of its component parts. On the contrary, the political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, whose interests on basic questions in the present epoch diverge at an angle of 180°, as a general rule is capable only of paralyzing the revolutionary force of the proletariat.”

–Leon Trotsky, “The Lessons of Spain: The Last Warning” (December 1937)

This law has already been verified by events. Despite the great combativeness of the Oaxacan teachers union, Section 22, and its allies in the APPO, their leaders are or have been linked to the PRD. On July 2, they called to cast a “punishment vote” against the PRI and the PAN – in other words, a vote for the PRD. [Section 22 leader] Enrique Rueda Pacheco is a supporter of the PRD, as are the scabs of the Central Struggle Committee (CCL), whose “moral leader” is Humberto Alcalá Betanzos, currently secretary general of the



IG signs in October 30 protest at Mexican consulate in NYC: “Break with AMLO/PRD Popular Front! For Workers Revolution!”

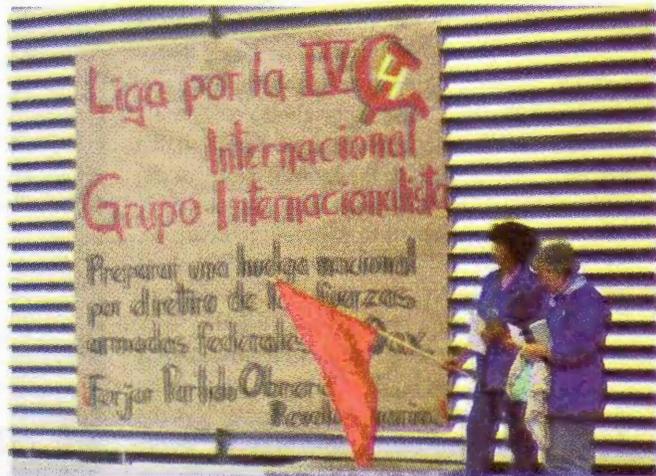
Oaxaca state committee of the PRD. Flavio Sosa, the most visible spokesman of the APPO currently, was a member of the PRD and even called to cast a “useful vote” in favor of Fox in the 2000 elections. In the state legislative assembly, PRD legislators voted prior to June 14 in favor of using “public force” (i.e., the police) against the teachers; they supported the governor’s “transparency” plan; they voted in favor of extending the term of the state legislature; and they joined the PRI and PAN in calling for the intervention of federal police forces against the strikers. The PRD is co-responsible for the deadly state violence against Oaxaca teachers, as they also are for the bloody attacks on peasants and town dwellers in Atenco and against steel workers in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán (see “Mexico: Bourgeois Elections and Workers Blood,” *The Internationalist* No. 24, Summer 2006).

The Grupo Internacionalista has insisted on the need to *break with the popular front around the PRD* and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, as we earlier warned against the harmful influence of the Cárdenas popular front in keeping the potential power of the working class tied to capitalist sectors. We call on the working people of Oaxaca, and all of Mexico, to break the corporatist shackles of “labor” federations such as the CTM, CT and CROC, and pseudo-unions like the national SNTE, which are part of the state apparatus. As such they act as veritable labor cops for the bourgeoisie, just as the company “unions” in the north do. In the case of Oaxaca they engage in scabberding against the teachers’ strike and even organize death squads. At the same time, it is also urgent to break the *political* chains which bind the “independent” unions and important sectors of the working class to bourgeois forces like the PRD. In order for the teachers’ insurgency to win, in order to sweep away the repression unleashed against the Oaxaca revolt and threatening all Mexican workers, it is necessary to fight to build a revolutionary and internationalist workers party, based on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution.

Fight for Permanent Revolution

Given its lengthy and hard-fought nature, it is obvious that the struggle of the Oaxaca teachers is facing something more than a murderous governor. The fact that Ruiz Ortiz has been able to hang on for so long, not giving in to the pressures of the other bourgeois parties and even to his own PRI, that he can get away with using the most heinous methods with apparent impunity, indicates that there are important forces backing him. In fact, "URO" has clung to power with such obstinacy that one is led to consider that there are sinister forces that would be seriously affected if he should lose control of executive power in the state. There are, for one thing, the multi-million contracts handed out to the construction company of his brother, Hugo Ruiz Ortiz, to build or remodel dozens of town halls around the state, as well as the seat of government in Santa María Coyotepec and the legislative palace in San Raymundo Jalpan. There are journalistic reports according to which he "has mafia-like relations with the 'tsar' of drug trafficking in Oaxaca, Pedro Díaz Parada," who "controls him to such a degree that he was able to get the State Police headquarters relocated to a property in the town of Santa María Coyotepec allegedly owned by Díaz Parada (*Universal*, 29 October). However, such cases of corruption exist in practically every state in Mexico.

More important is the fact that Ulises Ruiz Ortiz can count on the support of a tight-knit bourgeois layer which feels itself threatened by the teachers' struggle and the APPO. The governor's grandfather, Odilón Ruiz, was a *cacique* (political boss) in Chalcatongo, in the Mixtec region, where "people had to kiss his hand," according to one local official – "and his feet," added another (*La Jornada*, 24 September). There is a veritable oligarchic structure in the state which reproduces almost colonial relations between a white elite and the working population of Indian origin. It's similar to



El Internacionalista

Grupo Internacionalista at STUNAM union rally in defense of Oaxaca teachers, November 11.

conditions in Chiapas, where the "coletos" of San Cristóbal long for the old days when they held the Indians in vassalage, right up to when the latter unexpectedly (to the rulers) rose up on 1 January 1994.

In the current rebellion in Oaxaca, the specific demand for *autonomy* for the indigenous peoples has played a lesser role, since demands have focused on the throwing out the murderer-governor. Trotskyists insist that neither the juridical recognition of Indian rights nor the ouster of the particular rulers, as justified as these demands are, will produce a radical shift in the miserable living conditions of the working people and poor Indians. To free the indigenous peoples from the *capitalist* yoke requires a struggle for a *workers, peasants and Indian government* in Oaxaca in the framework of a workers revolution, nationally and internationally (see "The Other War Against Oaxaca's Indigenous Peoples," page 41).

One of the few concrete programmatic points in López

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Obrador's PRD presidential campaign was to call for revision or renegotiation of the chapter on agriculture and livestock of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, particularly concerning corn and beans, which has devastated the Oaxacan countryside. Marxist revolutionaries opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in its totality, as an attack on the livelihoods of working people in all three countries (Canada, U.S. and Mexico) benefiting the big capitalists. However, we do so not from a nationalist or patriotic standpoint, but as proletarian internationalists who seek the unity of the workers of the entire world, and particularly with our North American class brothers and sisters, in struggle against imperialism. Against the ravages of capitalist "globalization" we don't propose an impossible return to a narrow national market, but rather the struggle for an planned socialized world economy.

One of the effects of NAFTA has been an enormous increase in the flow of Oaxacan migrants to the United States, to the point that large parts of the countryside today have been emptied of men and youth, who have all "headed north." So many now live in the area around the city of Fresno, California that the region has been dubbed "Oaxacalifornia" (pronounced like Baja California). Ten percent of all Mexicans now live on U.S. territory, much of which was stolen from Mexico during the wars of the 19th century. Trotskyists fight for a revolutionary Mexico to become part of a Socialist United States of Latin America, in conjunction with the formation of an alliance of North American workers states including Mexico, the U.S., Canada and Quebec. Only in this way can we tear down the wall of death being built along the U.S.-Mexican border which cruelly separates workers' families.

The participation of Mexican workers in the United States in protests against the government of Ulises Ruiz has been a notable aspect of this struggle. Even more important would be



El Internacionalista

Contingent of the Grupo Internacionalista in march of Oaxacan teachers as it arrived in México City, October 9.



CLC

Teachers march in Rio de Janeiro, September 21, with banner saying "SEPE of Volta Redonda Calls On Working Class to Strike in Solidarity with Teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico." Comitê de Luta Classista, union tendency of Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, led struggle for workers solidarity.

the extension of the strike to the Mexican capital and to key industrial sectors, because the repression being suffered by the Oaxacan population is not due to a peculiarity of the personality of "URO" or the ways of the PRI. Rather, it is part of an assault launched jointly by the main capitalist parties against the working people of Mexico. In order to extend the struggle nationally, in addition to breaking with the popular front of

AMLO and the PRD, it is necessary to present a revolutionary program of *transitional demands* in defense of the working class of the entire country.

Thus, in order to fight the massive unemployment which is pushing mass emigration, we fight for a *sliding scale of wages and work hours*, in order to divide up the available work among all those seeking it, with no loss in wages and protection against inflation. We propose a *national strike against any attempt to privatize the energy industry* (electricity, oil), and to impose *workers control* in those industries in order to check the sabotage by the bosses government.

Amid this capitalist offensive against the working people in Oaxaca and the entire country, there is a burning need to prepare *workers self-defense*. The photos of Oaxacan youth resisting the PFP with slingshots and stones are striking, but the cops aren't always going to respond with their own slingshots and marbles. This was, as Ricardo Alemán wrote (in *El Universal*, 7 November), "a caricature." The "Molotov cocktails" are merely defensive and have a limited effect. Oaxacan strikers have shown that they know how to respond with creativity and intelligence to the multiple provocations and aggressions of the government, its cops, thugs and goons. But the next time around it's going to get serious.

So how to prepare the defense? By forming *workers defense committees*, under the command of the mass organizations of the workers, who equip themselves as well as possible to protect the masses in struggle against the threat (and in Oaxaca, the reality) of generalized repression. Such workers defense committees could serve as the nuclei of future workers militias, as long as they maintain their independence from the bourgeois state and parties. We do *not* call for the formation of "political-military" organizations separate from the workers movement, but for the strikers themselves to organize the defense, with maximum labor support.

It is no secret to anyone that Oaxaca abounds in armed groups, a direct consequence of the repressive PRI regimes. There are the Ejército Popular Revolucionario (ERP – Popular Revolutionary Army), the Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo Insurgente (ERPI – Revolutionary Army of the Insurgent People), the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias del Pueblo (FARP) and others. Since 1994, the government has sought to terrorize the rural areas of Oaxaca, particularly the region of Los Loxicha and the Mixteca, with its counterinsurgency campaigns. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and his rabid attorney general, Lizbeth Caña vituperate against the teachers strike attempting to link it to guerrilla groups in order to thereby justify military repression.

Up to now, the main guerrilla groups have kept their distance from the teachers strike and the APPO. On November 6, a conglomerate of small guerrilla groups that had split off from the EPR responded to the repression in Oaxaca by exploding some devices at various places in Mexico City. URO's supporters used this as a pretext to call for a crack-down in Oaxaca. The APPO quickly distanced itself from the actions. But beyond the negative effect that such acts may have for the teachers' struggle, and the tactical differences

between the various guerrilla groups, there is an essential programmatic question: all these groups are fighting for "popular" or at most "revolutionary" democracy, not for socialist revolution. With the Stalinist program of "two-stage" revolution which these organizations share, they accept the capitalist framework. This is armed popular-frontism.

Sensible elements of the Mexican bourgeoisie fear that, given the scope of the mobilization in Oaxaca, a bloodbath such as Ulises Ruiz & Co. have in mind could produce a massive guerrilla conflict. We defend leftist guerrillas against repression, as well as defending the teachers against idiotic claims that their strike is an "urban guerrilla struggle." However, the Trotskyists take a different path: rather than peasant-based guerrillaism, we fight for *workers mobilization* on the program of *permanent revolution*.

Analyzing the Russian Revolution of 1905, Leon Trotsky concluded that in semi-colonial countries and where pre-capitalist forms of production prevail, the bourgeoisie can no longer carry out the tasks of the great democratic revolutions of past centuries. Only under the leadership of the working class can we achieve democracy, carry out the agrarian revolution and win national liberation from the imperialist yoke, by establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat, supported by the peasantry, and extending the revolution. This was the program of the victorious October Revolution of 1917 led by the Bolshevik Party under Lenin and Trotsky, which proclaimed the onset of international socialist revolution.

Today there is a consensus among sectors of the PRD and various pseudo-socialist groups to call for a new constituent assembly in Mexico. The mid-August forum on governability, where there was a heavy PRD presence, called "for APPO to promote the installation of a Popular Government Council" and "a Constituent Congress which promotes a new Constitution" for Oaxaca. The LTS calls for "a workers and people's government of the APPO" to "call a Revolutionary Constituent Assembly in the state," adding a little leftist spice to the PRD slogan. For its part, the Communist Party of Mexico (Marxist-Leninist) demands "a Revolutionary Provisional Government" which would call "a Democratic and Popular National Constituent Assembly out of which would come a New Constitution."

Although the liturgy differs slightly from one denomination to the other, it is evident that they are all singing from the same hymn book. All are calling for a new government that would be part of a *bourgeois* democratic regime. A democratic constituent assembly, whether it is called revolutionary or not, does not surpass the limits of capitalism. Now, it's true that the Oaxacan masses are fighting for democratic goals in opposing the despotic regime of Ulises Ruiz. However, the duty of all Marxist revolutionaries is to explain to these valiant fighters that *democracy for the workers, peasants and Indians can not be won without a socialist revolution which overthrows the system of capitalist exploitation*.

This is exactly what a speaker for the Grupo Internacionalista said at the forum called by the APPO. "The reality is that in all countries where capitalism exists, there is



Internationalist photo

September 21 New York protest initiated by IG drew some 150 protesters, including NYC teachers, City University professors and students.

no democracy. Democracy for the bosses, for the rich, for the powerful, yes, but democracy for the poor, the landless, the workers, the poor peasants, Indians, homosexuals, women – there is no democracy for them.” Therefore, he insisted, it is necessary to forge a workers party based on the program of permanent revolution.

Pseudo-Trotskyist groups like the LTS and Militante don’t even bother to mention permanent revolution. They fight for democracy under capitalism, just as the Stalinists, who at least have the advantage of consistency between their “democratic” slogans and their “theory” of revolution in stages. Rather than calls for democratic, revolutionary and/or popular constituent assemblies, or for a “democratic and revolutionary national convention” (the slogan of Militante, which yearns for López Obrador’s National Democratic Convention to take power), the Trotskyists of the Internationalist Group fight for a workers and peasants government that establishes the rule of the working people, that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat. Only in this manner can the democratic revolutionary tasks be realized, by expropriating the capitalists, extending the revolution internationally and beginning socialist construction.

The Grupo Internacionalista’s Struggle for Workers Mobilization...

The mass strike in Oaxaca, now in its sixth month, represents the highest level of struggle by Mexican working people in several decades. It comes in the context of a series of Latin American workers’ struggles in recent years, among them the worker and peasant uprisings in Bolivia in 2003 and 2005 and the earlier struggle of the Argentine *piqueteros* (picketers). In Mexico there was the struggle of the Social

Security (IMSS) workers in 2004, when they surrounded the Senate trying to block passage of a law “reforming” their pensions; and more recently, the struggle of the Sicartsa workers which ended in a hands-down victory at the end of August.

The Grupo Internacionalista and the League for the Fourth International have sought to intervene around the struggle in Oaxaca in order to propagandize the Trotskyist program for cohering a revolutionary proletarian leadership, and to carry out actions of workers solidarity. The very day of the violent attempted eviction of the Oaxaca Zócalo, June 14, our comrades of the Internationalist Group in the U.S. called a protest picket in front of the Mexican consulate in New York, as they did again the next day, this time with the participation of a whole contingent from the faculty union of the City University of New York (CUNY). At the same time, comrades of the Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico traveled to Oaxaca, where they were constantly present over a period of two months.

The U.S. and Brazilian sections of the LFI mobilized again on September 21, initiating a demonstration of some 150 people in New York, including many teachers and professors, in defense of the Oaxaca strikers; and in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on the same day teachers marched with a banner announcing that the local of the teachers union SEPE in the city of Volta Redonda was calling for workers’ strikes in solidarity with the Oaxaca teachers.

The LFI produced a DVD, “Class Battles in Mexico,” in English and Spanish, focused on the Oaxacan struggle, which has been shown in assemblies of students and teachers in the U.S., Mexico and Brazil, and has been broadcast on cable television in New York. With the military/police invasion of Oaxaca, the Internationalist Group called an emergency picket in front of the Mexican consulate in New York on the same afternoon, October 28, and again on the 30th, and participated in a third protest on October 31.

In Mexico, the Grupo Internacionalista has carried out intense activity around the struggle in Oaxaca during the months of September and October. The GI attended several meetings of Sections 9 and 10 of the SNTE-CNTE (representing primary and secondary school teachers in the capital), calling on the teachers of the Federal District to undertake a strike against the (then) threat of large-scale repression in Oaxaca. We initiated an assembly on September 13 at the CCH-Sur (college preparatory school for sciences and humanities), on Oaxaca, with several students present from the University of Oaxaca. On September 22, we went to a meeting of the Mexico City APPO to inform them about the protests in New York and Rio de Janeiro, and to fight for the perspective of a strike based on the working class to halt the repressive machinery of the capitalists.

The GI marched with the Oaxacan teachers during the last three days of the APPO march that arrived in the capital on October 9. We carried a banner proclaiming: “Proletarian Solidarity with Oaxaca Teachers! For a National Strike Against the Murderous Government! Form Workers Defense Committees! Down with the PAN, PRI and PRD! Forge a

Revolutionary Workers Party!”

In protest against the federal police invasion of Oaxaca, the GI initiated – together with other student activists at the school, essentially anarchists – a successful shutdown of CCH-Sur on Thursday, October 26. The same day, several of our comrades played an active role in carrying out a shutdown of the School of Philosophy and Literature at the National University (UNAM). On the 31st, during a second shutdown of CCH-Sur, students of the GI led a 150-strong march from the campus to the Oaxacan teachers *plantón* (encampment) outside the Senate. These were the main stoppages in Mexico City, along with a shutdown at CCH-Naucalpan, where a couple of days earlier a student was shot to death and four wounded by *porros* (pro-government thugs).

At the same time, the Grupo Internacionalista went to important unions in the capital, urging them to strike against the repression. On October 5, the GI led a brigade of students from CCH-Sur to electrical plants to talk with workers about the need to mobilize their tremendous social power on behalf of the Oaxacan strikers. In the course of the student walkouts against the PFP invasion, we took a contingent of 50 students to the headquarters of the Mexican Electrical Workers (SME) on October 31 to talk about the need for workers action in support of the Oaxacan strikers under attack.

On October 26, a spokesman for the GI and several student strikers went to the General Strike Council of the Union of Workers of the National University (STUNAM) where they asked to speak about the urgent case of Oaxaca. Our comrade said that “what is now happening in Oaxaca is part of a larger series of attacks by the bourgeoisie against the working people which has extended over the final stretch of Fox’s six-year term.” If the strike of the Oaxaca teachers is defeated, he added, “this will mean wage cuts and anti-union attacks on other sectors, particularly energy and education,” which have been in the government’s sights for some years.

The student walkouts, he went on, although they are important, “are far from sufficient” to stop the repression. The UNAM workers have every interest in defending their class brothers and sisters in Oaxaca, and so they should go on strike, “not only in defense of their jobs and wages, but also to bring to a grinding halt the repressive machinery of the government. What is needed is a national strike against the murderous government. The STUNAM could play a key role in unleashing a struggle of the necessary proportions.” The speech by our comrade was well-received: we were told later by delegates who were present that “it shifted the ground for the workers” over the need to act against the repression in Oaxaca.

In another university labor organization, the Union of Workers of the Autonomous Metropolitan University (SITUAM), militants and sympathizers of the Grupo Internacionalista who belong to the union spoke at the General Delegates Assembly on November 8. A comrade made an energetic intervention, noting that “the SITUAM has called, over and over, for carrying out actions of solidarity with the Oaxaca teachers and against repression. The time has come to pass from words to deeds. What’s necessary is



Painting of Leon Trotsky by Yuri Annenkov, last shown at Venice Biennale in 1924.

not only to stop work this Friday, but to prepare a national strike against the repression.” He stressed that “the workers must understand that if there is a ‘final solution’ using the whole force of the state, the murderous attacks against workers’ struggles will spread to more and more places.”

Our motion did not succeed, but the next day at the Iztapalapa campus of the UAM we got a very positive reception from the workers, who voted to reproduce a wall newspaper produced by the GI on the struggle in Oaxaca. Although it may not be to the bureaucrats’ liking, they can’t escape the class struggle and they may be surprised to find that one fine day this giant, the Mexican proletariat, that has been pinned to the ground has broken the chains that bind it and risen up. It all depends on the attacks of the bourgeoisie and the capacity of the revolutionaries.

We have cited the activities of the Grupo Internacionalista and the League for the Fourth International to indicate how a small communist nucleus should respond to a large-scale class struggle. Our efforts have not always brought immediate results, but as shown by the student walkouts and shutdowns, they can have an effect. It’s worth recalling that during the UNAM strike of 1999-2000, the GI insisted repeatedly on the need for worker-student defense guards until, on the very day when the army was going to take University City, a contingent from the SME showed up to form the first workers defense guards (with hundreds of participants) seen in Latin American in a long time.

...And to Forge a Revolutionary Leadership

The necessary actions of solidarity and mobilization only constitute a part of the tasks of the revolutionaries. What's indispensable is the struggle to form the nucleus of a communist vanguard party to resolve the excruciating crisis of proletarian leadership. There is not going to be, we have repeated over and over, a greater example of audacity, tenacity and courage on the part of the workers than what we have seen in Oaxaca. They are already conscious of the need to break the shackles of bourgeois corporatism of the national SNTE, the CTM, the CROC and other *charro* (corporatist) federations. "Against *Charro* and *Neo-Charro* Unionism!" says the Section 22 banner, showing greater consciousness than some opportunists, like the Grupo Espartaquista de México (Spartacist Group of Mexico), an outfit that considers these labor police bodies to be genuine workers unions.

We have emphasized that militancy is not sufficient in order to win the struggle. To the extent that the Oaxacan strikers continue to be chained to capitalist sectors, their admirable spirit of struggle will be sacrificed, and they will be blackmailed in order to maintain a phony "alliance" with so-called "progressive" bourgeois forces, in this case Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his Party of the Democratic Revolution. Today, the popular front around AMLO and the PRD is the biggest impediment preventing the mass strike in Oaxaca from having a powerful echo in the rest of the country. Therefore it is necessary to break with this class-collaborationist alliance and fight for a revolutionary workers party.

It must be a Leninist-Trotskyist party, because without the iron organization and intransigent program of the Bolsheviks, it won't be possible to overcome the tremendous pressure of the bourgeoisie. Such a party will also have to act as a "tribune of the people," the defender of all the oppressed, for the emancipation and liberation of women, including the right to free abortion on demand, and for defense of homosexuals and demanding an end to all anti-gay laws. These demands will be viciously opposed by the Catholic church and its political representatives, including "community" leaders who raise the Virgin of Guadalupe on their banners in order to combat the unions and blind the workers as to their class interests.

A revolutionary workers party must also be the champion of the poor peasants and Indians in the struggle against their age-old exploitation and oppression, at the same time maintaining its class independence against those who in raising the banner of Zapatism want to repeat the failed bourgeois revolutions of the past. Mexico has already had three "democratic" revolutions – that of Independence, from 1810 to 1822; that of the Reform, from 1855 to 1861; and the Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1917. All have monuments and avenues in the capital named after them, but their leaders were assassinated and the workers and peasants continue to be mired in poverty. The Grupo Internacionalista insists: *the next Mexican revolution will be a workers revolution, or it will not be.*

The party we need to win this class war must be internationalist to the core. The tri-color flag belongs to the

bourgeoisie, not to the indigenous peoples massacred under colonial and republican rule alike; nor is it the flag of the peasants, who are used as cannon fodder by the bourgeois armies, including to kill their brothers as is now happening in Oaxaca. Ours is the red flag of the working class of the entire world, emblazoned with the hammer, sickle and "4" of the Fourth International. In contrast to those who want to compete with the PRI and the PRD in waving patriotic symbols, the Trotskyists fight to begin an *international* socialist revolution.

Only by extending the struggle north of the border, to the imperialist centers, will it be possible to mobilize the resources needed to overcome the suffocating economic backwardness endured by semicolonial countries like Mexico. Precisely because of the depredations of imperialism, today millions of Mexican workers are already indispensable parts of the U.S. productive machinery, both those who live "in the belly of the beast" and the hundreds of thousands who work in maquiladora plants on this side of the border, which is increasingly artificial in the face of the relentless march of the world capitalist economy.

For a few days Mexico is going to have three presidents (Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Felipe Calderón and Vicente Fox), all of them enemies of the workers. But while those at the top squabble over possession of Los Pinos (Mexico's White House), they are worried that a new six-year term that begins with a bloodbath could be doomed. Moreover, their godfathers in Washington, who think they are the masters of the world, having gotten bogged down in Iraq, are well-aware that a miscalculation in Mexico would have repercussions inside the United States. The outcome of the struggle of the Oaxacan teachers will be decided on the national and international stage, where the Trotskyists fight for workers revolution throughout the Americas. ■

State of Siege in Oaxaca...

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the struggles of the working people cannot be resolved on the basis of bourgeois democracy – which, moreover, is impossible in semi-colonial countries like Mexico. As Trotsky indicated in his perspective (both a theory and a program) of *permanent revolution*, today no wing of the capitalist class is capable of carrying out the tasks which the great bourgeois revolutions accomplished in centuries past. The *agrarian revolution* necessary to free poor peasants and Indians from their centuries-old poverty; *national liberation* from the imperialist yoke; and *democracy* for the exploited and oppressed, the wage slaves of capital, can only be won through workers revolution, expropriating the profit-hungry bourgeoisie and extending to the very heart of the empire, where today more than ten million Mexican workers toil. For this struggle to be the beginning of "the revolution of the 21st century," as a slogan stenciled on the walls in Oaxaca proclaimed, it must break out of the narrow mold in which it is now constrained. We do not look backwards, to the heritage of Zapata's peasant nationalism; instead, we seek to be the proletarian Bolsheviks of the 21st century. ■

A Oaxaca Commune?



Progress Publishers

The Paris Commune, March-April 1871.

A battle was won, but the war continues. And the outstanding fact about the war for Oaxaca is that, even though today it still takes the form and raises demands characteristic of a *democratic* struggle, underlying it is the *class war*. It all began with a teachers strike for rather modest demands (above all for rezonification¹ for Oaxaca teachers). After June 14, their main demand has been for the expulsion of the murderous governor. In principle, none of this goes beyond the capitalist framework. Nevertheless, the struggle not only faces a despotic *cacique* (political boss), but the whole semibonapartist regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled Mexico uninterruptedly for 70 years and is still intact in Oaxaca. The many thousands of political operatives who ran the single-party PRI-government in the state are still there, but now deathly afraid of losing their sinecures and facing the ire of an irate populace.

In reality, to bring down this regime and defeat its last-ditch defenders will take something approaching a political revolution. Moreover, the struggle takes place in a society characterized by a deep division between a narrow, oligarchic European-derived (*criollo*) ruling class, and a huge mass of working people largely of Indian origin. With this political and social structure, semicolonial in the strictest sense, “those at the bottom” cannot win without going outside the bourgeois-democratic framework and undertaking a social revolution. Replacing the governor to get another PRI politi-

¹Section 22 of the SNTE-CNTE, demanded that Oaxaca teachers’ pay be increased from Zone 3 to Zone 2, citing the high cost of living in this state which is a prime tourist destination. At present, Oaxacan teachers, whose average salary is about US\$525 a month earn less than teachers in Chiapas.

cian, or even a bourgeois “independent,” in his place would not change much, with the possible exception of the level of repression – and maybe not even that. *In order for the working people to win their struggle, the popular rebellion must turn into workers revolution.*

Some leftists are acting as if this has already happened. In recent weeks, there has been a spate of articles by “progressive” commentators in the bourgeois press and leftist groups referring to a “Oaxaca Commune.” This was the title of an article by Luis Hernández Navarro in *La Jornada* (25 July). Another by the Agencia Latinoamericana de Información was titled, “The Oaxaca Commune Rises Up” (ALAI, 29 September). Iván Rincón Esprú wrote about “Tlatelolco and the Oaxaca Commune” in the Oaxacan daily *Noticias* (5 October). “Mexico: Long Live the Oaxaca Commune!” proclaimed the Trotskyist Faction (FT) in a 6 September declaration, and more recently “Defend the Oaxaca Commune!” The FT’s Mexican group, the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (LTS – Socialist Workers League), refers to “The Oaxaca Commune on Alert” (*La Verdad Obrera*, 5 October). “The Oaxaca Commune: APPO,” writes the Militante group (6 November). In Brazil on November 2 there were a number of “actions in solidarity with the Oaxaca Commune.” On Radio APPO as well, announcers often say they are transmitting from the Oaxaca Commune, like Radio Habana signs off with the slogan “transmitting from the first free territory of America.”

Is there a Oaxaca Commune? Let’s take a look at the key point of reference: the Paris Commune of 1871. Following the defeat of the army of Versailles in the north of France in the war against Germany and the proclamation of the Republic in



Appeal by the Paris Commune calling for the election of delegates to a federal chamber of women workers.

September 1870, the French capital continued to be besieged by the Germans. The plebeian population of Paris distrusted the bourgeois government, which was enjoying the pleasures of a golden refuge in the Versailles Palace. This government, for its part, feared the National Guard because of its proletarian composition. When the regime tried to dissolve the Guard on 18 March 1871, it rebelled and the Parisian workers suddenly found themselves in power.

The image of a besieged revolutionary citadel is not totally alien in the present Oaxacan context, particularly today as it approaches a near-insurrectionary situation. At the same time, it is certainly not a very heartening image, presaging a bloody defeat. The Paris Commune was smashed after 72 days, with a toll of more than 30,000 dead and 50,000 jailed among the communards. This is what Iván Rincón Espriu was referring to in warning of the danger of a repetition of the 1968 massacre in the Plaza de Tlatelolco, when the Mexican army massacred perhaps 500 students and leftists. “The troops who will try to smash the Oaxaca Commune and drown the popular discontent in blood and fire (in the process increasing it) have already located their attack points and have taken up their positions,” he wrote in early October.

Hernández Navarro’s starting point is also valid: he writes that the movement begun by the Oaxaca teachers strike is the kind of social struggle that presages others of greater magnitude, like the strikes in Cananea (miners) and Río Blanco (textile workers) that were precursors to the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17. His conclusion, however, is to add the Oaxaca rebellion to the struggle against “the *cochinero* [roughly, swinishness] carried out in the July 2 elections” – i.e., the López Obrador mobilizations under the mantle of the bourgeois PRD.

In the case of protests against repression that seek to express enthusiastic support to the heroic Oaxacan fighters, the reference is understandable. But when tendencies which claim to be Marxist and Trotskyist refer to a “Oaxaca Commune,” above all when they do so as praise and glorification, this demonstrates a dangerous theoretical and programmatic light-mindedness: instead of clarifying, it obscures the necessary lessons and measures to win the battle of Oaxaca. It distorts reality by conferring on it a revolutionary content that has yet to be realized, and it reveals that the authors live in a fantasy world. Even worse, in losing confidence in the working class as the vanguard, they look for substitutes: they replace the class struggle with a “democratic,” or rather, “democratizing,” outlook. Instead of the dictatorship of the proletariat, they call for “organs of self-determination of the masses” (LTS, *Estrategia Obrera*, 21 October).

What was the Paris Commune? Among “the multiplicity of interpretations to which the Commune has been subjected, and the multiplicity of interests which construed it in their favor,” Karl Marx wrote in *The Civil War in France* (May 1871), “Its true secret was this: It was essentially a working class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor.” Later on in the same text he calls the Commune a “workers government.” Engels repeats, in his 1891 introduction to Marx’s work, “Of late, the social-democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the words: Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.”

Those who today refer to a Oaxaca Commune as “real democracy” or the “self-determination of the masses” without class distinction trace their lineage not to the great revolutionary theoreticians but to the great granddaddy of the opportunists, the “social-democratic philistine” par excellence, Karl Kautsky, who in his anti-Soviet screed *Terrorism and Communism* (1919) distorted Marx’s words in describing the Paris Commune as “the government of the people by the people, that is, democracy.”

The Paris Commune was a workers government, an incarnation of the dictatorship of the proletariat – two synonymous phrases – not because Marx and Engels said so, but because of its own self-conception, its composition and its actions. The proclamation of the Commune, the Declaration of the Central Committee of the National Guard of 18 March 1871, stated: “The proletarians of Paris, amidst the failures and treasons of the ruling classes, have understood that the hour has struck for them to save the situation by taking into their own hands the direction of public affairs.... They have understood that it is their imperious duty, and their absolute right, to render themselves masters of their own destinies, by seizing upon the governmental power.”

Marx immediately added: “But the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.” The proletariat had to build its own



Spokesman of the Grupo Internacionalista speaks to forum called by APPO in mid-August. PRD supporters tried to shout him down.

government, in which “the majority of its members were naturally workers, or acknowledged representatives of the working class. The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time.” This was the main amendment Marx and Engels made to the *Communist Manifesto* since it was written in 1848.

So let’s take a look at the Oaxacan situation today. The leading body of the struggle, the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, does not define itself as a government, nor is it one in fact. It is an organ of struggle, whose leadership consists of representatives of different organizations. Until now, the large majority of the delegates have not been elected but rather were named by the leaderships of the groups which make up the APPO. Its backbone is Section 22 of the SNTE-CNTE (the teachers union), and it includes various unions of public employees (workers of the secretariat of health, the Social Security Institute, the ISSTE, the University of Oaxaca, airports) belonging to the FSODO (Front of Unions and Democratic Organizations of Oaxaca), as well as telephone workers and bus drivers, along with semi-labor groups (Associated Women Trade Unionists, retired railroad workers) and leftist organizations (Frente Popular Revolucionario, Comité de Defensa de los Derechos del Pueblo [Committee for Defense of the Rights of the People], Partido Obrero Socialista [Socialist Workers Party, now rebaptized the Movement for Socialism]). But it also includes a number of organizations of indigenous peoples – the Organization of Indigenous Zapotec Peoples (OPIZ), the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca (CIPO), the Union of Indigenous Communities of the Northern Isthmus (UCIZONI), Movement of United Triqui Struggle (MULT) – and peasant organizations.

There is no doubt that the APPO has struck root in the Oaxacan masses by having resisted for so long the siege by state and federal governments and the murderous violence of the thugs and paramilitaries. But it is not a nascent workers government. The APPO has a multi-class character, with a petty-bourgeois leadership in which popular-front politics predominate. The decisions of the National Forum on Con-

structing Democracy and Governability called by the APPO last August 16 and 17, for example, called to “generate alliances with different sectors and political actors premised on our main demand: for the ouster of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz.” At the same time, it urged “the installation of a Popular Government Council” and the formation of a “Great National Popular Assembly.” For many in the APPO, these calls are directed at the PRD, whose representatives have had discussions with the APPO in Oaxaca in recent days.

To be sure, the APPO and Section 22 have had to carry out certain governmental functions, constituting the Honorable Body of *Topiles* (a kind of popular police, derived from indigenous community organizations) and the Oaxaca Teachers Police (POMO) to maintain order in the occupied city, detaining thieves and in some cases submitting them to popular trials. But these are only episodic organs and measures of struggle of the sort that would arise in any general strike that lasted for a time.

It is also true that there are aspects of dual power with the occupation of the capital by the APPO and the installation of popular municipal councils in around 20 municipalities. But this is not dual power of *different classes*. The APPO has not made any moves against private property whatsoever: it has not taken over hotels, or haciendas, factories or transportation companies. Nor has it seized federal government institutions, like the highways or airport. Above all, with its call for “peaceful” resistance against the onslaught by the forces of Ulises Ruiz and the federal government, it has not called into question the bourgeois state’s monopoly of armed force. In fact, in negotiations with the interior ministry (Gobernación) APPO leaders accepted in principle the incursion of the Federal Preventive Police into Oaxaca.

In December 1905, when Leon Trotsky was jailed as president of the Petersburg Soviet, he wrote a piece titled “35 Years Later: 1871-1906,” in which he stated:

“The Paris Commune of 1871 was not, of course, a socialist commune; its regime was not even a developed regime of socialist revolution. The ‘Commune’ was only a prologue. It established the dictatorship of the proletariat, the necessary premise of the socialist revolution. Paris entered into the regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat not because it proclaimed the republic, but because out of 90 representatives it elected 72 representatives of the workers and stood under the protection of the proletarian guard.”

None of this exists in Oaxaca *yet*. For now it is *Zukunftsmusik*, “music of the future” to which we may aspire and for which communists struggle. But to confound our desires with actual reality would be fatal for the future development of revolutionary struggle in Mexico. There is not a proletarian power in Oaxaca, and for it to come into being, the struggle would have to be waged, not in the confines of a predominantly peasant and rural state but instead by extending the insurgency to the big battalions of the working class in the capital of the country and the industrial centers. To achieve this, it is indispensable to forge a leadership, a party, which fights not for “real (bourgeois) democracy,” but openly for workers revolution. ■

Night of the Hyenas...

continued from page 10

at the night sky, noticing that the moon was obscured by what I thought was a cloud. It was an enormous cloud of tear gas and smoke from burning buildings. Soon we found out that over APPO Radio the organizers of that day's huge march were calling on everyone to seek refuge in houses or offices because the PFP was sweeping through the streets carrying out arrests.

Already earlier as protesters marched into the city center, PFP *tanquetas* (armored vehicles) lined side streets. Many of the protestors gathered in and near the Santo Domingo Plaza, watching the ranks of PFP cops with their visored helmets, black body armor, shields, *toletes* (clubs), teargas grenade launchers and other weapons.

Now police were attacking marchers. They shot teargas canisters and some live ammunition, and chased demonstrators as well as journalists (some of whom were injured), beating them with extreme violence. Soon the cops dismantled and pulverized the main APPO barricade in the city center. Buses out of the city were cancelled, and plainclothes cops invaded the bus station, smashed it up and drove out those inside.

APPO Radio was being jammed by the police, with a couple of bars of a rock song repeated over and over. You could still hear the announcers if you moved the radio around some (later the jamming blotted their voices out entirely). They reported that the cops, mainly in plainclothes were making raids and searching house to house. "La Doctora Berta," one of the most popular announcers, said a price had been put on her head. Supporters of the PRI (party of Oaxaca Governor Ulises Ruiz) had been called on to arm themselves and participate in the raids.

Red Cross ambulances on the streets actually had PFP cops in them instead of medical personnel. (Someone later told me he had seen two pick-ups filled with what he believed were plainclothes cops, wearing bandannas to look like protestors, zooming by earlier.) The ultra-right pirate radio station known by demonstrators as Radio Alcantarilla ["sewer radio"] was calling on citizens to report foreigners and "strange-looking people" so they could be taken to a Ministerio Publico (special court). Calls to that station were coming in giving the names and locations of APPO supporters to be seized. The governor repeatedly blamed "outside" leftists, "criminals" and foreigners for the events.

Downtown buildings (the local court, hotel association and others) had been set on fire. Small groups came past the place where we had taken refuge. Many had the homemade gas masks (a surgical mask with a sanitary napkin inside, soaked in vinegar) that were distributed by the brigades of health workers who, in an example of the impressive degree of organization of the protestors, had gathered at corners in the city center. They discussed whether the buildings were set on fire by some young protestors in response to the police



Jorge Luis Plata/Reforma

November 25: PFP launched manhunt for APPO supporters.

attacks, or by provocateurs. "We Oaxaqueños defend ourselves, but we are not vandals," a middle-aged woman said.

A European photographer who had been part of a group chased through the streets by cops (his partner had his foot broken when a gas grenade was fired at him) told of an older lady in a flowered hat who said "this is dangerous for you" and the next minute told protestors where there was a pile of rocks they could use to defend themselves against the police.

Rightists smashed a pickup truck into the office of one of the main APPO leaders, Flavio Sosa's Nueva Izquierda de Oaxaca, which had 14 people inside (one of whom was reportedly "disappeared"), drenched the office with gasoline and burned it down. The APPO is reporting three dead (this has yet to be confirmed), more than 100 wounded (25 by bullets), 25 "disappeared." The number of reported arrested ranges from 140 to 160; twenty had reportedly been formally charged as of late on November 27. The Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights put out a detailed chronology of how the PFP started the attack by shooting teargas and projectiles from rooftops. The APPO reported that 9 mm and .38 special bullet cartridges were recovered from areas where the police fired on demonstrators. The papers report that some protest leaders believe the army may be sent in

P.S. On Sunday morning helicopters were hovering over the ADO bus station. They were flying so low that they shook telephone cables along the street, whose vibration made an eerie noise. Pro-government radio stations broadcast the governor's claims that everything was under control, together with the continued calls for *delaciones* (turning people in to be arrested). Graffiti supporting the APPO and the protests had been painted over by municipal work crews during the night; in some places the white paint was still fresh and sticky to the touch. Graffiti supporting Ulises Ruiz was on the walls in some areas, as were posters saying "Ulises, We Genuine Oaxaca Citizens Are Unanimously Behind You." Over breakfast a middle-class woman talked to her son about the reporter whose foot was broken by a teargas grenade. "They shouldn't shoot those at people," she said." He replied, "If we're talking about 'should,' they shouldn't shoot them at all, they shouldn't be here, and they shouldn't exist. ■

Oaxaca: Scenes from November 25

El Internacionalista



El Universal

El Internacionalista



Upper left: March of tens of thousands enter center of Oaxaca just before police attack. Middle left: Marchers' sign says: "Oaxaca Is Not a Barracks – Army Get Out." Bottom left: Graffiti reads: "The Only Fatherland for a Revolutionary Is the Revolution." Upper right: protesters fire rocket at police barrier. Bottom right: supporters of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca throw back some of hundreds of gas grenades fired by police.

El Internacionalista



APPO

The "Other War" Against the Indigenous Peoples of Oaxaca



Indigenous women and bilingual teachers from Oaxaca in encampment in Mexico City, August 2006.

The discrimination against and exclusion of the indigenous population is one of the fundamental causes of the Oaxaca rebellion. No one can ignore it in the land of Benito Juárez, the Zapotec Indian who became president of Mexico in 1858 and led the War of the Reform against church power and the resistance to the empire of Maximilian¹. The Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) recognized this in the resolutions of the forum on "governability" which it called in mid-August.

However, the Indian question is not limited to the legal framework or democratic rights, nor to the removal of this or

¹ Benito Juárez, 1806-1872, became president of Mexico when civil war broke out in 1858 over a series of liberal reform laws establishing the separation of church and state and curtailing ecclesiastical power. After three years of fighting, the liberals led by Juárez triumphed. However, when the liberal government had to suspend payment of interest on foreign loans, its main creditors, England, France and Spain, sent forces to seize the Veracruz customs house. Louis Napoléon, the emperor of France, then decided to occupy the whole of the country, and with the connivance of Mexican monarchists he selected Maximilian I of the Austrian Habsburg ruling house to be emperor of Mexico. Juárez retreated to the north where he established an "itinerant republic." After the defeat of the South in the American Civil War, Napoléon withdrew his support from Maximilian. When French troops pulled out, the republican forces led by Juárez retook the capital in early 1867.

that *cacique* (political boss), or even the whole *cacique* system promoted by the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). To liberate the descendants of the original inhabitants from the weight of half a millenium of plundering, superexploitation and even genocide, both under colonial rule and the republic, will take a social revolution. Only the taking of power by the Mexican working class will make it possible to shatter the power of a bourgeois and even oligarchic ruling class in states like Oaxaca, where their fabulous riches are extracted from the sweat of indigenous working people.

The *criollo* (European-derived) caste which rules Oaxaca is extremely tight-knit: its members see each other in sumptuous feasts held in luxury hotels and the exquisite restaurants which abound in this colonial city; they visit each other's estates to admire the prize bulls and purebred horses. The political bosses maintain gangs of gunmen and thugs commanded by corrupt deputies and congressmen to assassinate rebellious teachers. The oligarchs flamboyantly wheel around town in their latest-model SUVs with oversized tires and polarized windows – known as "garcmobiles" during the El Salvador civil war of the 1980s – from which demoiselles in party dresses alight to attend their elegant fiestas. Their offspring practice endogamy, marrying only within the caste, and they all display openly racist contempt for those with dark skin.

These are the "powers that be" who lord it over the state of Oaxaca, and they were the ones who came out on November 1

in a PRI march to support Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. They wanted a “cleaned-up” city, some ladies told an American reporter, claiming that a majority of the “appos” are from Chiapas or Guatemala (i.e., they are Indian “foreigners”) and that the leader of teachers union Section 22 is a *muxe* (transvestite). The reporter, James Daria, noted the “deep seated economic and racial conflicts underlying the current social unrest” (*Narco News Bulletin*, 1 November). The deepest of these is the Indian question.

“We have already been warned ... they already have their *cuernos* [*de chivo*, goat’s horn, nickname for AK-47 automatic rifles) ready for when the damn Indians of the APPO show up,” remarked a rich cattleman of the lower Mixe region, according to Carlos Beas Torres, a leader of the UCIZONI indigenous organization (*La Jornada*, 16 October). The striking teachers have raised among their demands defense of bilingual education against budget cuts which have hit hard against instruction in Indian languages. Meanwhile, PRI-linked paramilitaries have made death threats against the coordinators of radio Huave (the most powerful community radio station in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec), Radio Ayuuk and Radio Umalalang.

This “other war” against the indigenous peoples is not limited to threats: in early August when a delegation of a Triqui Indian organization, MULTI (Movimiento de Unificación y Lucha Triqui Independiente), set off to reinforce the teachers’ encampment in the Oaxacan capital, they fell into an ambush which left three Triqui Indians dead (Andrés Santiago Cruz, Pedro Martínez Martínez and the youth Octavio Martínez Martínez) and four wounded. And on October 18, a teacher of bilingual primary school, Pánfilo Hernández of Zimatlán, was murdered as he left an APPO meeting.

Nor is this war new. The Triquis, ensconced in the Mixtec region of western Oaxaca, have been the target of constant aggression by the state and federal governments in support of PRI *caciques*, leading to the murder of many fighters for Indian rights going back to the 1970s. Among those killed are Guadalupe Flores Villanueva, Luis Flores García, Nicolás López Pérez, Eduardo González Santiago, Efrén Zanabriga Eufasio, Pedro Ramírez, Javier Santiago Ojeda, Paulino Martínez Delia and Bonifacio Martínez. Another of the murdered activists in previous years was Bartolomé Chávez of the CIPO (Popular Indian Congress of Oaxaca).

With 1.6 million Indians, more than half the total population, Oaxaca is the state with the highest percentage of the population who speak indigenous languages (37 percent, compared to 24 percent in Chiapas), including Zapoteco, Mixteco, Mazateco, Chinanteco, Mixe, Triqui and ten additional ethnic groups. Of the 570 municipalities in the state, 412 are governed according to indigenous “usages and customs,” under which municipal posts are determined by a rotating series of positions or obligations (*cargos*) and general assemblies make decisions by consensus.



El Internacionalista

Banner of the MULTI in the Oaxaca Zócalo, August 2006.

Although they are less corrupt than many other local governments, one doesn’t have to idealize the traditional indigenous governments. There are also PRI Indian *caciques*, and in a significant number of Indian communities (around 20 percent), even in the late 1990s, women didn’t have the right to vote. There is also little presence of women in the leadership bodies of Section 22, even though women make up a clear majority of Oaxacan teachers.

The centrality of the oppression of indigenous peoples in the present struggle in Oaxaca is widely recognized. In the APPO forum, resolutions called for a new state constitution to include “juridical recognition of the original peoples and their rights, among them the use of indigenous languages and acceptance of the accords of San Andrés Larráinzar.” However, neither legal recognition nor the autonomy codified in the San Andrés accords, negotiated with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) after the Chiapas rebellion of 1994, offer a solution to the profound social oppression of the indigenous peoples. This oppression is rooted in *capitalism*.

Just to cite some indicative figures: the areas of Oaxaca populated by Indian peoples are the most backward in terms of education and in the state as a whole, 27 percent of women are illiterate while 34 percent of primary school age children do not attend school. The poverty is enormous: 70 percent of the Oaxaca population earns less than 70 pesos (US\$6.50) a day. 55 percent of homes lack sewage connections or any drainage, while 40 percent of the houses have dirt floors, according to statistics of the INEGI (National Institute of Geography and Statistics) based on the 2000 census. Currently, poor Indians feel particularly threatened by the Plan Puebla-Panamá, which has led to massive buying up of Indian lands by speculators who want to grab a corridor alongside the superhighway.

We have written extensively about the struggle against the oppression of indigenous peoples in Latin America, calling in several Andean countries for a workers, peasants and

Indian government (“see Marxism and the Indian Question in Ecuador,” *The Internationalist* No. 17, October-November 2003). This demand would also be appropriate at the state level in Oaxaca. In Mexico as a whole, where the weight of the Indian population is substantially less, the demands of the EZLN and the Indigenous National Congress (CNI) center on indigenous autonomy, as laid out in the San Andrés accords which were turned down by the National Congress (with the connivance, it should be noted, of the PRD). As we wrote concerning Chiapas:

“Marxists support the right of the native peoples to decide their own fate. For the areas where Indians are concentrated, we join in demanding the *right of regional and local autonomy*. For this to have any reality, it must include control over natural resources, including land, water and petroleum. This will be strenuously resisted by Mexico’s capitalist rulers, as the state of Chiapas, where the Mayan Indians live in pervasive poverty, produces 21 percent of the country’s oil output, 47 percent of its natural gas, and 55-60 percent of total electrical production, mainly from hydroelectric stations....

“Effective autonomy for indigenous peoples will only be possible through socialist revolution instituting a planned economy.”

–“Mexico: Regime in Crisis,” Part 2, *The Internationalist* No. 2, April-May 1997

Oaxaca does not have huge natural resources like Chiapas, but there is another reason why genuine regional autonomy cannot be realized within a bourgeois framework. The peasant Indian economy is deeply threatened by the capitalist market, which is the ultimate cause of the poverty in which the indigenous peoples live. This has been the case since the triumph of capitalism in the Mexican countryside in the last half of the 19th century, but its effects have been accentuated in the last decade by the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, which has led to the importing of massive quantities of corn and the ruin of Oaxaca’s peasant agriculture.

Despite its rhetorical identification with the Mexican Revolution, the PRI arose from the layer of Northern ranchers (Obregón, Carranza) who were responsible for the assassination of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa and the defeat of the poor and landless peasants. The same ranchers are still in power in Oaxaca, and following their class interests they identify with the hacienda owner from Guanajuato, President Fox. Expropriating their estates will be one of the first steps of any social revolution.

Yet not even Zapata’s old program of “land to the tiller” will be sufficient to deal with this. Almost half of the cultivated land in Oaxaca is under a communal regime, another quarter is in the *ejido*² system, with little more than a quarter held as

² Ejidos were lands reserved for common use of the indigenous population during colonial times; under the land reforms following the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17, in Indian areas land was collectively owned by the community as ejidos and periodically parceled out among the members, although generally cultivated in individual family plots.

private property. Even with collective cultivation of the land, the urgently needed *agrarian revolution* in the Mexican countryside requires the industrialization of agricultural production, which will only be carried out to the benefit of the indigenous peasants in the framework of a socialized economy.

It is also essential to break with all the bourgeois parties. The most important struggle of the Oaxacan Indians in the past was that of the COCEI (Worker-Peasant-Student Coalition of the Isthmus) centered on Juchitán, dating from the mid-1970s. For a time, the COCEI was allied with the Mexican Communist Party, and COCEI members were always treated as communists by the PRI *caciques*. With the dissolution of the remnants of the CP into the Party of the Democratic Revolution, the COCEI also joined the PRD.

After many years of mobilization, the COCEI achieved power locally. However, as members of a capitalist party, the Juchitán COCEI/PRDers have aligned with the rulers of the state and played a markedly conservative role – to the point that in the current struggle, a significant number of teachers in Juchitán broke the strike. It is notable that the only place in the state where there was a significant amount of scabbing was precisely in this stronghold of the PRD.

The struggle to defend the original peoples is also not identical to *zapatismo*, although the appearance of the EZLN in 1994 did attract a great deal of attention to the conditions of Indians in Mexico. The political support which the EZLN gave for many years to the PRD didn’t help indigenous peoples in Chiapas or the rest of the country, as Subcomandante Marcos himself admitted in his June 2005 Sixth Declaration of the Lacandón Jungle.

In August 2005, a meeting was held in a Zapatista community bringing together indigenous representatives from all over Mexico. Spokesmen for the CIPO complained:

“It saddens us to see that the EZLN says something when something happens to those who are well-known, yet when blows are struck against communities, organizations and persons who are small, simple and little-known, they say nothing.

“We perceive a differential treatment by the EZLN, which on the hand gives priority to its ties to the world of the NGOs³ and organizations who carry out little or no work with the ranks, while it leaves aside the rank-and-file indigenous movement, which actually goes out into the streets and fights alongside us.”

It is no accident, then, that during the current teachers strike in Oaxaca, even though it has involved hundreds of thousands of indigenous people, the EZLN and its “Other Campaign” have played no role at all.

The liberation of indigenous men and women from the yoke of their age-old oppression will not be possible under a bourgeois regime, no matter how “democratic” it claims to be. What is required is a revolutionary workers party that brings down capitalism. ■

³ Non-Governmental Organizations. While supposedly not (directly) funded by local governments, many NGOs are funded by imperialist foundations and governments, particularly the U.S.

“Fight the Right” Rhetoric and Apologies for “Labor” Death Squads

GEM: Caboose of the Mexican Popular Front

OCTOBER 7 – The front page of *Workers Vanguard* (18 September), published by the Spartacist League/U.S., is headlined “Mexico in Turmoil.” The article is described as “translated and abridged from *Espartaco*,” the newspaper of the Grupo Espartaquista de México (GEM). But with a significant difference: the title of the same lead article in *Espartaco* (September 2006) reads: “The Attacks of the PAN Against the Workers and Oppressed and the Fight for Socialist Revolution,” referring to the rightist-clericalist National Action Party of Mexican president Vicente Fox. This was also the title of a flyer for a forum by the GEM in Mexico City last August, along with a kicker: “Massive Protests Demand Recount After Dubious Electoral Victory of the PAN.”

“The Attacks of the PAN...” What’s missing from this picture? It’s a headline that should set off alarm bells for any genuine revolutionary. The attacks on the working class by the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), which ruled Mexico with a heavy hand for seven decades and still controls many state governments, and by the populist nationalist PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution), which often poses as a friend of the working people – that’s what’s absent here. By focusing on the “attacks of the PAN,” to the exclusion of the other capitalist parties, the *Espartaco* headline is a crude attempt to sidle up to the huge numbers of PRD supporters who massively demonstrated and camped out for weeks in the center of Mexico City to protest apparent electoral fraud robbing their presidential candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, of victory and handing it to the PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón.

For the past six months, the Mexican working class has been the target of a series of murderous assaults by the forces of “law and order.” *April 20*: strikers occupying the Sicartsa steel mill in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán, attacked by 1,000 local, state and federal police and marines; two workers executed. *May 4*: Texcoco/Atenco, near Mexico City, flower sellers (!) arrested and their defenders set upon by 3,000 local, state and federal police; two youths murdered. *June 14*: striking teachers camped out in the state capital of Oaxaca attacked by an army of 3,500 riot police; in the aftermath, five strike supporters killed. The Mexican working class is under attack, all right, but to sum up these massacres as “attacks of the PAN” is a gross distortion, and ultimately a lie.

Politically, what’s most noteworthy about this string of attacks is that, in every case, they were carried out by police under the orders of *all three* of the major capitalist parties.

“Attacks of the PAN?” What About the PRI and the PRD?

Asiste al foro del Grupo Espartaquista de México

Protestas masivas exigen recuento tras dudosa victoria electoral del PAN

Los ataques del PAN contra los obreros y oprimidos y la lucha por la revolución socialista



ESPARTACO
PUBLICACION DEL GRUPO ESPARTAQUISTA DE MEXICO

NÚMERO 25 SEPTIEMBRE DE 2006 MÉXICO D.F. 20

Amenaza de represión masiva ante repudio a dudosa victoria electoral del PAN

Los ataques del PAN contra los obreros y oprimidos y la lucha por la revolución socialista

1 DE SEPTIEMBRE. El 1º de septiembre, día del último informe de gobierno de Fox, el gobierno panista convocó gran parte de la Ciudad de México en una zona de excepción, movilizando a miles de militares y policías —reubicando a los del gobierno perdedor de la ciudad—, temeroso del descontento social de clases que ha estropeado al país durante los últimos varios meses. Miles de policías sobre los puentes de las avenidas que llevan al Palacio Legislativo de San Lázaro y Bascanteadores en autobuses e incluso carros del sistema Público; camiones con cañones de agua paralizaban las calles y todos los coches del Metro que llevan a San Lázaro fueron cerrados; el Palacio Legislativo estaba rodeado de vallas metálicas de más de dos metros de altura y resguardado por soldados con armas desmontadas. El periódico perdedor *La Jornada* informó el día anterior, con base en numerosas voces de diversos movimientos, que las autoridades federales estaban formando grupos de “disuasión” fuera del PRI en elecciones embudadas por miembros de los Poderes Ejecutivo, Legislativo y Judicial, así como el ejército y la policía. Después de que el PRI le acusara que sus legisladores tratarían de impedir que Fox diera su discurso, el gobierno envió tropas para dispersar a los manifestantes que se acercaba a Fox. Sin embargo, cuando los congresistas del PRI ocuparon la tribuna de San Lázaro esa mañana pocos antes de que Fox hablara, los perdedores se la confundieron directa. Al final, el presidente se fue entregando una copia escueta de su informe final, señalando la primera vez en la historia que a un presidente vencido se le impide presentarse en vivo en televisión nacional ante el Congreso.

El PAN está resuelto a respaldar a su candidato, Felipe Calderón, a cualquier costo —arrojando tanto contra los restos de obreros y pobres que apoyan al PRD como contra sus propias operaciones burguesas—. La movilización masiva de las fuerzas armadas del estado el 1º de septiembre representa un pedregal mortal para el movimiento obrero y la izquierda. El linchaje anticomunista del gobierno contra el PRD burgués se usará para llevar los sindicatos y la izquierda y representa un ataque contra los derechos democráticos de todos. A pesar de semanas de represión política, en el caso de una eventual victoria del PAN al PRD y a sus partidarios.

La sociedad mexicana se está volviendo cada vez más polarizada, con la burguesía mexicana dividida y temerosa de que el descontento generalizado —basta sólo el escandaloso catalizador hacia el apoyo al PRD por parte burgués— se transforme en una explosión social. Tras las elecciones presidenciales del 1 de julio ha habido intensas manifestaciones en apoyo al perdedor Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) —una de las cuales, el 30 de julio, involucró a más de diez millones de personas en la Ciudad de México, en la que se dio la manifestación pacífica más grande en la historia del país—, un proceso contra la dudosa victoria electoral de Felipe Calderón del otrora PAN y contra el Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) que se opone al 30 por ciento de voto sobre AMLO y otorgando un recuento voto por voto de las boletas electorales.

¡Romper con AMLO y el PRD burgueses! ¡Forjar un partido obrero revolucionario internacionalista!

Los obreros de Lázaro Cárdenas se levantan contra la patronal. 10
Obreros en huelga contra el gobierno. 10
Los obreros de las Forjas Socialistas. 10

Ataque a la embajada sueca contra Lázaro y Obrador. 10
Bolsas: Tráfico de mercancías burguesas. 10

The PAN, the PRI and the PRD were competing with each other over who could crack down hardest against “insecurity.” The PRD governor of Michoacán sent state police against the steel workers; the PRD mayor of Texcoco sent municipal cops against the flower sellers; and PRD legislators in Oaxaca voted in advance for the use of “public force” by the PRI governor against the striking teachers. But you would hardly know this by reading the press of the GEM and the ICL. (In

fact, the extensive article has not a word about the role of the PRD in unleashing repression in Atenco and Oaxaca, and the barest mention of Michoacán!

“The Attacks of the PAN” – as a spokesman for the League for the Fourth International remarked in an August 19 forum of our Mexican section, the Grupo Internacionalista, attended by virtually the entire membership of the GEM, this headline is “a gift,” for it explodes the Trotskyist pretensions of the GEM and reveals its real politics. This sleight of hand is a classic opportunist gambit, where ostensible revolutionaries rail against the most openly reactionary forces in order to justify veiled support for the supposedly “progressive” capitalist party. Similarly, opportunist leftists in the United States refer to the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq as “Bush’s War,” thereby exonerating the Democratic Party which also supports the bipartisan *imperialist* war. The generic name of this strategem is “fight the right,” and it is a staple of Stalinist and social-democratic reformists who want to ingratiate themselves with the masses who follow a popular bourgeois party without openly supporting it.

Currently in the U.S., in the lead-up to the 2006 mid-term Congressional elections, the Maoist-Stalinists of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) – via their front group, The World Can’t Wait – are holding marches to “Drive Out the Bush Regime” that are explicitly geared to attract “disappointed Democrats.” Another variation on the same theme is a conference by the social-democratic International Socialist Organization (ISO) titled “Build the Left, Fight the Right.” Yet despite the “socialist” and even “communist” references in the names of the sponsors, these are all placed in the left-right framework of *bourgeois* politics. By singling out the Republican right, they are implicitly (and deliberately) appealing to “left” Democrats. Ditto for references to the “Attacks of the PAN” in Mexico.

In the United States, this ploy was made famous by the Communist Party in the 1936 presidential election when the CP ran its own pro forma presidential candidate (Earl Browder) while telegraphing to its supporters to vote for Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in the name of “combating this reactionary bloc [of the Republican right wing] and defeating its plans.” Declaring that a “People’s Front ... will develop in the form of progressive movements inside and around the Democratic Party,” the CP denounced the attacks of the right on the workers, while remaining silent about the attacks by FDR.

The popular front is a class-collaborationist coalition chaining the mass organizations of the working class to sectors of the class enemy by means of an alliance with bourgeois parties and politicians. In the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, the Chilean Unidad Popular government of 1970-73 and elsewhere, Stalinist and social-democratic reformists have erected popular fronts as dikes to hold back the struggle of



Carlos Torres/La Jornada Michoacán

“Attacks of the PAN”? In Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán, police forces under the command of PAN (federal), PRI (local) and PRD (state) all participated in assault on strikers occupying Sicartsa steel plant; two workers were executed.

the workers until it comes time for a Franco or Pinochet to massacre them. And for nearly two decades, as the decaying one-party regime of the PRI-government has come apart, Mexico’s capitalist rulers (and their U.S. imperialist patrons) have required a popular front to act as a roadblock to revolution. Today they need it more than ever.

The ICL has been moving to the right for some time, moving from abstention from the class struggle to abandonment of key programmatic tenets of Leninism and Trotskyism. Its dysfunctional Mexican section, under orders from its center, sat out most of the 1999-2000 National University (UNAM) strike and has been next to invisible in four months of labor insurgency in Oaxaca. But in the heat of the convulsive class battles that have shaken Mexico this year, their torturous formulas have led them to imitate classical popular-front politics, and worse. In attempting to force an American framework on semi-colonial Mexico, pretending that the corporatist labor bosses appointed by the capitalist state are just a bunch of sellout union bureaucrats like the Teamsters’ Jimmy Hoffa, they end up apologizing for “labor” death squads that are literally killing strikers.

The “Fantasmagorical” Popular Front

In Mexico, ever since the political *apertura* (opening) in the late 1970s and early ’80s when the PRI regime tried to disguise its single-party rule by providing more space for token opposition candidates, large-scale electoral fraud has been the way right-wing forces have kept a lock on power. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was probably robbed of victory in 1988 by a highly suspicious “crash” of the electoral computer system in the midst of the vote counting. At the time, various ostensibly Trotskyist groups which hadn’t openly called for votes to Cárdenas jumped on the *cardenista* bandwagon calling to “defend the vote.” The

PRT (Revolutionary Workers Party, Mexican followers of Ernest Mandel), for example, called to “support the people in the active legal defense of their vote.”

In the aftermath of the recent (July 2) Mexican presidential election, up to 2 million people came out at the call of PRD standard-bearer López Obrador, widely known by his initials AMLO, to protest election fraud. For six weeks, a huge *megaplantón* (encampment) of AMLO supporters occupied the Zócalo, Mexico City’s central plaza, and several miles of the elegant main avenue, Paseo de la Reforma. Various pseudo-Trotskyists such as the Militante group (which claims to be the “Marxist” wing of the bourgeois PRD!) and what remains of the PRT (which called to vote for AMLO) joined the *plantón*. Others like the LUS (Socialist Unity League) and LTS (Socialist Workers League) which didn’t formally call to vote for AMLO quickly climbed aboard the “anti-fraud” train.

Bringing up the rear was the Grupo Espartaquista. Like the LUS and LTS, it did not call for votes to the PRD. But while limply declaring that “we do not oppose a vote-by-vote recount,” the GEM maintains a fig leaf of independence, saying “we are not joining the current PRD campaign, whose objective is to put López Obrador in power.” At the same time, in order to gain favor with the followers of AMLO, *Espartaco* tilts toward the PRD with headlines on “The Attacks of the PAN....” To back up their tilt, they argue: “The exploited and oppressed masses of Mexico have shown that they *want* to struggle, but they presently regard the bourgeois PRD and AMLO as their representatives.” And then they launch a lengthy polemic against the Grupo Internacionalista, saying: “The GI is incapable of dealing with the fact that the workers see the bourgeois PRD as *their* leadership.”

How so? *Espartaco* writes: “According to them [the Grupo Internacionalista], the principle obstacle in Mexico to workers revolution is a fantasmagorical ‘popular front’ around the PRD.” The tiny Grupo Espartaquista may not “recognize” the popular front in Mexico, but precisely because of its willful denial of this reality, the GEM has been sucked into the wake of the political alliance that chains large sections of the working class to the bourgeois populist candidate López Obrador and his party. The Grupo Internacionalista, in contrast, fights to break the workers and oppressed from the AMLO pop front.

Going back to the 1988 election, a popular front coalesced around the candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas to siphon off the burgeoning workers’ resistance to the starvation and privatization policies implemented by the PRI government on behalf of Wall Street and Washington. Over the years, this front tied various “independent” unions to the PRD, which was founded by Cárdenas supporters from the PRI and a panoply of leftist groups headed by the remnants of the now defunct Communist Party of Mexico. The popular front was not limited to electoral support but also took the form of various coalitions against privatization, for national dialogue, against neo-liberalism, for democratic transition, etc. including the same cast of “independent” unions and AMLO’s Party of the

Democratic Revolution.

Far from being “fantasmagorical,” the popular front around the PRD could be seen graphically in the streets of Mexico City of late. In the *megaplantón* along Reforma there was one tent after another of the SNTSS (National Union of Social Security Workers), STUNAM (National University Workers Union), SITUAM (Union of Workers of the Autonomous University of Mexico), CNTE (National Coordinating Committee of Educational Workers), SUTIN (nuclear workers), National Bottlers Union, Union of Workers of the Federal District, National Alliance of Democratic Oil Workers, Trade Unionists for Democracy, etc., many with their union symbols next to that of the “Coalición por el Bien de Todos” (Coalition for the Good of All), the electoral vehicle for AMLO’s candidacy (see photos).

If that were not enough, on September 16 the mammoth National Democratic Convention in Mexico City’s Zócalo called by López Obrador proclaimed a Broad Progressive Front (FAP – Frente Amplio Progresista) including the PRD and the PT (Party of Labor, a minor bourgeois party set up by the PRI to harvest workers votes and now aligned with AMLO), with the support of the SME (electrical workers), the STRM (telephone workers), and various unions affiliated to the overlapping labor federations UNT (National Workers Union), FSM (Mexican Labor Federation) and FNUAS (National Front for Trade-Union Unity and Autonomy). The popular front around the PRD is not only very much alive, it is a principal obstacle to victory for the Oaxaca strike as leaders of the teachers’ union (Section 22 of the SNTE/CNTE) and the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) have given “tactical” political support to the PRD.

For almost a decade after 1988, from its very inception the GEM called on Mexican workers to break from the popular front around Cárdenas and the PRD. Today it does not. Why not? *Espartaco* argues, “The GI invokes the existence of a popular front around the PRD to prettify the present consciousness of the working class, denying the fundamental ideological obstacle of bourgeois nationalism and illusions in the democratic reform of the capitalist state.” According to the contorted reasoning of the ICL, calling on Mexican workers to break from a popular front would “prettify” their consciousness because they are so besotted with bourgeois nationalism and democratic illusions that it doesn’t matter that their mass organizations are chained to a class-collaborationist coalition.

And let’s not forget Roman Catholicism. According to *Workers Vanguard* and *Espartaco*, “undoubtedly the majority of those who support the PRD also identify, in one degree or another, with some of the reactionary Catholic values that the PAN prominently pushes.” On what basis have these self-appointed experts in religious sociology made this determination? Never mind the long tradition of bourgeois anti-clericalism in Mexico, or that PRD supporters repeatedly clashed with Cardinal Norberto Rivera at the doors of the Metropolitan Cathedral on the edge of the Zócalo. When you add it all up – nationalism, democratic illusions, Catholicism – for the ICL, Mexican workers are just too damn backward to have a popular front.

This is imperialist arrogance masquerading as Marxism.

“The mass of workers and radicalized youth who participate in defensive struggles no longer identify with the ideals of communism,” pontificates the spokesman of the GEM, even as red flags proliferate in Oaxaca. This is what the bourgeois press said over and over about the French youth revolt last spring, and it is a mantra that the ICL has been repeating all over the world in order to justify their abstentionist policies. These deserters from Trotskyism claim that the key thesis of Leon Trotsky’s Transitional Program – that the historical crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of proletarian leadership – is outdated, because it supposedly “predates the present deep regression of proletarian consciousness” with the destruction of the Soviet Union. At issue now is not so much the leadership but “the working classes across the world,” dixit the ICL in its revised “Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program” (1998).

In Bolivia, where worker-peasant uprisings toppled two governments in two years, the ICL goes so far as to assert that the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International “conjure up a proletariat where it barely, if at all, exists” (see “Spartacist League Disappears the Bolivian Proletariat,” *The Internationalist* No. 24, Summer 2006 for our refutation of this anti-Marxist idiocy). In the ICL’s idealist fantasyland, the Bolivian workers’ consciousness evidently regressed so far that they ceased to exist as a class. We are waiting with baited breath for the GEM to inform us that in there is no working class in Oaxaca as well, where the GEM has been notably absent in three months of a convulsive teachers strike (except for a brief foray as part of a national student congress).

The other main argument of the GEM/ICL for why there is not and cannot be a popular front in Mexico is that there is no mass workers party. The popular front “refers to the political subordination of the mass parties of the working class to the capitalists,” decrees the ICL. “In Mexico, such a party of the working class has never existed, not even a reformist bourgeois workers party in the style of British Labourism.” So since Mexican workers have been incapable of producing a Labour Party, they can’t have a popular front either. But the entire premise is false. Where did Trotsky, author of the definitive Marxist analysis of popular frontism, declare that popular fronts are limited to mass workers parties?

Let’s take a look. In a January 1939 discussion on Latin America, Trotsky referred to the Guomindang (KMT) of Chinese dictator Chiang Kai-shek, Lázaro Cárdenas’ Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM, precursor of the PRI) and



Internationalist photo

No popular front in Mexico? “Independent” unions were heavily present in giant PRD *plantón* (encampment) in Mexico City for six weeks this summer. Here: the Social Security Workers Union (SNTSS).

Haya de la Torre’s American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) – all of them bourgeois parties – as “the People’s Front in the form of a party.” And the Manifesto of the Fourth International on “Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution” (May 1940) declares:

“But in the colonial and semi-colonial countries not only in China and India, but in Latin America – the fraud of the ‘People’s Fronts’ still continues to paralyze the working masses, converting them into cannon fodder for the ‘progressive’ bourgeoisie and in this way creating an indigenous political basis for imperialism.”

In none of these countries – not in China, India or anywhere in Latin America – were there mass workers parties at the time Trotsky wrote these lines. For that matter, the ICL for decades referred to popular fronts in El Salvador, Algeria, South Africa and elsewhere in semi-colonial countries where there were no mass workers parties. The latter-day ICL’s redefinition of the popular front, denying its applicability to most of the so-called “Third World,” was invented to attack the Internationalist Group (see “Declaration of the Permanent Revolution Faction,” *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998).

But the issue is not just semantic, a dispute over definitions. At bottom, what’s at stake is whether revolutionaries fight for working-class independence from the class enemy. The Grupo Internacionalista and the League for the Fourth International call on Mexican workers to break with the bourgeois popular front around the PRD. The Grupo Espartaquista and the ICL do not, on the spurious grounds that to do so would “prettify” the consciousness of the Mexican workers. These pseudo-Trotskyists dismiss the powerful Mexican pro-



Banner of "Trade Unionists for Democracy" in PRD megaplantón. Note union symbols next to that of the PRD-led Coalition for the Good of All.

letariat as hopelessly mired in nationalism and Roman Catholicism, rather than intervening in the class struggle to break the organizational and ideological chains of subjugation.

GEM: "CTM Socialists"...

A second theme of the *Espartaco/Workers Vanguard* attack on the Grupo Internacionalista and the League for the Fourth International is the GEM/ICL's shameful apology for the corporatist pseudo-unions in Mexico. These instruments of state control of labor are inherited from the semi-bonapartist regime of the Institutional Revolutionary Party which ran Mexico from 1929 to 2000. Beginning under the rule of Plutarco Elías Calles, the PRI and its predecessors erected a corporatist regime, borrowing organizational forms from Mussolini's Italy. (The 1931 Federal Labor Code was literally modeled on its Italian fascist counterpart.) But in semi-colonial countries with weak national bourgeoisies, the political content of these forms varied, as capitalist governments often have what Leon Trotsky called a "bonapartist *sui generis*" (unique or distinctive) character. That is, they can govern by chaining the workers under a police dictatorship or they may maneuver between the imperialists and a relatively strong proletariat, even offering concessions to the workers (like Mexico's oil and rail nationalizations).

When the PRI-government was at the height of power, virtually everyone in the country was enrolled in the multiple mass organizations that were organically part of the state party. Peasants were part of the CNC (National Peasant Federation); youth were part of the CJM (Mexican Youth Federation); small businessmen were part of the CNOP (National Confederation of Popular Organizations); women were part of *Mujeres Revolucionarias*; architects were part of the *Arquitectos*

Revolucionarios, and so on. When combative workers unions arose in the mid-1930s, the populist-nationalist president Lázaro Cárdenas moved to co-opt them by setting up the Mexican Workers Federation (CTM), which became part of the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM – predecessor to the PRI). Describing a worldwide tendency toward state control of labor, Trotsky wrote in his unfinished essay "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay" (August 1940):

"In Mexico the trade unions have been transformed by law into semi-state institutions and have, in the nature of things, assumed a semi-totalitarian character. The stateization of the trade unions was, according to the conception of the legislators, introduced in the interests of the workers in order to assure them an influence upon the governmental and economic life. But insofar as foreign imperialist capitalism dominates the national state and insofar as it is able, with the

assistance of internal reactionary forces, to overthrow the unstable democracy and replace it with outright fascist dictatorship, to that extent the legislation relating to the trade unions can easily become a weapon in the hands of imperialist dictatorship."

Evolving from semi-state institutions under Cárdenas, during the course of World War II and through the post-war "red purges" carried out at the behest of the U.S. government, the CTM unions became thoroughly integrated into the capitalist state. By the 1950s, quantity had turned into quality. Union leaders were henceforth named directly by the PRI-government, labor militants (not only Communists) were fired by the thousands and many jailed for years, the CTM "labor" federation engaged in systematic strikebreaking and maintained squads of *pistoleros* to assassinate union oppositionists on a mass scale. Over the next half century, virtually every major labor struggle in Mexico (teachers in 1956-58, railroad workers in 1958, electrical workers in 1976-76, garment workers in the mid-1980s, miners and steel workers in 1989, maquiladora [free trade zone] workers from 1983 on) has been directed *against* the *charro* (corporatist) "sindicatos" which claimed to represent the workers but were actually labor cops for the bourgeoisie.

The fundamental characteristic of corporatist "unions" is that they are part the machinery of a corporatist bourgeois regime which regiments every sector of society, sometimes buying popular support by throwing some crumbs to labor rather than simply repressing workers as under the Pinochet dictatorship. Such corporatist apparatuses are not unique to Mexico, but can be found in a number of semi-colonial and intermediate capitalist countries with bonapartist and semi-bonapartist regimes. In Algeria and other African countries where a single-party regime arose after independence, there

were similar labor groups among the mass organizations of the state party. As the single party loses its control, its labor apparatuses are thrown into crisis and independent unions are thrown up or break away.

In Argentina under Juan Domingo Perón from the mid-1940s to the early '50s, another example of a bonapartist *sui generis* regime such as Trotsky analyzed in Cárdenas' Mexico, workers unions led by Communists, socialists and anarchists were taken over or destroyed and replaced by labor organizations under the control of the government labor department. Likewise, in Brazil under Getulio Vargas in the 1930s and '40s and again under the 1964-1985 military dictatorship there were corporatist government-controlled "unions," which gave rise to huge struggles for independent unions. Our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil participated in the 1980s strikes and in the early years of the Workers Party (PT) which grew out of them, while opposing the PT-led popular front from 1989 on, which in 2002 made ex-corporatist labor faker Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva president to dismantle workers' gains.

The ICL and its Mexican offshoot refuse to recognize this in large part because they seek to force the Mexican reality into the framework of American trade-unionism, derived from an imperialist economy which occasionally throws some crumbs to a labor aristocracy. Corporatist unions such as in Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Algeria have never existed in the U.S., nor could they in any imperialist country, except under a fascist/bonapartist dictatorship. On the other hand, a Labor Party on the British model is well-nigh impossible to build in an impoverished semi-colonial capitalist country, yet popular-fronts and popular-frontism can be found in most "Third World" countries that have a proletariat.

The issue of corporatism underlies the recent mine and metal workers' strikes in Mexico. In late February, after a mine disaster at Pasta de Conchos in the state of Coahuila in which 65 miners were buried alive, the *charro* "union" leader, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, under pressure from the survivors and families, criticized the mine operator, Grupo Mexico, of "industrial homicide." Gómez Urrutia is a lawyer who inherited the leadership of the National Union of Mining and Metallurgical Workers of Mexico (SNTMMRM) from his father, Napoleón Gómez Sada, and was installed by the federal labor ministry in 2001. But the Fox government, closely tied to the mine bosses, would not brook any criticism by its puppet "union" chief, so it dumped "Napito" in favor of a more pliant pawn, Elías Morales. This unleashed a national strike involving several hundred thousand mine and steel workers.

The SNTMMRM is no defender of the workers. It was co-responsible for the Pasta de Conchos miners' deaths, having routinely signed off on the safety inspections in the notoriously unsafe mines. Relatives told reporters that the union and the company "are the same thing." The government-installed "union" chief Gómez Urrutia was no less an instrument of the bosses than his government-installed replacement, Morales. But all class-conscious workers would object to the

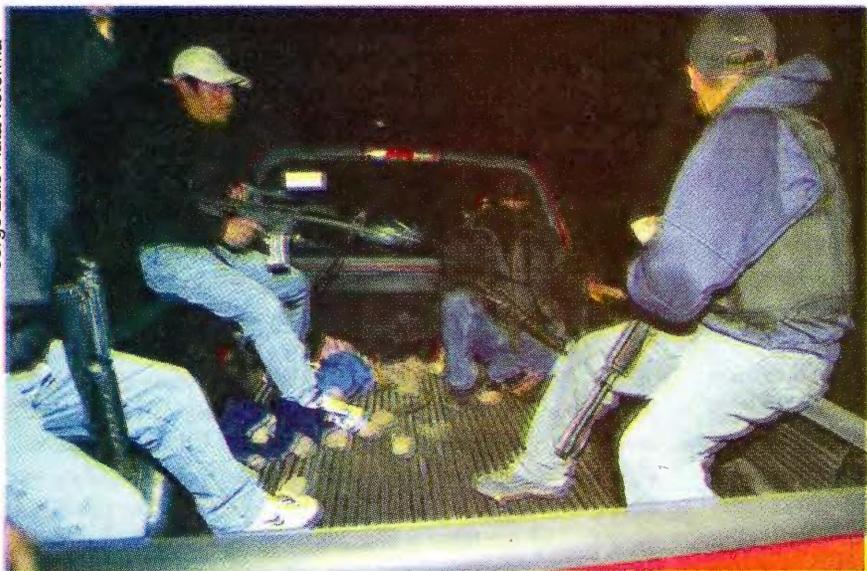
attempt by the capitalist state to name and remove leaders of what claim to be labor unions. The Grupo Internacionalista defended the miners' strikes and urged other sectors of the working class to go out on a national strike against all government interference and for class independence from the bosses. At the same time, the GI called for the formation of independent workers committees to break with corporatism and forge class-struggle unions (see "Capitalist Murder in Pasta de Conchos," *El Internacionalista/Edición México* No. 2, August 2006).

The SNTMMRM chief called the strikes off after a couple of days, leaving some of the most militant locals (Sicartsa in Michoacán, Cananea, Agua Prieta and Nacozari in Sonora, Sombrerete in Zacatecas) to go it alone. Under Gómez Sr., strikes by these same locals were repeatedly sabotaged by the national "union." Yet the GEM now declares: "The GI didn't even defend the miners union against state attack! In accordance with its adaptation to the PRD, this group claims that the unions affiliated with the PRI – like the miners union – are not workers organizations, but the '*class enemy*' (*El Internacionalista/Edición México* No. 1, May 2001)." The *Espartaco* article goes on to say that this "would also apply to the SNTE and its Section 22 in Oaxaca." It conveniently doesn't mention that the Oaxaca teachers themselves have been in revolt *for years* against the national SNTE (National Union of Education Workers), which has emphatically opposed the Oaxaca strike, is financing a group (the CCL) that is scabbing, and now supports sending federal police and troops against the strikers. Interestingly, the CCL is led by prominent supporters of the Oaxaca PRD, whose leaders have also called for sending federal forces to smash the strike.

.... Become Apologists for Death Squads

The decay of the corporatist system of the PRI is behind the explosive struggle by the Oaxaca teachers. The president of the national "union," the SNTE, Elba Esther Gordillo, was appointed by the Secretary of Government at an all-night meeting in the secretariat, after her predecessor (Carlos Jonguitud, also a PRI flunkey) had been "resigned" hours earlier in a meeting with President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Between them, Gordillo and Jonguitud are responsible for ordering the assassination of more than 150 SNTE dissidents. Lately, with the PRI's power eclipsed, Gordillo transferred her institutional allegiances to the Fox regime, and set up a new "party," the PANAL (National Alliance Party), to support the PAN candidate Calderón.

Section 22, on the other hand, is a key component of the breakaway CNTE (Coordinating Committee of Education Workers), which grew out of a revolt by teachers in Oaxaca and Chiapas 20 years ago. In many ways, the CNTE and Section 22 function as a separate union, calling statewide teachers strikes and national mobilizations of up to 500,000 teachers, directed against the national SNTE and the government's Education Secretariat where SNTE chief Gordillo & Co. generally select personnel and set policy. In the current Oaxaca strike, one can see numerous cartoons



Gunmen from the corporatist “labor” federation CROC participated in the “convoy of death” which drove around Oaxaca in late August shooting and killing strikers.

lambasting the national union, such as the one shown here (opposite page) portraying the SNTE, state and federal governments as a serpent headed by Gordillo (EEGM) while Section 22 and the CNTE are rowing the boat and fending off the vultures such as the CCL scabs egged on by the national SNTE leadership.

To “defend” the SNTE and the other *charro* “unions” as the GEM does is to defend strikebreaking, and worse: murdering strikers. As a militant of the Grupo Internacionalista explained to the GEM membership attending our August 19 forum at the Museo León Trotsky, the main corporatist “union” present in Oaxaca City is the CROC (Revolutionary Federation of Workers and Peasants, in which the “Revolutionary” refers to its affiliation with the PRI). The CROC was set up some decades ago to provide a more militant face for the increasingly discredited CTM. But now it is gyrating wildly, siding with the PRD when it looked like AMLO would win the presidency, going over to the PAN after Calderón was declared victor, and acting as an instrument for PRI governors in several states. In Oaxaca, the CROC is a key component of the still-intact PRI regime which has ruled the state uninterrupted for three quarters of a century. At the behest of PRI governor Ulises Ruiz, the CROC called a “strike” in December 2004 against the newspaper *Noticias*, the only local media to oppose Ruiz and support the teachers. Although the “strikers” didn’t even work at the paper, the government recognized their strike and a tent with CROC thugs has shut down the paper’s office ever since.

CROC goons have been an ever-present menace, and now they have launched *death squads* against the strikers. On the night of August 21-22, after the Oaxaca state attorney general denounced the teachers strike as “urban guerrillas,” the police

mounted an operation to “clear the streets.” This involved a caravan of several hundred gunmen in 34 vehicles, which careened through the city shooting wildly at strikers’ barricades and encampments. Two teachers were badly burned when they and their vehicle was torched by the gun thugs, several photographers were fired on, and an architect, Lorenzo San Pablo Cervantes, was shot to death. The CROC was an integral part of this “convoy of death.” *La Jornada* (23 August) reported:

“The ‘mopping up’ operation was joined by several pick-up trucks filled with goons and gunmen of the CROC, whose leader is David Aguilar; they drove around menacingly, at very high speed.... People took it upon themselves to cut them off by erecting new barricades and isolating them.”

Noticias (23 August) also noted the presence of the CROC:

“Thugs riding on pick-up trucks and SUVs, led by members of the CROC, also joined the officers from different police forces in their attack. In the face of this, residents of various neighborhoods and suburbs came into the streets and surrounded the radio station to join the defense and set up barricades with city buses, tires, rocks, sticks and other objects to prevent another attack.

“Residents of other projects did the same in streets and avenues to try and surround the aggressors. Around 2:50 a.m., part of the police convoy ... in the suburban town of Santa Cruz Xoxocatlán was surrounded by members of the teachers’ and popular movement. The police fired on them, although there were no reports of wounded.”

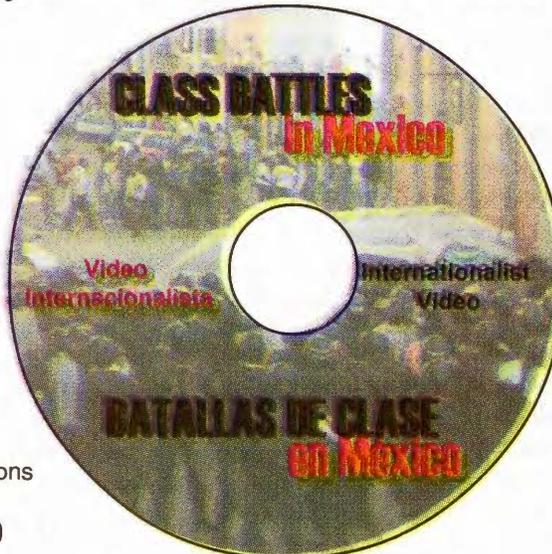
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And it's not just the CROC. During a September 28 lock-out called by the Oaxaca employers' federation, there were plans to stage provocations which could then serve as an excuse for federal military and police intervention. *La Jornada* (29 September) obtained detailed plans for the operation, which include the following: "Four groups of PRI members affiliated to the CROC and the CTM, as well as police and municipal employees, are ready to attack businesses and passers-by, kidnap and burn vehicles, attack the population and news media, passing themselves off as members of the APPO." The only reason this didn't take place is that the lockout was a miserable flop, with barely 10 percent of the businesses shutting down.

So when we insist that the corporatist so-called "labor" federations are not workers unions, but labor cops for the bosses and the capitalist government, this is no abstract question. They are literally on the other side of the barricades, firing on the strikers and dousing them with gasoline to burn them alive, organizing scabbing and seeking by every means to break the strike. This is what the GEM is defending and alibiing when it says it "defends the unions" like the SNTE, CTM and CROC. During the GEM's brief foray into Oaxaca during the student congress in early September, we offered to take them over to the CROC tent so they could try to sell their paper to these "unionists," but our offer was declined.

GEM Tails Popular Front in the Name of Defending Democratic Rights

The third strand of the threadbare GEM/ICL polemic against the Grupo Internacionalista and League for the Fourth International is to accuse us of "renouncing the perspective of permanent revolution." They tried this tack before, in 1997, when the supposed proof was that we insisted that Mexico was a capitalist country and not "semi-feudal" or having "feudal remnants" and "elements of the Spanish colonial feudal heritage" such as "feudal peonage." We pointed out that not only is this false, it is precisely the line of the Stalinists, who

use it to justify their call for a *bourgeois-democratic* revolution in Latin America. The GEM/ICL kept repeating this reformist canard for over a year, until it dawned on their principal leader that to talk of pre-capitalist survivals in Mexico was a "mistake" and anti-Marxist besides (see *The Internationalist* No. 5). Oh, well.

Never mind, like a bad penny, now the same charge is back, only this time based on the allegation that we supposedly oppose fighting for democratic rights: "The GI *rejects* the struggle for democratic rights, thus rejecting the permanent revolution" (*Espartaco*, September 2006). And exactly what "democratic struggles of the masses" is it that the GEM/ICL accuses us of rejecting? The massive demonstrations and en-

campment mounted by the PRD to protest electoral fraud? Actually, in its flyer the GEM said "we do not support this PRD campaign." So what about the Grupo Internacionalista and LFI? In our article "Mexico: Bourgeois Elections and Workers Blood" (*El Internacionalista/Edición México* No. 2, August 2006, an abridged version of which was published in *The Internationalist* No. 24, Summer 2006) we write:

"Was there fraud in the Mexican elections? How could there not be?... *Fraud in Mexico is not an aberration but an integral part of the electoral process.* And not just in Mexico.... As Marxists, we give no political support to any of the competing capitalist parties and fight everywhere to organize revolutionary workers parties....

"Particularly in such a close and hard-fought election, where there are plenty of potentially suspicious elements, we support the demand for a recount, vote by vote, ballot box by ballot box – and not by the duplicitous electoral tribunal but in the light of day, before the population. But while most of the left has enthusiastically climbed aboard the AMLO express, dropping earlier criticisms of the PRD candidate and instead calling to 'defend the vote,' the Grupo Internacionalista warns that at present the mammoth marches called by López Obrador are in fact *political rallies* on behalf of his Coalition for the Good of All....

"But if the struggle passes from the terrain of the electoral circus, if the capitalist state declares a victor by means of massive fraud, imposing the candidate of an incumbent regime that can only stay in power by a repressive crackdown, if instead of giant *pejemarchas* [pro-AMLO marches], there are mass protests against actions pointing to a police-military dictatorship, proletarian revolutionaries would call for a *working-class mobilization against the bonapartist threat.*"

In the face of the repeated police and military attacks, we continue to call to break from the AMLO popular front and to build a revolutionary workers party, as well as for a "national strike against the murderous government" and for "workers defense committees, independent of all bourgeois politicians and par-



Here is the political pressure the GEM is succumbing to: hundreds of thousands of PRD supporters filled Mexico City's Zócalo in April 2005 to protest removal of AMLO's executive immunity. GEM joined demos with leaflet "Down with the Lifting of López Obrador's Immunity!" Grupo Internacionalista said demos were political support for López Obrador, not defense of democratic rights. AMLO's immunity was lifted but he still ran for president.

ties." So the GEM/ICL contention that the GI/LFI "rejects the struggle for democratic rights" falls flat on its face.

After quoting pieces of the above, *Espartaco* pontificates: "The point is that the struggle in defense of the democratic rights of the rights of the population is *not counterposed* to the defense of the working class against a bonapartist threat: in fact, *they are one and the same*." This formula has some weighty ambiguities. Certainly, for proletarian revolutionaries working-class struggle against a bonapartist threat includes the struggle to defend democratic rights. But bourgeois liberals and petty-bourgeois opportunists often seek to build support for a class-collaborationist popular front by posing the struggle in terms of democratic rights. In fighting against a threatened or actual coup, communists do not *limit themselves* to defending democratic rights but instead seek to lead the struggle to workers revolution.

In fact, we are quite specific about when and how "proletarian revolutionaries would intervene on the side of the working masses fighting to defend democratic rights." And this is not merely hypothetical – we cited our call on Haitian workers to mobilize this past February:

"With open confrontation in the streets over the attempt by right-wing reactionaries to steal the election, revolutionary Marxists stand on the side of the vast mass of poor black Haitians against the U.N. occupation forces and Haitian police on the other side of the barricades, while giving no political support to Préval and Aristide.... Trotskyists would have opposed voting for "Préval prezidan," or for any of the capitalist candidates, while calling today for the formation of committees of working and poor people to expropriate the bourgeoisie and drive out the U.N. mercenary occupation forces."

—"Attempted Election Theft in Haiti" (*The Internationalist*

No. 23, April-May 2006)

The GEM/ICL writes that "if López Obrador won the elections," they would "defend his right to occupy the post" of president. Well did he, and do they? And when and how would they defend that right – by mass mobilizations in the streets of the capital such as we have just seen? They don't say. The GI/LFI states that if the struggle departs from the electoral plane and leads to class battles in the streets, revolutionaries would fight alongside the pro-AMLO masses against the attempt to impose a government by military means, while *we continue to call for a "workers and peasants government," not an AMLO government.*

For the centrist ICL and the GEM, as for all the opportunists, the fight against bonapartism is a (bourgeois) democratic rather than (proletarian) revolutionary struggle. *Espartaco* quotes a 1916 article by Lenin against Yu. Piatakov (P. Kievski) on the need for the proletariat to be "educated in the struggle for democracy." Fine and good, but they do not cite where Lenin writes in the same piece: "The Marxist solution of the problem of democracy is for the proletariat to *utilise all* democratic institutions and aspirations in its class struggle against the bourgeoisie in order to prepare for its overthrow and assure its own victory." They quote Lenin again on the Bolsheviks' August 1917 military bloc with the petty-bourgeois "democrat" Kerensky against the tsarist general Kornilov. This was not a parliamentary dispute or political demonstration, such as currently in Mexico, but a battle in the trenches against an attempted coup. And they leave out where Lenin writes:

"*Even now* we must not support Kerensky's government. This is unprincipled. We may be asked: aren't we going to fight against Kornilov? Of course we must! But this is not the same thing; there is a dividing line here..."

"We shall fight, we are fighting against Kornilov, *just as Kerensky's troops do*, but we do not support Kerensky."

Leon Trotsky, writing about the Spanish Civil War, likewise sharply distinguished between any form of political support to the bourgeois "democrats" and military struggle against the fascists and Francoist military plotters when the struggle passed from the parliamentary plane to that of civil war:

"Everywhere and always, wherever and whenever revolutionary workers are not powerful enough immediately to overthrow the bourgeois regime, they defend even rotten bourgeois democracy from fascism, and they especially defend their own position inside bourgeois democracy.

"The workers defend bourgeois democracy, however, not by the methods of bourgeois democracy (Popular Fronts, electoral blocs, government coalitions, etc.) but by their own methods, that is, by the methods of revolutionary class struggle. Thus, by participating in the military struggle against fascism they continue at the same time to defend their own organizations, their rights, and their interests from the bourgeois-democratic government."

—Leon Trotsky, "Answer to Questions on the Spanish Situation" (September 1937)

The Trotskyists did not fight with the aim of restoring the Spanish bourgeois Republican politicians like Azaña and Companys to the offices they were elected to. Rather, they fought in the trenches alongside Republican soldiers against the Francoists — and against repression by the Stalinists and bourgeois Republicans — for the goal of workers revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The current situation in Mexico in many respects harks back to the battle last year over the Fox government's removal of AMLO's executive immunity. At that time, the GEM joined in the massive pro-PRD demonstrations with a leaflet titled, "Down with the Lifting of López Obrador's Immunity!" It portrayed the attack on AMLO as a "blow against the democratic rights of the population," pretending that if his immunity from prosecution (for actions as head of government of the Federal District) was removed, he would be blocked from running for president. We insisted, on the contrary, that immunity for executives of capitalist governments is not a democratic right, that López Obrador was not the PRD candidate, and that lifting this immunity would not *ipso facto* prevent AMLO from running. We wrote:

"[T]he Grupo Internacionalista warns that the threat of a future anti-democratic prohibition is being used, with considerable success, to gain sympathy and political support for López Obrador and the PRD, a bourgeois nationalist party.... While defending the elementary democratic right of any political party to run in the elections with whatever candidates it chooses (even in the case of the big capitalist parties), we point out that the workers, peasants and other sectors of the exploited and oppressed must not let themselves be hoodwinked by the electoral maneuverings nor place any confidence in any side in this dispute among the bourgeoisie....

"For now, 14 months before the elections, this is a pre-fraud being readied against a pre-candidate in a pre-electoral period which is serving as a pretext to swell support for the popular front. Should Fox and the PRI be so bold as

to carry out their idiocy — imposing a ban on the politician who is, by far, the most popular of the potential candidates in the public opinion polls — then we would defend the right of López Obrador to run for president, in the framework of our efforts to debunk his candidacy and those of the other capitalist parties."

Did the GI "**reject** the struggle for the defense of democratic demands"? Not at all. We said that we defended the right of any party to present any candidate it wanted, but that was not what was going on here. We pointed out that executive immunity is an *anti-democratic* guarantee of impunity for the capitalist rulers, one that had been used by the authors of the 1968 and 1971 massacres, and that this is quite distinct from parliamentary immunity, which protects legislators from arbitrary actions by those very same rulers. The GEM responds by saying: "We do not take a position on such precepts of bourgeois legislation in the abstract, but rather based on the interest of the *working class* in each *concrete* case." In other words, they are not acting on a matter of principle but of political calculation, and what they see as the "interest of the working class" is that large numbers of workers supported AMLO as their candidate. So the GEM gave AMLO backhanded support in the guise of defending his democratic rights.

In any case, the verdict on this episode is in: *López Obrador's immunity was lifted, yet this did not prevent him from running in the July 2 election as the candidate of the PRD for president.* Case closed.

Rearguard of the Popular Front or Vanguard of the Proletariat

Over the last several years, in reaction to the counter-revolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, the SL/U.S. and the other components of the ICL have turned sharply to the right and renounced a series of central Trotskyist programmatic positions. An important aspect of these revisions is that they take place just when the issues become hot.

It is a fundamental precept of Leninism, that in an imperialist war revolutionaries stand for the defeat "their own" imperialist bourgeoisie. In the United States, the SL for years called to "Defeat U.S. Imperialism!" notably in the Persian Gulf War of 1990-91. But amid the "anti-terrorist" war hysteria whipped up by the government following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the SL/ICL dropped the call for defeat of "their own" imperialist bourgeoisie. On top of this, they added a sinister smear, accusing the Internationalist Group of "anti-Americanism" — literally, "Playing the Counterfeit Card of Anti-Americanism" — and being soft on Islamic fundamentalism, because we upheld the Leninist program of revolutionary defeatism toward imperialist powers engaged in colonial wars.

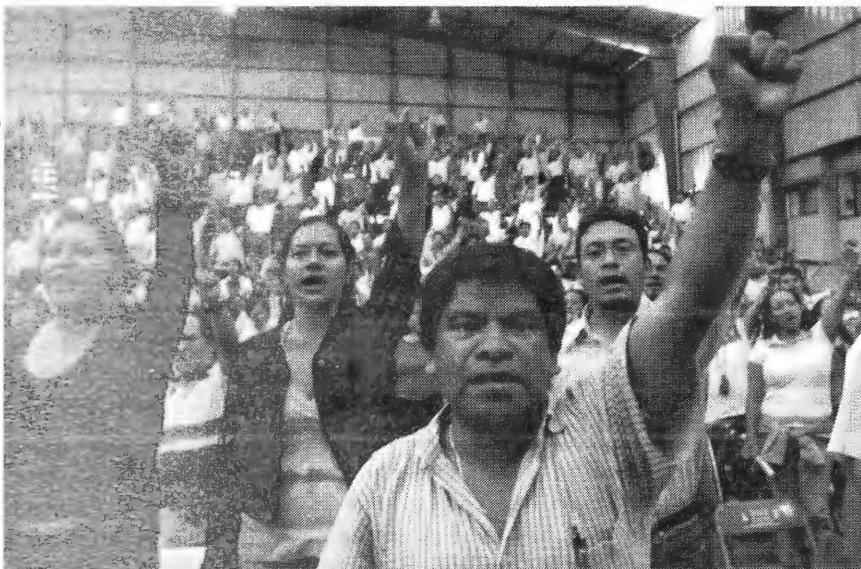
Similarly, ever since the Vietnam War, the SL/U.S. had regularly called for transport workers to "hot cargo" (refuse to handle) war materiel during imperialist wars. They continued to do so up to September 2002, just as the Pentagon war machine was going into high gear shipping military goods to the Near East out of West Coast ports. Yet the minute the U.S. government slapped a Taft-Hartley injunction on the

Guillermo Ogam/Notimex



Which side are you on? GEM calls to “defend” SNTE while teachers of Oaxaca Section 22 SNTE/CNTE are fighting against *charro* (corporatist) national SNTE, which opposes strike. Below: Union ranks vote Sept. 27 to continue strike.

Marco Ugarte/AP



ILWU dock workers, alleging that a walkout could affect the war effort, the SL abruptly dropped the call for “hot cargoing.” After much flim-flam and accusing the IG of “irrevolutionary phrasemongering,” they finally admitted that they dropped this call for proletarian action against the war, as they had earlier dropped the call for workers strikes against the war, blaming it on the backward consciousness of the workers.

In Mexico, we have pointed out that the GEM had called since its inception in 1990 to break with the popular front around the PRD. But after expelling youth cadres in late 1996 who subsequently founded the Grupo Internacionalista, suddenly in May 1997 the GEM declared that there was no popular front in Mexico. Not coincidentally, this discovery took place just as the PRD was about to win the elections for the government of the Federal District. The GI published an open letter to the GEM,

titled: “To Fight the Popular Front, You Have to Recognize That It Exists.” Amid the wave of popular support for the PRD, the GEM didn’t want to fight for the workers’ organizations to break from the popular front. And last year, responding to the groundswell of support for presidential hopeful López Obrador in the “hip” Mexico City petty-bourgeoisie it orients to, the GEM hitched its wagon to the popular front in the name of “defending democratic rights” when no democratic right had been attacked.

Today, the issue of corporatist unionism in Mexico is a burning question. The PRI-government monolith has cracked, right-wing clericalists are in power and the bureaucrats who were cogs in this apparatus for state control of labor are flailing about. Some (like the SNTE’s “moral leader” Gordillo) have cast their lot with the PAN’s Fox and Calderón, others (like the dynastic head of the SNTMMRM, Gómez Urrutia) have made timid criticisms of the bosses, and still others (like Vega Gallina of the SNTSS) have gone over the PRD. At the same time, the CTM is headed by Josaquín Gamboa Pascoe, who is not just any old corporatist labor boss but headed the gang of *pistoleros* that under the orders of the eternal CTM chief Fidel Velázquez destroyed the combative union at the Pascual bottling plant by gunning down union militants. The Congreso de Trabajo (CT), the umbrella group for the corporatist labor groups, meanwhile, is led by Víctor Flores Morales, who presided over the destruction of his own union and the firing of tens of thousands of railroad workers, while growing rich off proceeds of the privatization of the nationalized railways.

In the middle of this agitated situation, miners and steel workers strike against government intervention. The corporatist “union” chief sends them back after three days, leaving the militant locals to strike alone for months. The Cananea strike loses, the Sicartsa strike wins, but no thanks to the SNTMMRM, which didn’t lift a finger to aid them. The Oaxaca teachers then undertake a militant strike which turns into a generalized revolt of the poor, indigenous and working people of the entire state. Now is the time to wage an aggressive campaign to definitively bring down the crumbling corporatist edifice and build genuine class-struggle unions, as the Grupo Internacionalista has been insistently calling for.

So what does the GEM do? While complaining that the GI has “dedicated pages upon two-column pages to documenting the betrayals of the past and present bureaucracies of the min-

ers union" (none of which they deny), the GEM "defends" the SNTMMRM without a word of criticism of the *government-imposed* labor boss Gómez Urrutia. While ridiculing the GI's call for a national strike against the murderous government, the only action the GEM actually advocated was the phony "national work stoppage" for June 28 that was bandied about by the CTM/CT tops only to be called off, as they always do, saying the timing (right before the July 2 election) was not "opportune"!

And then these pseudo-Trotskyists denounce the GI for saying that the SNTE is an instrument of the class enemy for controlling labor precisely at the moment when this apparatus is doing its level best to bust the Oaxaca teachers strike, while CTM/CROC gunmen are murdering strikers. These "CTM socialists" are now effectively apologizing for death squads.

When challenged on this, GEM/ICL cadres have responded (a) that Stalin killed a lot of communists, but that didn't mean that the Soviet Union ceased to be a workers state; and (b) that the CROC "unionists" shooting Oaxaca strikers had "capitalist consciousness"! No kidding. They have "capitalist consciousness" because they are the armed fist of the bourgeoisie, just as much as the cops they rode with in the "convoy of death."

And yes, Stalin killed several million communists, but the USSR remained a bureaucratically degenerated workers state because it rested on the proletarian economic basis of collectivized property. The CTM/CT/SNTE and the rest of the corporatist apparatus do not rest on workers organizations, they rest on the *capitalist state*, which directly provides most of their finances, while imposing and deposing their leaders at will, and dispatching their goon squads to engage in strikebreaking at gunpoint.

In making an analogy between the Soviet Union and a workers union, Trotsky wrote of the misleaders the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the late 1930s, contrasting union



Fred Chase/Impact Visuals

CTM scabherders: In April 1994, women workers at SONY plant (Magnéticos de México) in Nuevo Laredo went on strike for union democracy. After CTM "union" boss sent police to beat strikers, the CTM tried to break strike by busing in scabs. Three hundred strikers blocked them (see photo). At the time, when it stood for authentic Trotskyism, the ICL/GEM wrote: "Key is throwing off the stranglehold of the corporatist CTM 'unions' which are directly integrated into the capitalist ruling party and the elaborate 'conciliation and arbitration' mechanisms of state control.... [T]he Grupo Espartaquista de México put forward a program to elect workers committees independent of the bourgeois parties, including Cárdenas' PRD – to break the corporatist shackles of the CTM (which acts as labor cops for the PRI) on the working class" (*Workers Vanguard*, 24 February 1995). Today, revisionist ICL/GEM says CTM and other corporatist federations are legitimate unions.

misleaders who sell out strikes to scabherders who break strikes:

"The class character of the state is determined by its relation to the forms of property in the means of production. The character of a workers' organization such as a trade union is determined by its relation to the distribution of national income. The fact that [AFL leader] Green and Company defend private property in the means of production characterizes them as bourgeois. Should these gentlemen in addition defend the income of the bourgeoisie from attacks on the part of the workers; should they conduct a struggle against strikes, against the raising of wages, against help to the unemployed; then we would have an organization of scabs, and not a trade union. However, Green and Company, in order not to lose their base, must within certain limits lead the struggle of the workers for an increase – or at least against a diminution – of their share of the national income."

–Leon Trotsky, "Not a Workers' and Not a Bourgeois State?" (November 1937)

But, in fact, the CTM, CROC, CT, SNTE and the rest of the corporatist labor apparatuses literally conduct struggles against strikes and against raising wages, while organizing

continued on page 59

Spirited Solidarity Picket in New York

“Oaxaca Teachers, We Are With You!”



Internationalist photo

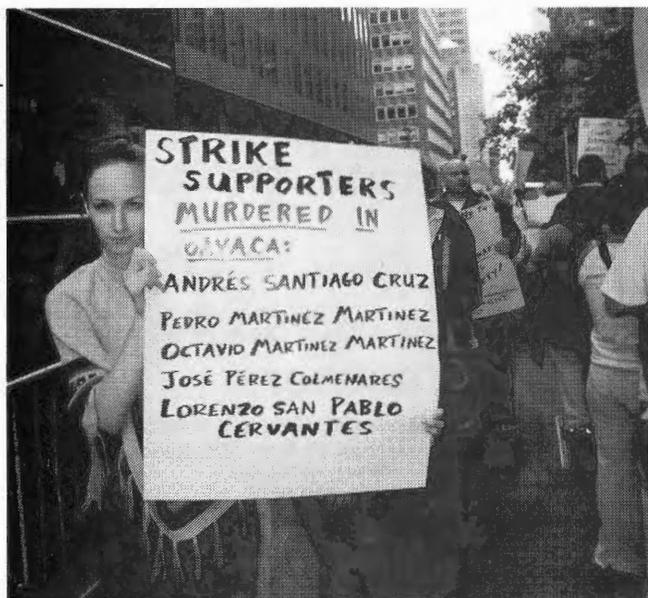
On September 21, some 150 teachers, professors, trade-unionists, students, leftists and community activists joined in an energetic picket outside Mexico’s Consulate General in New York to “Protest Repression in Oaxaca, Mexico – Defend the Striking Teachers.” (See leaflet on page 58 with endorsers list.) The picketers were demonstrating militant solidarity with the 70,000 teachers in the southern Mexican state on strike since last May 22, who have braved massive police repression and death squads that have killed at least five strike supporters in the last month.

“*Maestros oaxaqueños, estamos con ustedes*” (Oaxaca teachers, we are with you), the NYC demonstrators chanted. The chant was so loud, in fact, that it was heard all the way to Oaxaca, via a live broadcast from the picket line to the strikers’ station, Radio Plantón (Sit-In Radio). Pictures of the protest were printed in *El Diario-La Prensa* in New York and *La*

Jornada in Mexico City. On the same day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, members of the teachers union (SEPE) from the steel city of Volta Redonda carried a banner proclaiming: “SEPE-V.R. Calls on the Working Class to Strike in Solidarity with the Teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico.”

The New York protest exceeded the organizers’ expectations, as protesters kept arriving. Soon it was almost impossible to move in the narrow area blocked off by steel barriers set up by the police to cordon off demonstrations. Picketers chanted, “From New York to Oaxaca, fight for the right to strike!” Other chants included, “Oaxaca, Atenco, massacres in Mexico,” “International solidarity with Mexican teachers,” “Defend Mexican teachers against death squad terror” and “*¡Viva la huelga de los maestros oaxaqueños!*”

An important aspect of the Oaxacan teachers’ struggle is the fight against the oppression of the indigenous peoples of



this state, where more than a third of the population speaks native languages. One of the signs in the September 21 protest carried a greeting in Mixteco from a Oaxacan teacher thanking New York teachers for their support. Another declared in Spanish: "Against Racism, Discrimination and State Terror, Defend the Indigenous Peoples of Oaxaca and Chiapas!" (A large majority of the striking teachers in this heavily indigenous state are women, many from the Zapotec, Mixtec, Mixe, Triqui and other Indian peoples.)

The united-front protest was in response to a call endorsed by more than 70 individuals and organizations, including scores of professors from the City University of New York (CUNY) and teachers from the city's public schools. For several weeks, union activists from the Professional Staff Congress (PSC, representing CUNY faculty and staff) and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) have been gathering support for the protest in support of the Oaxaca teachers. The Internationalist Group and supporters in the PSC and UFT as well as members of the Internationalist Clubs at CUNY played an important role in initiating and building the protest.

The broadcast over Radio Plantón was particularly important, lasting for 25 minutes before the connection was broken. The strikers prepared beforehand to transmit on all the occupied radio stations in Oaxaca. So when the call from New York came in, four other stations (Radio La Ley, Radio APPO, and others) were networked in. Amid the chanting some of the signs carried by protesters were mentioned, among them the call for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. A student from the CUNY Internationalist Clubs spoke from personal experience growing up in the state of Guerrero about the racism directed against indigenous peoples in Mexico. CUNY professor Electa Arenal sent greetings to the Oaxacan teachers she had met while attending a tri-national (U.S.-Canada-Mexico) conference in defense of public education there last March.

As demonstrators called to fight for the right to strike, we explained to listeners that under New York's anti-labor Taylor Law, public sector workers are banned from striking here, yet

last December the powerful Transport Workers Union (TWU) shut down the city's subways and buses for three days. Despite massive fines, the TWUers were unbroken. A spokesman for the Internationalist Group explained to listeners that this was intimately connected to the burning need for a revolutionary workers party, both in the U.S. and Mexico, because all the bosses' parties supported repression against the strikers. The announcer in Oaxaca said that many strikers had expressed the need for a party representing the working people.

The picket was being broadcast while Oaxacan strikers were beginning a long trek by foot to Mexico City that is expected to last two weeks. Marchers listening to the broadcast from the striker-occupied radio stations called in questions to Radio Plantón to pass on to the protest in New York. One listener wanted to know what unions were represented (dozens of members of the PSC, UFT and TWU). Another asked if any document had been brought to the consulate. We reported that a New York teacher and a high school student had tried to deliver a letter from UFT president Randi Weingarten protesting the repression against Oaxacan teachers, but they were rebuffed.

There is no doubt that the radio broadcast gave marchers trekking through the Oaxacan countryside a real lift hearing the chanting from New York and knowing that there was a large and combative solidarity demonstration in the heart of U.S. imperialism supporting the strikers. Now the right-wing government of Mexican president Vicente Fox is threatening to send in federal forces to dislodge the teachers. Governor Ulises Ruiz has issued an ultimatum for teachers to return to work by Monday, September 25, or he will replace them with scabs and send in the police. It is urgent for the working class internationally to come to the aid of our class sisters and brothers in Oaxaca.

Bloody Repression, Hard Class Struggle

For the last four months the Oaxacan teachers and their supporters have been engaged in a hard and protracted class battle, the likes of which hasn't been seen in Mexico in several decades. On June 14, the governor sent an army of 3,500 riot police to evict strikers camped out in 52 blocks in the heart of the state capital. The repressive forces let off repeated volleys of tear gas (and rifle fire), burned the strikers' tents, invaded the teachers union headquarters, destroying the strike radio station, and brutally beat anyone they came across. But after a tenacious struggle, tens of thousands of teachers retook the city center.

Two days later 300,000 people marched in solidarity with the teachers. Ever since, the entire city has been in the hands of the teachers and their allies. Police, often masked, periodically sneak into town for nighttime incursions in unmarked vehicles. After one such raid in late August, in which a strike supporter was shot to death by a marauding "caravan of death," more than 500 barricades were thrown up all around Oaxaca city. The city hall, state legislature, supreme court and governor's office are all occupied, as well as several radio stations and the state government's TV channel.

Upon receiving phone reports from our comrades of the Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico about the bloody June 14

cop attack on the striking teachers, the Internationalist Group in New York called an emergency protest outside the Mexican consulate on an hour's notice. The IG initiated a second demonstration at the consulate the following day which was joined by a large contingent from the PSC. Photos of that demonstration were published in the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* and in *Noticias* in Oaxaca, the widely read daily newspaper which is supporting the teachers.

Over the next two and a half months, militants of the Grupo Internacionalista were in Oaxaca almost constantly, distributing thousands of leaflets to the strikers and talking of the need for a national strike against the murderous government, the formation of workers defense committees and fighting to forge class-struggle unions to break the stranglehold of the corporatist "unions" which for decades acted as labor police for the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). A particular focus was the GI's call to break with the popular front around the bourgeois-populist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) led by presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, widely known by his initials AMLO.

This was a key issue among the teachers, since after saying for a month that they would boycott the July 2 elections, the union leadership and their allies in the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) ended up calling for a "punishment vote" against the hated PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) of the bloodthirsty governor Ruiz, which ruled Mexico for 70 years and was still in power in Oaxaca, and against the right-wing clericalist PAN (National Action Party) of Mexican president Fox. This popular-frontist appeal amounted to a call to vote for AMLO and the PRD, which 46 percent of the voters in the state did. At the end of July, supporters of the Grupo Internacionalista held a video showing of the film "Land and Liberty" about the Spanish Civil War and forum on the popular front which drew several dozen strikers.

In August, a youth leader of the GI addressed a mass meeting of 1,500 strike supporters in Oaxaca called by the APPO, declaring that there would be no "democracy" under capitalism for the poor and working people, women and indigenous peoples, denouncing the role of the PRD, and calling for a revolutionary workers party. As PRD supporters attempted to shout him down, our comrade held his ground, while a number of teachers called out to "let him speak." In the end he got more applause than a PRD senator. Striking teachers crowded around to see photos of the June 14 and 15 protests in New York City and effusively asked IG supporters to convey their thanks to NYC teachers for their solidarity. 198 copies of a new issue of the Mexican edition of *El Internacionalista* were sold as strikers lined up and called out for copies.

The struggle of the Oaxaca teachers figured prominently in a Grupo Internacionalista forum on "Mexico: Bourgeois Elections and Workers Blood" and "Revolution and Counter-revolution in the Post-Soviet World" held in the Leon Trotsky Museum in Coyoacán (Mexico City) on August 19, the eve of the anniversary of Trotsky's murder there by a Stalinist agent in 1940. Starting in late August, supporters of the International Group back in New York began agitating and working

Demonstrate, Sept. 21!

**Protest Repression
in Oaxaca, Mexico**

**Defend the Striking
Teachers!**

**Thursday, September 21, 5-6 p.m., outside the
Mexican Consulate, 27 East 39th Street
(between Madison and Park Aves.)**

For information call (212) 460-0983

Endorsed by: AELLA (Association of Latino and Latin American Students - CUNY Graduate Center), Art for Change (Blanca Aguilar, SEU 2006), Electa Arenal, PSC-CUNY International Committee (emerita), Bernard B. Aulrey, Gordon Bastian, PSC-Hunter College, Craig Demerits, PSC, Harold Biderthal, PSC (emerita), Callista Calk, Henry T. Cassin, PSC-College of Staten Island, Chelsea Neighbors to End the War, Center for Immigrant Families, Dawn Clark Looze, PSC-NY City Tech, Lorena Cohen, PSC-LaGuardia College, Committee for Social Justice in Colombia, CUNY International Clubs, Bill Fitzhugh, PSC (emerita), Donna Gill, PSC-Hunter College, Carla Stone Gentry, Jane Galt, Made Gulderson, PSC-Hunter College, Brenda Gonzalez, Mary Gonzalez, PSC-Queens College, Mary Goodman, NYU Local 100 Executive Board, Dr. Anthony Gonzalez, PSC member-Queens College and BMCC, Green Party candidate for NYC Mayor 2006, John Heiser, Melissa Chagnac, Professional Staff Congress, Regina Hughes, PSC-BMCC, Hunter College Colombian Club, Hunter Dominican Perspectives Club, John J. Hannon, PSC-Hunter & CUNY Grad Center, Harry Hazard, International Cross, International Socialist Organization, Damon Johnson, Terence Julian, PSC-LaGuardia College, Laura Kaplan, PSC-Helene Community College, Jay Kessler, PSC-NY City Tech, Solomon Kline, PSC-LaGuardia College, League for the Revolutionary Party, Steve Leberstein, PSC-Brooklyn College, Henry Lennox, PSC-Helene Community College, Carl Lindenberg, Adriel Prosser, Doctoral Students Council, CUNY Grad Center, Norma Peña de Lorenz, PSC-Helene Community College, Clara Rivera, PSC-Queens College, Luis M. Rivera, University of New Mexico, Carmen Mendez, PSC-Helene Community College, Cecilia Mueller, Sociology Dept., Hunter College, Maria Nunez, PSC-BMCC, Luis North, UFTers to Stop the War, Park Slope Greens, Frances de Paul Shalton, PSC-CUNY, Michael J. Perna, PSC-Hunter College, Vanessa Perrotti, PSC-College of Staten Island, Mary Pines, educator, Progressive Labor Party, Tanya Rabinov, PSC, Shirley Rauscher, PSC-BMCC, Jeremy Rayner, PSC-Hunter College, Gerardo Riancho, Henry Diaz, CCNY, Rolfe Meyers, Sussanah, Arlene Stancovich, The Brad's Pass Collective, Vincent Taub, PSC-Brooklyn College, J. Michael Turner, History Dept., Hunter College, Co-Founder, Global Afro Latino & Caribbean Initiative, UFTers to Stop the War, Mike Vozick, PSC-Trib College, George X. Walker, PSC, Mary Williams, PSC-Helene Community College, Steven Wisniewski, PSC, Susan Wisniewski, PSC-Lahman College.

*Individual endorsement, organizational affiliation for identification purposes only

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with activists of the PSC and UFT, to build a labor protest of solidarity with the embattled Oaxacan teachers. UFTers to Stop the War was among the initiators of the demo. Although the union tops refused to endorse, many individual members enthusiastically did.

The IG had a stand at the annual West Indian Day Parade in Brooklyn on September 4, selling copies of *The Internationalist* with several articles on the hot struggles in Mexico. A well-attended forum was held by the Hunter Internationalist Club on September 7 showing a just-completed video produced by the Internationalist Group on "Class Battles in Mexico" (copies of the video are available for sale). On September 9, several hundred leaflets calling for the protest along with a fact sheet on events in Oaxaca were distributed and dozens of endorsements for a protest gathered at the Labor Day parade, despite the wretched Democratic (and in some cases Republican) politics of the pro-capitalist union tops.

On September 14, a "report-back" meeting was held at the City University Graduate Center, sponsored by the Association of Latino and Latin American Students and endorsed by the PSC, CUNY Internationalist Clubs and the Doctoral Students Council. In a room packed to overflowing with more than 60 people, CUNY faculty who recently were in Oaxaca recounted the struggle there and segments were shown from a video shot and being edited by Professor Tami Gold of the Hunter Film Department. After the presentations there was a lively debate with more than a dozen speakers in the audience over the role of the PRD, the nature of the corporatist "unions" in Mexico and the need for solidarity action in the United States.

On September 17, flyers were distributed and 50 copies of *El Internacionalista* sold at the Mexican Independence Day festival in New York. As momentum built for the picket, an IG



Internationalist Group calls for break from Mexico's bourgeois parties (PAN, PRI and PRD).

spokesman gave an interview on WBAI radio emphasizing key aspects of the struggle in Oaxaca, including the important issue of racism against indigenous peoples. The Hunter Internationalist Club held a sign-making session making dozens of signs. In Mexico City, the Grupo Internacionalista held a forum on the teachers' struggle, with students who traveled from Oaxaca speaking, at the CCH-Sur preparatory school which was attended by over 100 students. Meanwhile, in Brazil, supporters of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, section of the League for the Fourth International, were pushing for the teachers union there to demonstrate support for the Mexican strikers. In all three countries, the Internationalist video was shown.

These intense efforts prepared the way for the successful September 21 protest. At the picket, an Internationalist Group leaflet was distributed with an update from Mexico on the "Threat of Heavy Crackdown in Mexico." At the end of the hour-long protest, the crowd was addressed by a number of the participants. An executive board member of TWU Local 100 spoke of the battle for the right to strike and against the union-busting Taylor Law, after which demonstrators again chanted to fight for the right to strike. A prominent member of the PSC spoke of how teachers in Oaxaca had inspired teachers in New York, and of the need for the working class to become active against the war. Protesters chanted "For workers strikes against the war!" and "Defeat U.S. Imperialism!" An activist from the UFT told how the consulate refused to receive the letter from the NYC teachers union, with 150,000 members, against the repression in Oaxaca.

There were also speakers from Grassroots Haiti, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, the International Socialist Organization, the League for the Revolutionary Party, Progressive Labor Party and the Spartacist League. The speaker from the Internationalist Group emphasized that the key issue is revolutionary leadership: the Oaxacan teachers have certainly shown tenacity and courage, and have massive popular backing, but the strike is undercut by the leadership's support for the PRD, many of whose members have been scabbing on the strike and whose legisla-

tors are now calling to bring in the Mexican federal police to dislodge the strikers. The fight against massive poverty, to defend immigrants' rights, to defeat the imperialist war on Afghanistan and Iraq, both in Mexico and the U.S., require the leadership of a revolutionary workers party.

The demonstration ended with vigorous chants to fight for the right to strike, denouncing death squad repression, and proclaiming "¡Viva la huelga de los maestros oaxaqueños!" ■

GEM: Caboose...

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scabs, murdering union militants and exploiting the labor of contract workers while their leaders not only enrich themselves with graft but become actual capitalists. In short, by Trotsky's criteria and a Marxist, materialist analysis, these are literally "organizations of scabs," not workers' unions.

The GEM outrageously repeats its charge that the Grupo Internacionalista "supported Fox's plans" by refusing to make common cause with the pro-PRD rallies last year, *as the GEM did* in the name of defending democratic rights. We know this smear well. These are the same charges that were hurled by the Stalinists against the Trotskyists during the Spanish Civil War, for refusing to give political support to the bourgeois Republican politicians. The GEM absurdly pretends it is swimming against the stream because it maintains a verbal independence from the PRD, while in fact tailing after it. It writes:

"On July 30, a small team of Spartacists was distributing their Trotskyist press ... among two million ardent supporters of López Obrador. When he began to speak (on the giant screens), one of the demonstrators got up on a lamppost and yelled at the others: 'Be quiet, the jefe (boss) is speaking!' There followed almost absolute silence, only interrupted by the cheers during his speech. This should give an idea what it means in reality to 'swim against the stream'...."

This certainly gives an idea of the political pressure the GEM is capitulating to, which is real indeed. But in distributing leaflets and selling papers with headlines on "The Attacks of the PAN," these centrists are not swimming against the stream but *going with the flow of the AMLO popular front*.

While the GEM uncritically tails after the corporatist union bureaucrats and "defends" the PRD presidential candidate against future threats to democratic rights, and the SL/U.S. only reluctantly agrees to endorse a New York City demonstration to defend Oaxaca teachers, the sections of the League for the Fourth International (Grupo Internacionalista/México, Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil and Internationalist Group/U.S.) have actively fought to organize proletarian solidarity with Mexican workers under the blows of state repression. Emphasizing the need for *international* socialist revolution, the IG speaker at the September 21 NYC demonstration noted that this is the centenary of the Cananea miners strike which was the *joint* effort of revolutionary Mexican and U.S. workers. As Cananea 1906 served a precursor of the 1910-17 Mexican Revolution, the 2006 Oaxaca strike can be a spark for workers revolution on both sides of the border. The key, today and yesterday, is revolutionary leadership. ■

UFCW Should Shut Down Meatpackers Nationwide! Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

Outrage! U.S. Arrests Over 1,200 Immigrants in Factory Raids

DECEMBER 13 – Yesterday morning, federal agents from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) division of the Department of Homeland Security swooped down on Swift & Co. meat packing plants in six Midwest and Mountain states. Almost 1,300 were arrested in the workplace raids. ICE officials bragged that they were the largest-ever in U.S. history. This set off shock waves that are spreading across the country.

In Gestapo-like action, black-uniformed ICE cops stormed the packinghouses brandishing military weapons, terrorizing workers. Instead of using cattle cars like the Nazis, buses with whited-out windows lined up to haul immigrant workers to concentration camps called “detention centers” in antisepic ICE-talk. Hundreds of enraged and anguished family members rushed to the plants, bringing green cards, crying out for their relatives and chanting against the hated immigration (*migra*) police. Cordons of riot cops stopped them from blocking the buses.

As they were shoved onto deportation buses, anguished moms in plastic cuffs screamed out for someone in the crowd to pick up their children from school. In Worthington, Minnesota a bus driver left several children at a church center because no one was home to receive them. If the workers are deported, as the government intends to do, some of these children

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Family members and supporters protest immigration cops at Swift plant in Greeley, Colorado, December 12.

Ahmad Terry/Rocky Mountain News

Woman worker at Grand Island, Nebraska plant calls out to crowd as she is put on ICE bus, December 12.



Barrett Stinson/Grand Island Independent

Walkout at Smithfield Packing Beats Back Attack on Immigrant Workers

Labor Revolt in North Carolina



Hundreds of employees protesting outside Smithfield Packing Co. in Tar Heel, North Carolina, the largest pork-processing plant in the world, November 17. Strike forced company to rescind firings.

On November 16, the workers at Smithfield Packing Company in Tar Heel, North Carolina scored a victory as over 1,000 black and Latino workers went on strike to defend immigrant workers fired because of problems with their documents. Since the beginning of the month, the company had dismissed 75 immigrant workers charged with providing “false information” because their Social Security numbers didn’t match up. After a two-day walkout, amid chants of “*si no hay solución, no hay producción*” (if there is no solution, there won’t be any production), workers won back the jobs of the fired workers along with promises of no disciplinary action against those who walked out and more time to resolve Social Security issues. The successful walkout at the non-union plant was fueled by mounting frustration over the harassment, degradation and horrendous working conditions all workers at the plant endure. It reverberated nationally, showing that it is possible to resist the federal government’s anti-immigrant witch-hunt, as a flood of “no-match” letters have gone out aimed at terrorizing workers into submission.

The dramatic wildcat strike shook up the Smithfield bosses and set off alarm bells in the media. “The workers’ rebellion ignited like a brush fire on Thursday morning,” reported *Newsweek* (18 November) in an article titled, “Thanksgiving Rebellion.” It noted that in addition to Latino workers (two-thirds of the workforce), white and black workers joined in the

protest. The Tar Heel plant is the largest pork-processing plant in the world, with 5,500 workers slaughtering 32,000 hogs daily. The company is known for its brutal repression. It was notorious as the only meatpacking plant in the United States to have its own private police force. More than modern-day Pinkertons, the Smithfield Special Police had arrest powers from the state,



The North Carolina plant was notorious as the only packing house with its own company cops, the Smithfield Special Police.

and arrested about 100 workers since 2001. The head of the force, former chief of plant security, was found guilty of violating the 1871 Ku Klux Klan law after beating union activists in 1997. In November 2003, these company cops broke a spreading walkout by night-shift cleaning workers, causing a panic by announcing that “immigration agents were waiting outside to deport them” (*Port Folio Weekly*, 5 July 2005).

The plant has been the scene of a bitter union organizing drive since it was opened in the early 1990s. This recent firings come amid an intensified unionization drive by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW). Playing by the bosses’ rules, the union lost union-representation elections organized by the National Labor Relations Board at the plant in 1994 and 1997. However, the results of those votes were thrown out by an NLRB administrative law judge who ruled that Smithfield goons had engaged in “egregious” violations including threatening, intimidating, firing and even beating workers involved in the union drive. Human Rights Watch issued a report, *Unfair Advantage* (August 2000) which documented numerous instances of the bosses’ terror: confiscated union literature, union supporters spied on and suspended, threats to close the plant if a majority of the workers voted for the union, threats to deny pay raises and promotions and fire workers who voted for the union; threats to force a strike, fire strikers and blacklist them in the industry, etc.

Workers Protest Deadly Working Conditions

At the plant, workers have been fighting against conditions which seem to fly out of the pages of Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle*, written a hundred years ago in 1906 on the inhuman environment workers were subjected to in the Chicago meatpacking plants. Following chapter after chapter describing the horrendous working conditions, the floors covered with blood, the freezing temperatures workers had to endure, the killing pace of the processing line leading to knife injuries and even death, Sinclair writes of the struggle to organize the workers in unions:

“...what the unions were really trying to do was to put a stop to murder. For murder it was that went on there upon the killing floor, systematic, deliberate and hideous murder – ... They were slaughtering men there, just as certainly as they were slaughtering the cattle; they were grinding the bodies and souls of them and turning them into dollars and cents.”
–Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle. The Uncensored Original Edition*. (See Sharp Press, 2003 [1906])

When Sinclair first tried to get his book published, the slaughterhouse companies got his publisher, Macmillan, to drop publication. He turned to another publishing house, Doubleday, which demanded that he excise whole passages and turn the book into a muckraking piece. But as Katherine De Grave, author of the introduction to the unexpurgated version noted,



Paul Rubiera/Fayetteville Observer

Worker at Smithfield Packing Co. rallies fellow strikers during walkout, November 17.

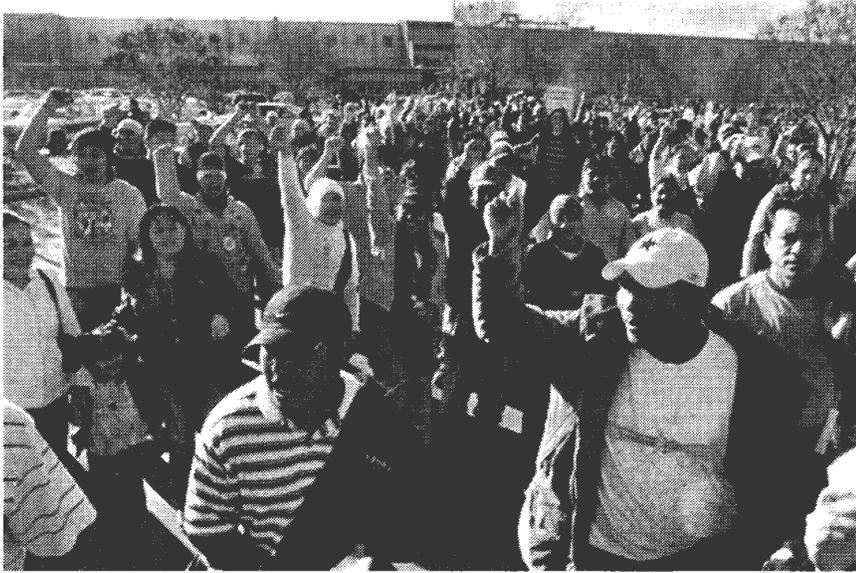
“Sinclair did not mean to write a reformist book but a revolutionary one.” *The Jungle* is now officially celebrated as responsible for the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act. But a century later, most plants are still not unionized, and meatpacking is still hell.

In an account on the UFCW’s website, one former Smithfield worker, Denise Walker, a black woman, describing the conditions and degradation she endured, said people were cut, falling down on floors, always sick and sometimes killed:

“One time I was inside the building and the plant was on fire. They had us still in there working...I’m only 23, but my hands are hurt pretty bad. When I worked at Smithfield, I hurt my hands as well as my back, developed pneumonia, and had a miscarriage from standing too long on the job. I also had to deal with sexual harassment from the managers; they could touch you and make nasty comments and there wasn’t nothing you could do unless you wanted to lose your job.”

Edward Morrison, another black worker, spoke of the murderous speeds at which workers have to operate at Smithfield: “That speed is what starts a lot of people’s demise because people get hurt when you move that fast. Just like slave driving to me. They set up conditions to injure people.” From workers getting stabbed with carving knives to women getting sexually harassed on the job, the conditions at Smithfield packing house are horrendous. But they are not exceptional.

Last year another report was issued by Human Rights Watch, titled *Blood, Sweat, and Fear* (January 2005) documenting how the *reported* injury rate in meatpacking was four times that of industry as a whole, with *one worker in five* suffering serious injury and illness *every year*. The report quoted a string of descriptions from OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) documents uncovered by the *Omaha World Herald* in 2003 special investigative report on conditions in Nebraska slaughterhouses:



Over 1,000 workers participated in the strike action at the plant, forcing operations to halt. A union organizing campaign has been stymied by company hardball tactics.

“Cleaner killed when hog-splitting saw is activated.”

“Cleaner dies when he is pulled into a conveyer and crushed.”

“Cleaner loses legs when a worker activates the grinder in which he is standing.”

“Cleaner loses hand when he reaches under a boning table to hold meat from chain.”

“Hand crushed in rollers when worker tried to catch a scrubbing pad that he dropped.”

In 1906 and 2006 alike, a large percentage of the workers in this deadly dangerous industry are immigrants, and particularly undocumented workers without legal rights who are doubly fearful of resisting near-slavery conditions in the plants, running the risk not only of losing their jobs but also of being deported. About three-quarters of packinghouse workers are reportedly Latin Americans, and many of the rest are Southeast Asians with very few U.S.-born workers. This past June, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) division of the Department of Homeland Security sent out circulars to employers demanding that businesses gather names, Social Security numbers and other data on workers across the nation as part of its racist “war on terror,” which is really a war to terrorize the world’s peoples and working people in the U.S. into submission. In the post-9/11 hysteria, Democrats and Republicans pushed through laws demonizing immigrants. But the walkout in Tar Heel, North Carolina showed that through the mobilization of labor’s power these terror tactics can be defeated.

Since our inception, the Internationalist Group has called for united working-class struggle in defense of immigrants and immigrants’ rights. In a 1996 leaflet we wrote:

“What’s needed is an internationalist struggle uniting the black, white, Hispanic and Asian working people and youth in the U.S. with their class brothers and sisters abroad who are oppressed by a common enemy: capitalism. Class-conscious workers and defenders of the rights

of the oppressed must fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants!”

This mobilization must necessarily be political, we stressed, and it must be directed against both the partner parties of American capitalism. “To defeat such powerful forces we need to mobilize real social power, and that is the power of millions of workers and minorities whose labor makes the wheels of capitalist society turn.”

Bosses Seek to Divide and Conquer

At the Smithfield plant and throughout the history of the United States, one of the ways in which the bosses kept and continue keeping the workers in submission is through race division. The bourgeoisie tries to get black workers to think that immigrant workers will “steal their jobs,” by working long grueling hours at low wages while asking for no benefits. In turn, the

bosses try to convince immigrant workers that black workers have a “bad work ethic” because they fight for higher wages and better conditions. Class-conscious workers and fighters for immigrant rights must consciously fight against these stereotypes promoted by the capitalists in order to pursue their “divide and conquer” strategy. Our watchword must be: “Workers of the world, unite!” And in the United States, particularly in former slave states like North Carolina, what this boils down to is that the key to defending immigrant workers is the struggle for black liberation through socialist revolution.

At Smithfield, the company has consciously tried to set black and Latino workers against each other, as well as whites and native Americans. A few years ago, as part of a series on “How Race Is Lived in America,” *New York Times* journalist Charlie Leduff decided to get a firsthand experience at what goes on at the Tar Heel packing plant. He found that management systematically separated the workforce according to skin tone:

“Whites, blacks, American Indians and Mexicans, they all have their separate stations.

“The few whites on the payroll tend to be mechanics or supervisors. As for the Indians, a handful are supervisors; others tend to get clean menial jobs like warehouse work. With few exceptions, that leaves the blacks and Mexicans with the dirty jobs at the factory... There are English and Spanish lines at the Social Security office and in the waiting rooms of the county health clinics.”

—“At a Slaughterhouse, Some Things Never Die,” *New York Times*, 15 June 2000

Le Duff noted that “The hierarchy of power was summed up on a plaque that hangs in the courthouse commemorating the dead of World War I. It lists the veterans by color: ‘white’ on top, ‘Indian’ in the middle and ‘colored’ on the bottom.” “But as reds and blacks began to make progress in the 1990’s,”

he goes on, "the Latinos began arriving." The segregation of workers into different stations at the plant is a conscious tool used by the bosses to smash multiracial unity of the workforce. Racial slurs and stereotypes are fanned to spread the flames of mistrust among the workers. All this with the same effect: profits for the bosses and wage slavery for the workers.

Writing on similar racial divisions within the working classes of Europe 135 years ago, Karl Marx remarked:

"Every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself.

He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the 'poor whites' to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rulers in Ireland. This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this."

—Karl Marx, Letter to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt, April 1870

The significance of the victorious walkout of the 17-18 of November was enormous. For the first time in years the workers showed what can be done to overcome the boss's racist war of division and deportation. By uniting black and Latino workers in defense of the most vulnerable sector, immigrant workers accused of lacking the documents that the government now demands, workers at Smithfield meat packing plant at Tar Heel showed that racist attacks can be defeated. But this was only a limited victory. The bosses backed off, but didn't agree to negotiate workers' grievances, and particularly not with the union. They only agreed to extend the deadline for documentation for 60 days. In a subsequent meeting between management and worker representatives, workers complained that the bosses weren't taking them seriously and further action might be necessary.

Mobilize Labor's Power

Smithfield workers have taken the first step. Now it's up to the unions to bring the power of the organized workers movement to bear. While Tar Heel is in North Carolina, notorious for government union-busting, it is not far from the Norfolk-Hamp-



Raul Rubiera/Fayetteville Observer

Playing by the bosses' rules is a recipe for defeat. Labor's gotta play hardball to win.

ton Roads-Newport News area, a center of unionized industry. The union leadership, however, is calling for an impotent consumer boycott of Smithfield meat products. This is conscious avoidance of the need to bring out workers' power through industrial action and mass mobilization. Ever since UFCW tops sold out the 1984-85 Hormel meatpacking strike in Austin, Minnesota, even setting up a new local (P-10) to scab on the P-9 strike, they have avoided real union struggle. Instead they look to the Democrats in Congress to pass legislation making it possible to unionize workers with a simple "card check" registering the number of workers who had signed union cards. It would take a sea change in American bourgeois politics to bring that about, and even then it won't win decent wages, benefits and working conditions.

In the media commentaries on the Tar Heel, North Carolina walkout, a liberal web site, TomPaine.com, laid out the "strategy" of appealing to the Democrats: "The good news is that now we have a government in place that can help the workers at Smithfield and other workplaces demand rights without fear. Days after the Democrats swept the midterm elections, the labor group, American Rights At Work, sent out an action alert calling on the Speaker-to-be Pelosi to put workers' rights at the top of her agenda." Yet the Democratic Party is no friend, and Nancy Pelosi is not going to fight for workers' rights. Labor's battles have to be won the old-fashioned way, though hard class struggle. And that struggle cannot be limited to the U.S.: the fight against Smithfield, a U.S. firm with global operations, must be fought internationally, including at its plants in Poland, France, Great Britain, Mexico and Poland.

While Smithfield workers have shown great willingness to struggle, what's missing is a class-struggle leadership that can unite and mobilize the multiethnic and multinational working class in common struggle. Such a leadership must educate immigrant labor in the need to join their struggle with the emancipation of the black worker. As Marx wrote in his book *Capital* around the time of the American Civil War

“Labor cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded.” At the same time, revolutionaries combat the anti-immigrant chauvinism fanned by the bosses among native-born black workers. As we wrote in 1996:

“An internationalist leadership would fight to win Latinos to the crucial understanding that the black question is central to the American socialist revolution. While today in many areas, undocumented Latin American and in some cases Asian workers are among the lowest paid and most brutally exploited, historically the black question is key to all political and social questions in racist America. The capitalists, in their perennial effort to set one sector of the oppressed against another, will always try to pit blacks versus whites versus Hispanics in a struggle for crumbs from a shrinking pie.”

—“Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!” *The Internationalist* No. 1, January-February 1997

The attack on immigrant labor and blacks is an attack led by both parties of American capitalism, the Republicans and the Democrats. The post 9/11 roundups of immigrants were in no way an improvisation by the Bush government. In fact the blueprints were drawn up years before. It was Bill Clinton’s 1996 “Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act” which made it legally possible to deport hundreds of immigrants after the World Trade Center attack. The precursor to the 700-mile wall along the Mexican border that Congress just voted for was Clinton’s Operation Gatekeeper, which led to over a thousand deaths of immigrant workers forced cross the scorching deserts. Under Bush, the Democrats overwhelmingly supported the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act and voted for the “Real ID” Act to deny drivers licenses to undocumented immigrants. The recent Kennedy-McCain “guest worker” program would reestablish indentured servitude.

In the original text of his novel, *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair introduced a character, a Polish socialist, Comrade Ostrinski, who denounced the “futility” of making “an alliance with the capitalists,” and argued for “the great purpose...the organizing of the working-class for the revolution” and not to “beguile” the workers with schemes like “municipal ownership and ‘reform.’” Today, we of the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International warn against allying with any capitalist party or politicians and call on the working class, blacks, immigrants and all the oppressed to break from the Democrats and forge the nucleus of a class-struggle workers party dedicated to fighting workers governments in the U.S. and around the world. This is the challenge posed to all of us by the courageous workers in Tar Heel, North Carolina. ■



Ed Andreski/AP

The migra Gestapo. Blackshirt ICE cops during raid at Greeley, Colorado.

Outrage! U.S. Arrests...

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could never see their parents again. A government that could stage such an atrocity is a criminal regime. George Bush & Co. are baby-snatchers, tearing children from their homes and banishing their parents.

These raids are an attack on the entire workers movement. Unions across the country should mobilize to protest this heinous outrage. The United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), which represents 10,000 workers at five of the six Swift packing plants raided, denounced ICE for violating workers’ rights and “criminalizing people for going to work.” But it’s not enough to send union lawyers to represent the arrested workers (they were refused access) and ask the courts for an injunction (which will be turned down), as the union has done.

The UFCW should immediately shut down every unionized packing plant in the country in protest. If the union struck nationwide in defense of immigrants, workers would pour into their ranks, setting off the biggest-ever organizing drive in the industry. It would also strike a powerful blow against the anti-immigrant hysteria that is being whipped up by both parties of the racist ruling class, Republicans and Democrats. The capitalists exploit immigrant labor, and in order to pile up superprofits from low-wage labor, they deny modern wage slaves legal rights.

A woman standing along the highway outside the Grand Island, Nebraska plant held up two hastily scrawled signs: “Everyone Has Their Rights!!” and “Who Will Work In Your Plants? You Need Them.” She’s so right. The government calls immigrants who lack legal papers “illegal aliens,” as if they were creatures from outer space. Xenophobic (anti-foreigner) bigots call for mass deportations. But the fact is that even this reactionary regime can’t arrest and deport all or a



Protester outside the Grand Island, Nebraska plant is on the mark.

significant portion of undocumented workers. The U.S. economy would collapse.

By official estimates there are more than 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, overwhelmingly workers. The real number is probably much higher. Whole industries depend heavily on immigrant labor, including cleaning, construction, landscaping, food preparation and taxis. They are concentrated in the lowest-paid and most dangerous jobs. And nowhere more so than in meatpacking, where up to three-quarters of all workers are immigrants. The injury and illness rate in meatpacking is *four times* the rate for all industry.

The raids were a horror show. At the Worthington, Minnesota plant, ten buses hauled off over 230 workers (out of a first shift of 1,100). The “kill floor” was shut down and workers were herded into the cafeteria for “processing.” “They treated us like trash,” said Veronica Carabantes Maravilla. Panic spread through homes and schools. Second-shift workers debated whether to pack up and flee. Parish members at the Comunidad Cristiana went to the church to care for the crying children, volunteers went house to house looking for kids whose parents were detained (*StarTribune*, 13 December)

In Grand Island, Nebraska, federal agents surrounded the plant to prevent anyone from escaping. Out front, a woman held up a sign saying “It’s not fair. What about the kids?” In Greeley, Colorado, where some 200 were arrested, a young girl cried, “I don’t understand why they want to take my dad. He worked [here] for seven years.” Out in front along the highway, a crowd alternated between chanting, “¡Raza sí, migra no!” crying and praying.

Such an abomination is no surprise from a regime that engages in wholesale torture, from Abu Ghraib to Guantánamo, as it destroys Iraq and seeks to subjugate the world. Imperialist war is always accompanied by racist repression here. The government says it is enforcing draconian immigration laws as part

of its “war on terror.” In reality, these raids serve to terrorize the domestic population. It claims it is defending victims of “identity theft.” Yet undocumented workers are neither terrorists nor thieves. They pay *billions* of dollars into Social Security funds they can never collect from.

It is necessary to bring out workers’ power to *defeat* the U.S. imperialist war abroad and the bosses’ war on labor, minorities, immigrants and democratic rights “at home.”

Last spring, millions marched demanding legalization for immigrants. On May Day, Swift Packing plants shut down as workers held a “day without immigrants.” Meanwhile, right-wing immigrant bashers have set up vigilante squads like the Minutemen, staging manhunts along

the border like modern-day slave catchers. While many liberals and reformists call for “amnesty,” as if immigrant workers had committed some crime, the Internationalist Group fights for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*, documented or undocumented. And we call for aggressive *union defense of immigrants against racist attacks*.

The UFCW has called for “comprehensive immigration reform” and “a legalization process for the millions of immigrant workers already contributing to our economy and society.” But this won’t protect thousands of its union members facing the *migra cops right now*. Class-struggle unionists call on labor to oppose all documentation checks and to mobilize against immigration raids. Thousands of union members massed at plant entrances ready to take care of business are what’s called for when the feds’ deportation squads show up.

The fight for immigrant rights must be waged against the partner parties of American capitalism. In Minnesota, Republican governor Tim Pawlenty crowd, “It’s good to see that Immigration and Customs Enforcement is proactive.” But Democrats are no friends of immigrant workers either. The laws they are being deported under and the Basic Pilot program used to check IDs were set up by the Clinton administration. Only a class-struggle workers party fighting for a workers government can win full rights for immigrant workers.

The attack on immigrant workers is the spearhead of police-state repression against the population as a whole. Just as Social Security sends “no match” letters to companies, fingering workers with inadequate documentation, the Transportation Department keeps a “no fly” list of people to be kept off airplanes. The witch-hunt against undocumented workers already sparked a walkout by hog processing workers in North Carolina (see “Labor Revolt at Smithfield Packing Beats Back Attack on Immigrant Workers,” page 61). Now is the time for the unions to *act* on the old labor principle, *an injury to one is an injury to all*. ■

Italy Popular Front...

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America, Red Guards in Mao's China – whatever was the fad in petty-bourgeois radical milieus; in the 1980s, they joined NATO social democrats like François Mitterrand in an anti-Soviet hue and cry over Afghanistan and Poland.

What the Pablo/Mandelites did *not* do was build independent Leninist-Trotskyist parties to fight for *international socialist revolution*. Pabloism led to the organizational destruction of Trotsky's Fourth International, which the League for the Fourth International is dedicated to forging anew. In Italy, where the prewar Trotskyists had been decimated by murderous fascist and Stalinist violence, Livio Maitan (1923-2004) became a Pabloite leader of international importance, especially after Pablo took his liquidationist program to its logical conclusion and joined the post-independence bourgeois-nationalist government of Algeria. In Latin America in the 1960s, Maitan was instrumental in forcing the parties of the United Secretariat to abandon any pretense of Marxist proletarian orientation in favor of a disastrous strategy of peasant-based guerrilla warfare. The effect was to wreck nuclei of would-be Trotskyists across the continent, especially in Argentina, Bolivia and Peru.

In Italy, in the 1950s and '60s, Maitan encouraged supporters of the Pabloist International and later United Secretariat to bury themselves deeply in the PCI. As a result, when the great explosion of radical youth and working-class struggle took place in 1968-69, there was no Trotskyist party in Italy that could fight to lead this upsurge. Thousands of young militant workers, disgusted with the instrumental role the PCI played in propping up the capitalist order, and seeing no revolutionary alternative because of the liquidationist policies of Maitan and the USec, impressionistically styled themselves as Maoists, syndicalists or even anarchists – tendencies to which Maitan then adapted as well. In his later years Maitan became a close advisor to Bertinotti, whose introduction to Maitan's 2002 autobiography, *La Strada Percorsa* (The Road Traveled) is an effusive tribute to the author. In 1991, Maitan and his "Bandiera Rossa" organization helped found Bertinotti's Rifondazione Comunista – the very party on which the current capitalist order in Italy relies.

Sinistra Critica: "Si a la Guerra!"

Today the popular front's hold on power in Italy is none too secure, owing to the narrow vote margins. In the Senate, Sinistra Critica senator Franco Turigliatto, a supporter of the USec and longtime aide to Maitan, justified his "yes to war" vote in a long-winded speech with the Orwellian title: "Against the Italian Intervention in Afghanistan." Turigliatto admitted that 60 to 70 percent of Italians want Italian troops out of Afghanistan, but he carried out his duty for the capitalist ruling class. The publication of the USec had the gall to write of this ploy by the "radical left": "even though its representatives in the Senate voted for the motion of confidence... and the financing of the war in Afghanistan, they showed that even a small minority can stand up to the government's

policy" (*International Viewpoint*, October 2006). They "stood up" by sitting in their parliamentary seats and voting for war credits, as the German Social Democrats did on that fateful 4 August 1914! No Karl Liebknechts here! This is the kind of cynical subterfuge and outright lying which fake Marxists trade in, and their betrayal must be ruthlessly exposed.

In the Chamber, where the four "no" votes against Italian participation in the occupation of Afghanistan were registered, the Unione has enough of a majority so that the votes were not needed. Deputy Salvatore Cannavò of Sinistra Critica could take the liberty voting "no." But this was grandstanding as Cannavò remarked that "the 'objector' senators have chosen to agree, in an act of extreme sacrifice, to vote for the motion of confidence in the government" (*Liberazione*, 27 July). What a sacrifice! (One deputy in the PRC majority, Paolo Cacciari, showed more guts, resigning his seat in protest over the parliamentary charade on the Afghanistan vote.) But as the government keeps calling one vote of confidence after another, the PRC "left" can't duck. On the budget, with its cutbacks and attack on pensions, Cannavò ended up abstaining on the law and then leaving the Chamber during the vote on the motion of confidence rather than opposing this anti-working-class law outright. For this timid dissent, the PRC tops have threatened to put him on trial, while removing Sinistra Critica supporters from all official posts. In the Senate, SCer Turigliatto voted *for* the capitalist cutback budget just as he earlier voted *for* imperialist war.

Break with the Centrist Tails of the Popular Front . . .

As Lenin remarked to the March 1917 Bolshevik Party conference, "I hear that in Russia there is a trend toward unification . . . with the defensists – that is a betrayal of socialism. I think it is better to stand alone like Liebknecht – one against a hundred and ten." Lenin was addressing the party from exile in Finland; Trotsky was then in a concentration camp in Canada. The party was being misled by Stalin and Kamenev, who were seeking accommodation with the Kerensky-led popular front, which stood for "defense of the fatherland" by continuing the slaughter of the first imperialist world war. By "stand alone like Liebknecht," Lenin referred to the German Social Democratic deputy, Karl Liebknecht, who in December 1914 stood alone in the Reichstag against the whole of the Social Democratic Party and refused to vote war credits for the war of the Kaiser and the industrialists like Krupp. Today, millions of Italian workers would be willing to stand up to the capitalists, yet they are bound to the bourgeoisie via the popular front imposed on them primarily by the PRC and sellout union bureaucrats.

With the Unione in power, the left parties have generally shifted to the right. Following the April election, the ex-Stalinists of the DS vowed to complete their transmutation into mainstream bourgeois politicians by joining with the ex-Christian Democrats of the Margherita to form a Democratic Party. The Rifondazione Comunista tops are communists in name only. Bertinotti is preparing to ditch the reference to communism by launching a magazine, *Alternative per il*



Sign in November 17 strike/protest against popular-front budget law denounces prime minister Prodi.

socialismo, which he says represents a fundamental “*svolta*,” or turning point, akin to the PCI’s turn to “Eurocommunism” in the late ’70s (*Corriere della Sera*, 20 December). Sinistra Critica is if anything worse yet, because it tries to sully the name of Trotsky with its betrayals. While the Mandelites and Cliffites of SC try to hang on to positions of influence in the PRC, others with equally rotten reformist politics like the FalceMartello (Hammer and Sickle) group, part of the tendency founded by the late Ted Grant, strike a slightly more militant pose having no parliamentary seats to lose. But while FM publishes a pamphlet against attacks on immigrants in the city of Sassulo, it still votes for the PRC which is part of the city council that launched the racist attacks. These fans of Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez are as deeply imbedded in Bertinotti’s PRC as their Mexican comrades are in the *bourgeois* PRD of Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

As the “responsibilities” of governing a capitalist state intensify Rifondazione’s internal contradictions, various centrist currents have been thrown into turmoil. Marco Ferrando, the principal leader of the Progetto Comunista tendency, was slated to be a Senate candidate for the PRC in the 2006 elections. However, the entire bourgeois media and politicians of right and “left” threw a fit over an interview with Ferrando in *Corriere della Sera* (13 February) published under the headline, “Shoot at Our Soldiers? A Right of the Iraqis.” Ferrando: Nassiriya Was a Case of Armed Resistance.” What Ferrando actually said was that armed struggle against the colonial military occupation was just, and that Berlusconi had sent troops to Nassiriya (where they were attacked by guerrillas in November 2003, leaving 19 Italian soldiers and police dead) because of Italian capitalists’

interest in Iraqi oil. As politicians from the DS to the fascist AN howled, the PRC’s Bertinotti abruptly dumped Ferrando. Nevertheless, Ferrando called to vote for the PRC in the April elections and thus helped install the popular front in office. In mid-May, on the eve of Rifondazione’s vote for the Unione government, Progetto Comunista broke from the PRC to set up the Movimento Costitutivo del Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori (MCPCL – Movement to Constitute a Communist Workers Party).

Meanwhile, another part of the Progetto Comunista current objected to Ferrando’s candidacy on the grounds that it was arranged behind the backs of the rank-and-file, and that he had agreed to vote for a Prodi government. But this grouping, now called Progetto Comunista – Rifondare l’Opposizione dei Lavoratori (PC-Rol – Communist Project – Refound the Workers Opposition), in typically opportunist fashion proposed to the PRC tops that its spokesman, Francesco Ricci, replace Ferrando on the ballot. Behind the centrists’ endless maneuvering, the fact is that the Proposta/Progetto Comunista current never represented a revolutionary opposition, but rather a centrist barnacle on the reformist PRC. Ferrando supported Bertinotti in the leadership of Rifondazione Comunista when it backed the first (1996-98) Prodi government, which invaded Albania. Ferrando was fully prepared to vote for Prodi II, if only Bertinotti had let him . . . Such are the wages of opportunism.

The various pseudo-Trotskyist groupings in and around Rifondazione originate in Pabloism (Sinistra Critica, Progetto Comunista) or other currents characterized by ingrained tailism (Cliffites) and deep entrisism in reformist mass parties (the Grantites were buried in the British Labour Party for half a century). They have never fought to build an independent Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party of the proletariat, which was the centerpiece of the founding program of Trotsky’s Fourth International. Their maneuverings with Bertinotti and the PRC while the latter sustain Prodi I and join the Prodi II governments are business as usual for these inveterate opportunists. This is precisely what Trotsky was referring to when he condemned centrists who seek to “peddle their wares in the shadow of the People’s Front.” As Trotsky went on to stress in his July 1936 letter about the maneuvers of the Spanish POUM: “In reality, the People’s Front is the *main question of proletarian class strategy* for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism.”

. . . to Build a Leninist-Trotskyist Workers Party in Italy

The left-centrist Lega Trotskista d’Italia (LTd’I – Trotskyist League of Italy), part of the International Communist League (ICL) led by the Spartacist League/U.S., voices a number of correct criticisms of the pseudo-Trotskyist milieu that for the last decade and a half has sought to make the social-democratic Rifondazione Comunista more appetizing to would-be communist militants, thereby chaining them to the bourgeois popular front. But following the ICL’s own *svolta* (turnabout) in the mid-1990s, in the latter-day Spartacist discourse, these criti-

cisms are accompanied by an obligatory disquisition on how, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the workers' consciousness has undergone a qualitative regression:

"But in contrast to the past, the workers don't see, even in a partial or deformed manner, their struggles as part of the struggle for a socialist transformation of the world. In many cases, even the idea that this society is based on the class struggle between workers and capitalists is distant."

—"2006 Elections: No Alternative for the Workers," *Spartaco*, March 2006

For our part, the League for the Fourth International has noted that the historic defeat of the proletariat represented by the demise of the bureaucratically degenerated/deformed Soviet and East European workers states has had a real but uneven effect on the workers' consciousness. And it has not altered or rendered outdated (as the ICL contends) the central thesis of Trotsky's Fourth International, that the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of proletarian revolutionary leadership. In fact, the impact of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the USSR has been greatest on the workers' leaderships and leftist groups claiming to be revolutionary. Nowhere is this more evident than in Italy, particularly over the war. During 2002-03, there were not only huge pacifist marches, the working class also sought to fight against the war. In February 2003, railroad workers and antiwar activists blocked rail lines in northern Italy seeking to prevent the transport of U.S. tanks, artillery and munitions to the Persian Gulf; when the U.S. launched the invasion, thousands of Italian workers walked out. Since the beginning of the war drive, we in the LFI have fought for workers strike action against the imperialist war.

The ICL on the other hand, especially in the U.S., dismissed our calls for the defeat of U.S. imperialism and for workers to "hot cargo" (refuse to handle) military goods and for strikes against the war as "rrrevolutionary phrasemongering." In Italy, where it was impossible to ignore the workers' antiwar actions, the LTd'I briefly raised the call "For Workers Strikes Against the War" – but only *after* (not before) the dramatic battle of the rails (*Spartaco*, June 2003). It has not repeated this since, even though Italian workers overwhelmingly continued to oppose the war. Nor has it raised the call for concrete workers actions against the war over the continued presence of Italian troops in Afghanistan, or the sending of Italian forces to Lebanon. (At most it talks vaguely of continuing "class struggle at home" in the context of imperialist war, which could mean almost anything.) The ICL justifies its refusal by arguing that strikes against the war would be tantamount to calling for revolution, and since "the workers don't see ... their struggles as part of the struggle for a socialist transformation of the world," not even in a partial or deformed way, such calls are empty. Except Italian workers actually do it.

The ICL is not alone in claiming that Trotsky's argument that "the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership" has become "insufficient" (see "In Defense of the Transitional Program," *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998). The Mandelites, Cliffites and others use the thesis of a retrogression in work-

ers' consciousness in order to justify their capitulations to the reformist misleaders, and to abandon any reference to Trotskyism; the latter-day Spartacists use the same argument to justify abstention from the class struggle. At bottom this revisionism is based on anti-Leninist conceptions of the relationship of the party to the class. The Mandelites and Cliffites (the latter most explicitly) reject Lenin's thesis, in *What Is To Be Done?* that revolutionary consciousness is brought to the working class from outside the framework of the daily struggles with the bosses, which by themselves at most generate trade-union consciousness. The ICL puts forward an idealist conception. As we wrote: "They see the role of the party as that of missionaries rather than the advance guard of the proletariat, which develops the mentality of the workers through its sharp programmatic intervention in the class struggle" ("In Defense of the Transitional Program").

In 2001-03, Italy was racked by militant youth, worker and antiwar struggles on a massive scale: **July 2001**, Genova uprising against the G8 imperialist rulers' conclave; **April 2002**, 13 million-strong general strike; **February 2003**, 3 million march against Iraq war, workers block "trains of death"; **October 2003**, 10 million-strong general strike against attacks on pensions; **March 2004**, 1 million march against war. Today, Italy is still involved in imperialist war and the attacks on workers' livelihoods continue, but protests are far smaller. What changed? A new regression in workers' consciousness? No, what happened is that the PRC, which during 2001-05 had opted to support "social struggles," decided at its 2005 conference to sign on with the Unione popular front. Its reformist and centrist hangers-on were dragged along in its wake. Today as in the past, Italy probably has more self-proclaimed revolutionaries and syndicalist trade-unionists per square kilometer than anywhere else on the planet, yet Italian capitalism remains intact. *What's key is the fight for revolutionary leadership.*

This requires ruthless exposure of the betrayals not only of the PRC and union misleaders, but also by smaller reformist and centrist currents that tail after them. It is necessary to intervene in struggles of workers and the oppressed with a transitional program going beyond the limits of capitalism: for a sliding scale of wages and hours, to combat mass unemployment and inflation; for full citizenship for all immigrants, for dissolving the CPT detention camps and for workers mobilization against anti-immigrant attacks; for workers defense guards against fascist provocations and workers strikes against imperialist war. The Berlusconi gang will not be defeated at the ballot box by a wretched popular front which carries out the same anti-worker policies, practically to the letter. The capitalist class has never given up power voluntarily, no matter how many so-called communist deputies get elected. Proletarian power will not come from bourgeois parliaments, but our own working-class organizations – unions, factory committees, defense guards and ultimately workers councils. The starting point is to gather the most militant and conscious workers in building the nucleus of a Bolshevik-internationalist party, as part of the struggle to reforge an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International. ■

After First Round Wake-Up Call, “Comrade President” Capitalizes on Confidence of Washington and Wall Street

Brazil: Lula vs. Alckmin

Candidates of Capital

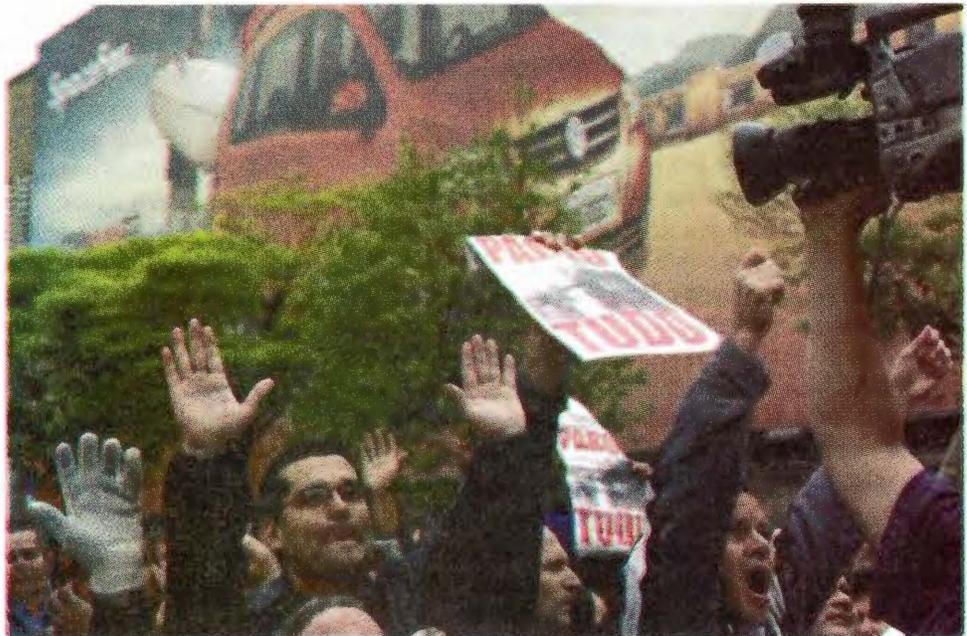
Against the Workers

The following is a translation of a statement by our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil issued after the first round of voting on October 1. The run-off election was held on October 29 and resulted in a victory for President da Silva, who was reelected with over 60 percent of the total.

Right up to election day, the opinion surveys gave Luis Inácio Lula da Silva a majority of the votes on the first round of the presidential election. Yet the accumulation of scandals and the publication in the morning papers of a photo of piles of money from “Dossiergate” produced the intended effect in the middle class of São Paulo and southern Brazil, where Lula was in the minority. Even with 48 percent of the vote, Lula’s expected triumphal victory was spoiled.

His opponent, Geraldo Alckmin, the candidate of the PSDB (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy) and of the São Paulo bourgeoisie, wanted to rope in the “moralist vote,” but it misfired: trying to look forceful in the debates, his arrogant attacks were infused with prejudice towards the common people. After the shock of the victory-defeat of October 1, the current resident of the Palácio do Planalto (Brazil’s presidential palace) railed against the aristocratic *paulista* elite and mobilized his base among the poor of the Northeast. Quite a few workers as well, disappointed with four years of Lula’s administration but worried about the consequences of a victory by the traditional right, will vote once more for Lula. And then what? It’s war on the working class.

The bourgeois popular-front government led by Lula and his Workers Party (PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores) has made things very comfortable for the capitalists of Wall Street and the Bovespa (Brazil’s stock exchange), in particular for the bankers, who enjoyed huge profit rates under his administra-



Andra Penner/AP

Workers of Volkswagen do Brasil in São Bernardo do Campo go out on strike on August 31 over the announcement of the closing of a plant and mass layoffs.

tion, rising to historic highs. According to the CUT (Central Única dos Trabalhadores – Unitary Workers Confederation), “they had a 25 percent increase in liquid profits compared to last year, and the biggest banks in the country raked in an additional R\$ 11.5 billion (roughly US\$5 billion) just in the last four years, an increase of 132.5 percent.”

It was so much that the journal *Valor Econômico* (29 September) published the “country risk” factor for Brazil, which on the eve of the current elections was running at 233 points, one-eighth the level it was before the 2002 elections. Even so, Lula thinks he should have channeled more profits to the capitalists. He says, “The only thing that frustrates me is that the rich aren’t voting for me. You know? Because they made money hand over fist in my government” (interview with *Terra Magazine*, 18 September).

Lula saluted his capitalist masters. The *Wall Street Journal* (23 September) wrote: “Mr. da Silva needs to pass pension, labor and budget overhauls that would reduce a bloated public sector, which currently saddles Brazil with a tax rate compa-



Photo of stacks of bills from Dossiergate that impressed the middle-class electorate on the first round. On the second round, Wall Street's money was more impressive, in support of Lula.

able to that of a rich country..” As he told trade-unionists gathered in São Paulo’s Hotel Sheraton in November 2002 following his first election: “from now on, there will be an end to feebleness.” At the time, it was about his “reform” of the retirement system, which was an attack on public employees. Now the rights of all workers are under attack, as well as free public higher education and a number of union gains.

The Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, section of the League for the Fourth International (LQB/LFI), calls for a blank ballot (*voto nulo*) on the second round of the presidential elections in order to express our proletarian opposition both to the candidate of the PSDB as well as to Lula’s popular front, *Força do Povo* (Strength of the People), a class-collaborationist coalition formed by the Workers Party (PT), the Brazilian Republican Party (PRB) of the textile magnate José de Alencar and his Universal Church of the Reign of God, and the social-democratic Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB). Between Lula and Alckmin there is no lesser evil for the workers, both represent the interests of big capital and imperialism. A second Lula administration, like the first, would have the task of imposing the anti-working-class measures that prior right-wing governments had not been able to push through.

The LQB also called in the campaigns of 1994, 1998 and 2002 not to vote for any candidate of any popular front, while the large majority of the Brazilian left voted for Lula, often pretending to ignore the fact that he was the candidate of a bourgeois political formation. This time around the openly rightist character of the Lula government was so well-known that a sector of the PT split to form the Party of Socialism and Freedom (PSOL), reviving the more leftist rhetoric of the old PT. But the substitute PT that is the PSOL has continued the social-democratic practices of the PT, including seeking a substitute popular front. In addition to forming a Left Front with the pseudo-Trotskyists of the PSTU (Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado – United Socialist Workers Party) and the PCB (Brazilian Communist Party), the PSOL was flirting

with the PDT (Democratic Labor Party), which ultimately named its own candidate, ex-PTer Cristóvão Buarque; and when the PMDB (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement) decided not to put forward a presidential candidate, Anthony Garotinho, who had been the PMDB candidate, decided to support the PSOL candidate, Senator Heloísa Helena of the northeastern state of Alagoas.

The campaign of Helena and her vice-presidential candidate, César Benjamin, a former advisor to Garotinho, was not in any way a class opposition to the capitalist candidates. It didn’t even represent on the political checkerboard a left opposition to the Lula popular front. Heloísa Helena opposed women’s right to abortion, denounced peasants for invading the National Congress, calling this a “pseudo-radical farce,” and even criticized Lula for a lack of “firmness” over the supposed nationalization of Petrobrás (Brazilian oil company) installations by the Bolivian government of Evo Morales! We Trotskyists, who fight for permanent revolution – for the taking of power by the working people, the expropriation of capital by a workers and peasants government and extending the revolution internationally – insisted that no class-conscious worker should vote for the reformist and popular-frontist ticket of Helena/Benjamin.

Today, after getting 6.8 percent of the votes on the first round of the presidential elections, the “Left Front” is no longer a front. The PCB is brandishing the threat of Alckmin, who belongs to the ultra-rightist clerical order Opus Dei, to justify a “critical” vote for Lula, Yankee imperialism’s sheriff in Latin America. Sectors of the PSOL – among them Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, Ivan Valente and Chico Alencar as well as intellectuals like Francisco de Oliveira – announced that they would vote for Lula. The PSTU, for its part, is calling for casting a blank ballot, but with a purely bourgeois rationale: “Lula in reality has nothing to do with a left-wing government. His is a right-wing government, masquerading as left-wing,” says the editorial of *Opinião Socialista* (No. 279, 1 November). And if the policies of Lula’s popular front government were slightly more left wing? This is the continuation of the PSTU’s policy of voting for Lula on the second round of the 2002 elections, going along with the illusions of the masses.

We have already stated in *Vanguarda Operária* (No. 9, May-June 2006): “In the present run-up to the election campaign, the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista notes that the main tasks for proletarian revolutionaries continue to be the struggle against the popular front and its anti-working-class ‘reforms’ (labor relations, trade-union and university), against the pro-capitalist bureaucracy [of the unions] and in favor of building a revolutionary workers party, objectives which class-conscious workers should pursue in all mass organizations of the working class, in the CUT, in *Força Sindical* [a more right-wing union federation], in the CGT [another right-wing labor federation] and in unions affiliated with Conlutas [a la-

bor body linked to the PSTU and PSOL].” On October 29, we call on working people to cast a blank ballot (*votar nulo*) against both capitalist candidates for the presidency and to prepare a class-struggle offensive in order to defeat the assault on the working class by governments following the orders of Wall Street and Bovespa.

Lula’s Government: A Banquet for the Bankers, Crumbs for the Poor

The first round of the elections took place amid numerous accusations of corruption involving the buying of alleged dossiers which incriminate the PSDB candidate for governor of São Paulo, José Serra, Lula’s main opponent in the 2002 elections and potential adversary of the PT in 2010. The dossier that the PT tried to buy denounced Serra as one of the initiators of *Operação Sanguessuga* (Operation Bloodsucker, involving fraud in the purchase of ambulances). There is no doubt that the PSDB initiated the corruption of the *mensalão* [monthly payments to Congressional deputies to vote for initiatives of the Lula government] and the *sanguessugas*; the PT simply continued the corruption, while failing to denounce the schemes of Fernando Henrique Cardoso [Lula’s predecessor as president of Brazil]. It’s equally evident that this large-scale corruption was necessary for the survival of the Lula government, which at the beginning was in a minority in the Congress. He ended up buying himself a “*frentão popular*”, a mega pop front, which ranged from the weakened PT left to leftovers from the military dictatorship (Paulo Maluf, Delfim Netto).

All these media campaigns cooked up by the right were intended to undercut the government and to weaken the PT at the polls. Even left-wing parties like the PSOL, PSTU and others got in on the act. Revolutionary Trotskyists, in contrast, attack the Lula government for its real crimes against the working people and we unmask the political calculus behind this “ethics” maneuver. In reality, we noted:

“Corruption is a constant in bourgeois politics. It is the grease that makes the gears of the capitalist state machinery work so that the government of the day can serve as the executive committee of the ruling class, integrating the interests of its different factions. It particularly bothers the ‘proper’ petty bourgeoisie and social-democratic reformists because it exposes the dirty reality behind the mythology of the ‘neutrality’ of the state, giving concrete proof of how this state defends the interests of capital, not of ‘everyone’.”

—“Permanent Crisis of the Popular Front: Lula Against the Workers,” *Vanguarda Operária* No. 9, May-June 2006

But the opinion polls tracking voter trends showed the failure of the denunciatory tactics of the right-wing liberal opposition and the strengthening of the campaign for Lula, who blamed the PT for ‘errors’ in order to protect his government. Now members of the PT nucleus who surrounded Lula in the Palácio do Planalto – like José Dirceu, José Genoino, Palloci, Delúbio and Berzoini – have fallen, one after the other, following each new denunciation.

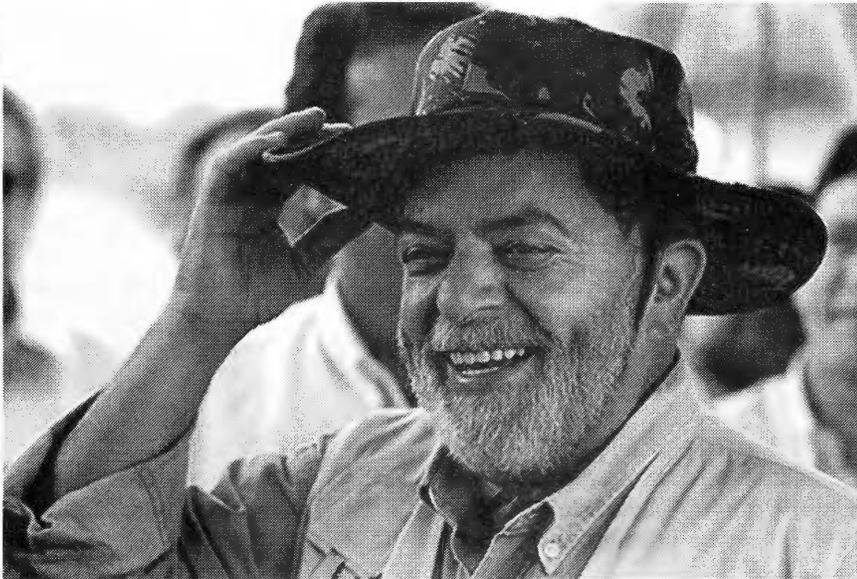
How was Lula able to save himself amid the downfall of the PT? It was, first of all, due to the support from layers of the

poor who benefited from programs like *Bolsa Família* (Family Fund). Some of these welfare programs, like Fome Zero (Zero Hunger), failed completely for lack of funding. But last year Bolsa Família reached 11 million of the lowest income families (earning less than R\$ 120 [roughly US\$50] per person per month) with monthly payments of up to R\$ 95 [US\$44]. In reality, it cost the public treasury very little, totaling about R\$ 10 billion, in comparison with the more than R\$ 160 billion [US\$53 billion] that Brazil will pay in interest on the public debt this year (see Valério Arcary, “Critical Arguments About Bolsa Família,” *Correspondência de Prensa*, 21 October). Even with these programs, in Lula’s Brazil there are more poverty-stricken people than the entire population of Argentina. According to a study by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, “42.6 million Brazilians are still mired in poverty.” Above all, this type of program is an integral part of the “neo-liberal” schema, which favors payments to the poorest and the *elimination of rights won by the workers*, such as pensions.

This is the most important task entrusted to an eventual second term for Lula’s government by high finance and the imperialist summits. Delfim Netto, the economist of the military dictatorship who is now an advisor to Lula and Congressional deputy for the PMDB, explained in an interview in *Folha de S. Paulo* (26 August) his vote for the former trade-unionist “so that he can finish what he began.” “There are two reforms that must be made and only Lula can carry them out,” he went on, namely pension reform and labor relations reform. “Only Lula can produce these two reforms, because workers believe in him.” A pro-Lula business leader, Laurence Pih, explained to journalist Josias de Souza of *Folha* (in his blog of 12 July) the kind of labor relations “reform” that the bosses want: “It’s important to lighten the burden on the payroll. Social contributions are almost equal to wages.” They want to tear up rights, eliminating “privileges” in the social security system. And these aren’t minor capitalists who are supporting Lula: Pih is the owner of the largest flour mill in Latin America; Lula’s vice president, José Alencar, is a textile magnate known as the “king of the T-shirts,” and now he has the support of Blairo Maggi, the governor of the state of Mato Grosso, known as the “soy bean baron.”

It is noteworthy that much of the business support the head of the PT has received is from the captains of agribusiness, in exchange for the billions in subsidies by the government to this sector. On the other hand, as we wrote in *VO* No. 9, “In the countryside, the PT’s talk of agrarian reform has produced zero results. The structure of rural property, one of the most unequal in the world, hasn’t changed one bit.” Only about 127,000 peasant families received land from the Lula government up to the end of 2005, and of these, 27,000 were in land-reform settlements. This is quite a ways from the 400,000 land reform beneficiaries that the Rural Landless Workers Movement (MST) requested at the beginning of the administration of the “comrade president.” Moreover, a recent study by the International Labor Organisation (ILO), *Slave Labor in Brazil* (October 2006), estimates that there are currently between 25,000 and 40,000 forced labor-

AFP



Happy Lula. The rich “made money hand over fist in my government.”

ers in situations of slavery in Brazil, the large majority in rural zones. Over the last decade there have been 34,000 complaints of slave labor and 18,000 workers were freed, but only at the end of October was the first guilty verdict issued.

It's not surprising, therefore, that nine years after the massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás (in the Amazonian state of Pará), where 19 landless peasants were slaughtered, not one of the soldiers and officers involved is imprisoned. And now José Rainha, the emblematic MST activist, has been sentenced to prison for the fifth time. Even so, João Pedro Stédile, the leader of the MST, is campaigning for votes for Lula. Stédile says, using the same arguments as the rest of the PT left wing (Emir Sader, Frei Betto):

“The candidacy of Alckmin represents finance capital, the multinationals, the Bush government, the Brazilian bourgeoisie and the large agribusiness landowners, who are anxious to take back the reins of government.

“Every day in the newspapers they say that it's necessary to keep on privatizing Petrobras, the postal system, highways and state banks. They want labor-relations reforms, tax reform and pension reform in order to boost their profits. They want to write a guarantee of payment of interest into the Constitution, in the form of the extravagant zero deficit plan. They say that ALCA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) is a necessity – and thus they seek to subordinate our economy and country even more to the interests of the empire.

“And if the poor dare to fight back, they will call in the ‘*capitães-do-mato*’ (slave catchers), offering police and jail. That's why the social movements and all their members must mobilize, roll up our sleeves and go into the street to defeat the candidacy of Alckmin and his class interests.”

–*Folha de S. Paulo*, 10 October

All of Stédile's accusations against Alckmin are justified, *but they are also valid against Lula*. Lula represents, without the slightest doubt, the interests of finance capital, the multinationals, the Bush government, key sectors of the Brazilian bourgeoisie, agribusiness; he, too, is privatizing

Petrobrás, the postal system and banks, gradually but surely; he also is pushing the labor-relations, tax and pension reforms; Lula is already paying off interest, including with advance payments, with a zero deficit (in fact, a surplus in the federal primary budget), not requiring a constitutional amendment; and he continues to negotiate with the empire over ALCA. As for the slave catchers, the judicial system under the Lula regime does nothing against the *jagunços* (paramilitary private armies) like the Primeiro Comando Rural, while for MST militants it's police and jails.

Lula vs. Alckmin – two candidates with one, capitalist, program, against the working people. Contrary to the argument of the head of the landless peasants, class-struggle militants must “roll up their sleeves” to struggle against the popular front and the

Workers Party that serve the bosses and in favor of a *revolutionary workers party* to lead an *agrarian revolution* (and not just reform) by means of a *workers and peasants government* as the stepping-off point for *world socialist revolution*.

The Reactionary Campaign of Heloísa Helena

Internationally, Lula has been the main support point for U.S. imperialism in Latin America. He is praised by George Bush, the bloody butcher of Iraq. In Haiti, a Brazilian expeditionary corps disguised as U.N. “peacekeeping forces” acts as mercenary troops for the U.S. in maintaining a colonial occupation of the first black republic in the world. In July of 2005, Brazilian military officials of the MINUSTAH (the United Nations mission in Haiti) carried out an assault on the slum of Cité Soleil, murdering at least 19 residents. Recently, following the intensification of MINUSTAH raids, there were student protests in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince demanding the exit of the United Nations. The LQB has insistently fought for the expulsion of Brazilian occupation troops from Haiti.

We also defend the right of the neighboring country of Bolivia to expropriate the installations of Petrobras, a multinational capitalist enterprise headquartered in Brazil, a majority of whose shares are held by investors on the New York Stock Exchange. In the face of the announcement by Bolivia's minister of mines and energy that two refineries of Petrobras that had been confiscated would be turned over to contractors to run, Lula responded: “I have a clear notion of Brazil's superiority over Bolivia.... When I spoke with [Bolivian president] Evo Morales, I took the map of South America and showed Bolivia's situation, and where Venezuela is located. I said, ‘don't go ahead and put the sword to my head; if I didn't want your gas, you would suffer more than us’” (*Folha de S. Paulo*, 18 September). This was the response of a capitalist ruler of a country that claims to be a regional superpower. As

a result of Lula's threat, the measure was canceled and the Bolivian minister was sacked.

The response of the opposition candidates to the Bolivian action was very instructive. The rightist Alckmin of the PSDB characterized Lula's response as submissive, inadequate and weak. Heloísa Helena, candidate of the Left Front, took the same tack, criticizing "the incompetence and irresponsibility of the Lula government" (*Folha on line*, 14 September), saying that he "lacked firmness" for not insisting with Morales on "compensation to be given to our national industry."

(Her comment was reported on Helena's campaign website, www.heloisahelena50.com.br, since deactivated.)

So here we have the candidate of the PSOL, PSTU and PCB criticizing Lula from the right, for being insufficiently strong in the defense of the "national" interests of Brazil and of a multinational company! In the face of this spectacle, even the PCB commented about Heloísa Helena (in an October 6 resolution on the second round of the presidential election): "her discourse, in many cases, was indistinguishable from that of the bourgeois opposition candidate, above all on international questions."

This wasn't the only rightist "gaffe" by the candidate of the Left Front. In an interview on Rede Globo's "National Journal" TV news program (8 August) she spoke about land reform. Asked whether she "would take over land of rural proprietors who produce and hire labor," as the PSOL program suggests, Heloísa Helena responded: "I cannot, my dear, because the Constitution prohibits it. A party program deals with strategic objectives. It has nothing to do with a program of government. It would be impossible to expropriate lands, unless they are using slave labor or planting marijuana."

On top of this, when hundreds of peasants of the Landless Liberation Movement (MLST) occupied the Chamber of Deputies on June 6 in a protest demonstration, as a result of which 539 were arrested, the honorable senator from Alagoas dismissed their action as "a pseudo-radical farce." She took her stance as defender of this den of thieves, the national Congress: "So why come here? What is the justification for coming to the National Congress?" Helena asks. "You've got the wrong address. What's demoralizing the National Congress is all this stuffing of dollars into men's underwear and stuffing billions of dollars into off-shore tax havens to pay Mr. Lula's accounts." Thus she exempts the Congress of the *mensalão* and the *sanguessugas* scandals of any responsibility for the lack of agrarian reform.

During her "National Journal" interview on Rede Globo, after saying it would be "impossible" to expropriate productive lands (unless they produce marijuana!), when asked "if



Empty chair debate. Candidatos Geraldo Alckmin (left), Heloísa Helena and Cristóvão Buarque in televised debate. Lula didn't show up.

madam could tell us what other planks of the program of the party madam helped found does she intend not to implement," the "Christian socialist" responded: "I am a socialist by conviction, I always say that I learned from the Bible to be a socialist even before reading the classics of socialist history." But, she added, "it would be intellectually dishonest on my part and it would disregard the whole of socialist tradition for me to say that I am going to implement socialism.... Today I am fighting for democracy. For the democratization of wealth, of social policies."

As part of her fight for "broadened democracy" (not even the "participatory" democracy that the PT boasted of in Porto Alegre, where it was used to approve "popular" budgets including cuts in social services), the "ethical socialist" Heloísa Helena opposed the democratic right of women to abortion. In an interview on the "Globo Jornal" morning TV show (1 September), she revealed: "For me, from a scientific and also spiritual viewpoint, I am against abortion." Not only that, she opposes medical research using stem cells extracted from embryos.

Also in the name of "democracy," the candidate called for a "citizen's audit" of the foreign debt to imperialist banks and governments rather than outright abolition or repudiation of the debt. On the eve of a strike by Volkswagen workers, the senator called for the BNDES (National Economic and Social Development Bank) to finance the multinational company. And she considers the renationalization of companies privatized by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, such as the multinational mining company Vale do Ríó Doce, as called for by the PSOL, another plank of a party program that will not be implemented.

In other words, we have here a "socialist" candidate who is against agrarian reform on productive land, against non-payment of the imperialist debt, against abortion, against stem cell research, against the renationalization of companies that were stolen ... and who defends the "national" interests of the multinational private company Petrobras! But even aside from her political positions which place her to the right of various bour-

geois politicians, Heloísa Helena is always looking for allies in the capitalist parties. At first she courted the PDT (Democratic Labor party), the heirs of the old populist *caudilho* (leader) Leonel Brizola, to the point that she was invited to the national convention of this party representing the tradition of bourgeois "laborism." (One of the congressional deputies who founded the PSOL, João Fontes, has since joined the PDT.)

Then in the middle of her campaign, "HH" received the support of Anthony Garotinho, former governor of Rio de Janeiro and husband of the current governor, Rosinha Garotinho, both responsible for repeated repression of Rio teachers' strikes. In reality, the campaign of Heloísa Helena was a "*frentinha popular*," a mini popular front, a corridor coalition with the right opposition to Lula, which was already established during the scandal over the *mensalão*, the payoffs to Congressional deputies. No class-conscious worker, and much less a revolutionary, can give political support to such an abomination, *my dear*.

"Left" Satellites of the PSOL, Refuse of the PT

As for the PSOL's allies of the PSTU, these followers of [the late pseudo-Trotskyist leader Nahuel] Moreno had the unpleasant task of trying to justify "their" candidate. But they are well trained in apologies for popular-frontism: what they are doing today for Heloísa is the same as they did for years for Lula, trying to prettify the head of their slate and give him an unwarranted "left" image. The wages of this opportunism are to swallow one betrayal after another. And for what? Their courtship of the ex-PTers who are now the PSOL goes back years, to the time when they were all among the many "left" currents inside the PT. But at every step, the Morenoites have been blocked in their attempts to former a "broader" party.

Back when HH and her parliamentary comrades (Babá, Luciana Genro, Fontes) were expelled from the PT (in 2003), the PSTU called for forming a "new party." When their overtures were rejected, the PSTU suggested a common slate in the elections, with PSTU leader José Maria Almeida as Heloísa's vice-presidential running mate. The PSOL could be the parliamentary (if not to say parliamentarist) party, while the PSTU would be in charge of mobilizing in the streets. Another rejection from the PSOL. It's a story of eternal unrequited love, which keeps on repeating because it reflects the PSTU's tailist policy of always trying to be the "left" wing of some petty-bourgeois or even bourgeois force, whether it is Peronism in Argentina, Sandinism in Nicaragua or the PT "family" in Brazil. As we wrote at the time of the formation of the PSOL in mid-2004:

"This new party is, without any doubt, another social-democratic party, positioning itself slightly to the left of the PT, and is governed by the rules of the parliamentary game of the bourgeoisie. It is precisely this kind of 'party of an old type,' electoralist to the core, that the Brazilian working class *does not need*. Trained in the struggle for influence in the corridors, it will be a satellite of Lula, undertaking campaigns in order to pressure him (and perhaps recruit some of the leftists who stayed in the ranks and in the ministerial easy

chairs of the PT) rather than preparing the proletariat to come out on top in a frontal clash with the bourgeois government." – "We Don't Need a Social-Democratic 'New Party' of Disillusioned Lulistas," *The Internationalist* No. 20, January-February 2005

If the reformist PSTU acts as a satellite spinning around the PSOL, other smaller groups of a centrist sort are in the orbit of the PSTU. For the Liga Estratégia Revolucionária – Quarta Internacional (LER-QI – Revolutionary Strategy League-Fourth International), affiliated internationally to the Fracción Trotskista (Trotskyist Faction), a neo-Morenoite current led by the Argentine Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS – Socialist Workers Party), the guiding principle of their "strategy" is to make the PSTU fight. Thus they unconditionally supported the union tendency pushed by the PSTU, Conlutas, calling to form a mythical "anti-bureaucratic pole" inside it. In the current election campaign, first they called on the PSTU to form a "class-struggle wing of the Left Front," for which "the PSTU needs to criticize not only César Benjamin [the PSOL vice-presidential candidate] but mainly Heloísa Helena... including paid articles in mass-circulation papers." When this tactic flopped, the LER-QI decided to call to "vote critically for the workers candidates of the Left Front" – mainly the PSTU and the "workers sector of the PSOL." The latter turns out to be ex-members of the LER-QI who migrated to Helena's party in order to better carry out their tailist policies. In the end, they called to vote for president for the candidate of the Partido Causa Operária (PCO – Workers Cause Party), with which they have almost no political agreement (since the PCO opposes Conlutas). Now they are dejectedly calling for a blank ballot on the second round of voting.

Another centrist group in the opportunist swamp is the Liga Bolchevique Internacionalista (LBI), whose specialty is constant "unity" maneuvers with the most diverse (and contradictory) political currents. The LBI, too, is an unconditional fan of Conlutas, acting as a counselor to the PSTU, asking it to break with the popular front, adopt a more combative policy, etc. etc. In the current electoral period, the LBI began with an "Open Letter to the PSTU" where it called on the latter to run Zé Maria as a revolutionary "anti-candidacy," and even to "reorient itself programmatically." When the Morenoites declined to receive their proposal, the LBI changed tack and launched an appeal for a rotten block of all tendencies calling for a *voto nulo* in the elections (which could extend from the anarchists to bourgeois formations), with an emphasis on criticizing the Heloísa Helena candidacy.

Then, after October 2, the LBI launched a new appeal for a "National Emergency Conference" of everyone calling for a blank ballot on the *second* round, once again proposing to the PSTU and others who supported the "Catholic socialist" HH on the first round that they should "adopt a revolutionary program of direct action"! In the 2002 elections, the LBI called on "class activists" (a category that included those who voted for Lula), even before the first round of voting, to "launch a broad national mobilization ... against the electoral fraud" and impose a Lula presidency. And last July they called for a "national strike

to defeat electoral fraud," to impose a presidency of the Mexican bourgeois politician López Obrador!!

Beyond its opportunist maneuvers with bourgeois forces "against fraud" (and in Brazil last year, against the "mensalão government") along with its repeated supplication of the PSTU to adopt a "revolutionary" policy, the constant *frontism* of the LBI is fundamentally opposed to genuine Trotskyism. Trotsky himself commented, in discussing the struggle against the advance of Nazi fascism in Germany in the early 1930s, that a united front *for action* is counterposed to propaganda blocs. Referring to a lash-up of several centrist leaders at the time, the Bolshevik leader wrote:

"We shall be told that the bloc between Rosenfeld-Brandler-Urbahns is only a propaganda bloc for the united front. But it is precisely in the sphere of propaganda that a bloc is out of the question. Propaganda must lean upon clear-cut principles and on a definite program. March separately, strike together. A bloc is solely for practical mass actions. Deals arranged from above which lack a basis in principle will bring nothing except confusion.

"The idea of nominating a candidate for president on the part of the united workers' front is at its root a false one. A candidate can be nominated only on the grounds of a definite program."

—Leon Trotsky, *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* (January 1932)

We will conclude our excursion into the reformist and centrist left with a look at the Partido Causa Operária (PCO – Workers Cause Party). The PCO put forward its leader Rui Costa Pimenta as candidate for president, as it did in 2002 as well. For many years, this party defended Lula, metaphysically separating him in a Menshevik fashion from the popular front. Praising the "workers candidate" of this front with bourgeois forces, it contradicted the Trotskyist understanding of the popular front, a class-collaborationist coalition, as a *bourgeois* political formation. Only recently the PCO decided to separate itself from Lula, but it continues to seek a return to the old PT with its call for a "mass workers party." Also significant is its call for a "government of the working people," instead of the Trotskyist slogan of a workers and peasants government. The latter was, the Bolsheviks stressed, nothing less than the proletarian dictatorship, whereas the tasks which the PCO assigns to its "government of the working people" are measures typical of a social-democratic government of the capitalist state: an end to privatization, state control of health and education, "a genuine national plan against hunger," etc.

The Lula government tried to call into question Costa Pimenta's candidacy, claiming that it had vio-

lated the regulations of the Supreme Electoral Court (TSE), which in mid-August turned down the PCO candidate. Revolutionaries defend the right of any party, and particularly those who claim to represent the workers movement, to present their candidates in supposedly "democratic" bourgeois elections, at the same time as we criticize the social-democratic and non-revolutionary campaign of the PCO. In addition to supporting for years the different popular fronts formed by Lula's PT, Causa Operária has adopted the same policy itself by offering its slate to various careerist elements from the PPS, PDT and other bourgeois tickets.

The fundamental fact is that all these groups generally considered to be the "far left" have their origins in Lula's Workers Party, and they all yearn for the good old days when they were allowed to carry out their little maneuvers and backroom deals, giving them the illusion of power. But their frame of reference is a party that is social-democratic and parliamentarist to the core, seeking to ensconce itself in the bourgeois political regime. All of them (PSOL, PSTU, PCO and their lesser relatives, LBI, LER-QI, etc.) do on a small scale what Lula's team did at the head of the PT in years past. Now they want to recreate the PT of the days before they were expelled one after another (PCO in 1989, the PSTU at the beginning of the '90s, the PSOL in 2004). Even if they achieved their fantasies, it would only lay the basis for repeating this history of degeneration.

What the Brazilian proletariat needs right now, when it confronts a capitalist offensive down the line against its gains and its very existence, is not a new version of the PT. It already went through that experience. It is urgently necessary to forge a workers party based on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution, which fights for agrarian revolution, for the liberation of all the oppressed – women, blacks, Indians, homosexuals – through *international* socialist revolution. This is what the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil fights for. ■

VANGUARDA OPERÁRIA
 Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, revista da Liga IV Internacional
 Nº 8, maio-junho de 2006 preço R\$ 3,00

Crise permanente da frente popular
Lula contra os trabalhadores
forjar um partido operário revolucionário

Congresso do Conselho: O PSTU reusa, não houve nova central
Lutar na CUT e em todos os combates contra a frente popular!

Imprensa em greve por que operário trabalhista?



Leia e assin

VANGUARDA OPERÁRIA

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50 Bullets...

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Sean Bell's funeral. Patrick's mother, Marie Rose Dorismond, a Haitian immigrant, rode the bus from Miami to be there. A few feet from the coffin, she cried out: "Again? Again? Again?" The mother of Gidone Busch, a Hasidic Jewish man executed by the police in Borough Park in 1999, who maintains close contact with Amadou's mother, unfortunately could not attend. Juanita Young had just gotten out of the hospital after her latest abuse at the hands of the cops. While liberals put the blame for these tragedies solely on rabid reactionaries like Republican Giuliani (or Democrat Ed Koch), just as they call the occupation of Iraq "Bush's war," the 50 shots that rang out in Jamaica, Queens taking the young life of Sean Bell, like the 41 shots that cut down Amadou Diallo, are proof that racist police brutality is produced by a *system*.

That system is capitalism, and from the days of the slave-catchers – who terrorized blacks north and south of the Mason-Dixon Line – to today, when killer cops target blacks, Latinos, immigrants and anyone else who gets in their way, the system rests on brutal repression. In demonstrations against police brutality, the Iraq war and for immigrant rights, the Internationalist Group has emphasized that "Imperialist War Abroad Means Police-State Repression 'At Home'." The fight against racist cop terror cannot be limited to calls for investigations or the removal of particular police officials. The killers are not just "bad apples" or "rogue cops," they are enforcers of racist, capitalist "law and order" which treats ethnic minority communities like occupied territories. The police think they can "get away with murder" against young black men in Queens because they have done so for years. "Racial profiling" is nothing new, it has just become more blatant since 9-11.

Today, the Democratic Party has become the main war party responsible for keeping U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. In New York, the Democrats have been key in *preventing* mobilizations against cop terror that should have taken place in recent days. Many of those who came to pay their respects at the funeral and who have participated in various protests have carried signs saying "Justice for Sean Bell." To achieve justice for the oppressed, to defeat imperialist war and the police-state repression it breeds, it is necessary to break with the parties of the oppressors and build a workers party that fights for the socialist revolution that will put billionaire Bloomberg and his capitalist cronies out of business. To put an end to the system of police brutality you have to sweep away the capitalist masters who give the orders and the guns to the killer cops. ■

U.S. Rips Apart Iraq...

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The lynch mob atmosphere of the hanging, captured on a cellphone video being shown everywhere, eliminates any pretense of a representative government in the deeply fractured society. The hooded executioners and bloodthirsty witnesses screaming Shiite fundamentalist slogans made it clear to all that the puppet regime is nothing but the sectarian fun-

damentalist militias writ large. This was not any kind of justice but naked *victors' vengeance*. And it's part of a pattern. The Iraqi army and police are now systematically driving Sunnis out of Baghdad. As a result, the deep-rooted insurgency against the colonial occupation regime and the Shiite ascendancy may now spread to encompass the entire Sunni Muslim population as it sees its very survival at stake.

While the long suppressed Shiite majority in the South and Kurdish separatists in the North may have cheered the execution of their persecutor, Saddam Hussein is now being hailed around the Arab world as a martyr and symbol of resistance to U.S. domination. Quite a turnaround for the one-time CIA "asset" who became a bloody dictator with Washington's blessing and support. It was not Saddam who accomplished this feat, however, but the Americans who in their quest for non-existent "weapons of mass destruction" set off a chain reaction that has engulfed the region. In addition to inflaming nationalist feelings, carrying out the hanging on the first day of the Eid al-Adha religious holiday enraged Sunni Muslims. And with the video of the execution, U.S. and Iraqi authorities are now desperately trying "to challenge the impression it conveyed that Mr. Hussein, for all his brutal crimes, had behaved with far more dignity in his final minutes than his seemingly thuggish executioners" (*New York Times*, 4 January).

The show trial of Hussein and his lieutenants was a travesty by any measure. Three of the original five judges were removed, the last one explicitly for not being hostile enough toward Hussein. Ramsey Clark, the former U.S. attorney general who was one of the Iraqi leader's attorneys, was ejected from the court. Clark noted: "Four defense counsels brutally were murdered, three tortured – the last two with drill holes in their heads – and paraded around parts of Baghdad." Even Human Rights Watch, which called for the prosecution of Iraqi regime leaders, declared that the proceedings were marked by grave "defects" and did not meet "fair trial standards." (HRW also promoted the show trial of Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic and regularly tries to give a "human rights" cover to U.S. imperialist aggression.)

These trials were supposed to provide an ideological justification to the U.S. invasion, by selectively highlighting various of Hussein's crimes. Yet Hussein managed to turn the tables and make a mockery of the farcical proceedings, denouncing the invaders who had devastated Iraq. The actual charges in the case for which he was sentenced to death concerned the execution of 148 men and boys from the town of Dujail following a 1982 assassination attempt there against Hussein. The attempt was organized by the Iranian-backed Dawa party, which also supplied the Iraqi figureheads to preside over the "high tribunal." But the occupation authorities were the puppet-masters in this rigged trial, which was staged in the American-controlled "Green Zone." Hussein was held in the U.S.' "Camp Cropper," and the hanging took place on a U.S. facility.

And this orgy of "ethnic cleansing" is not the result of "centuries of Sunni-Shiite hostility," as the bourgeois media

keep repeating. It is the direct result of the stoking of religious sectarian and ethnic hostilities by U.S. imperialism, following the *divide et impera* (divide and rule) maxim of empires from the Roman to the British. As Juan Cole, the leading U.S. academic expert of Shiite Islam, has written (*Informed Comment*, 18 December 2006):

“The Shiite tribes of the south probably only converted to Shiism in the past 200 years. And, Sunni-Shiite riots per se were rare in 20th century Iraq. Sunnis and Shiites cooperated in the 1920 rebellion against the British. If you read the newspapers in the 1950s and 1960s, you don’t see anything about Sunni-Shiite riots. There were peasant/landlord struggles or communists versus Baathists. The kind of sectarian fighting we’re seeing now in Iraq is new in its scale and ferocity, and it was the Americans who unleashed it.”

The U.S. stoked Shiite revanchism for more than a decade and a half, just as it long promoted Kurdish militias – and also abandoned them when they rose up, as in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War. The German imperialists similarly encouraged Kosovo Albanian and Croatian nationalism while the U.S. backed Bosnian Muslims against the dominant Serbian bourgeoisie in post-counterrevolution Yugoslavia.

The judicial murder of Saddam Hussein was orchestrated straight from the White House as an exercise in psychological warfare aimed at drawing public attention away from the military fiasco of the U.S. invasion/occupation of Iraq. This posed a problem to the “antiwar movement” with its politics of bourgeois pacifism. The most blatantly pro-Democratic Party groups of the “peace is patriotic” stripe, like United for Peace and Justice (UPJ), ducked the issue and focused on the news that 3,000 U.S. soldiers had died in Iraq (with barely a mention of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who have been killed as a result of the U.S. imperialist invasion). The International Action Center (IAC), founded by Ramsey Clark and led by the Workers World Party (WWP), called protests in several cities, but barely mentioned Hussein. Their pacifist message was “execution = escalation.” The Party of Socialism and Liberation (PSL), a split-off from the WWP, issued an on-line protest quoting from a news conference by Clark.

The WWP and PSL are heirs of the proto-Stalinist current led by Sam Marcy, who split from Trotskyism by defending the Kremlin suppression of the 1956 Hungarian workers uprising, a pro-socialist revolt that represented a developing political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy. Marcy and the Marcyites went on to politically defend Mao’s China, Castro’s Cuba, Kim Il Sung’s North Korea and a host of bourgeois nationalists, including Milosevic in Yugoslavia and Hussein in Iraq. The Marcyites tend to take on the political coloring of whatever regime they are defending at the moment. The PSL statement (29 December) on the Saddam trial admits that the Iraqi strong man “represented a strongly anti-communist wing of the Arab Baath Socialist Party, which was engaged in a violent struggle against communists and other leftists.” But it adds: “At the same time, much like European social democratic parties, it [the Baath party] combined its violent anti-communism with programs of social reforms that benefit sections of the masses as well as Iraq’s national development.”

Saddam Hussein was no West European social democratic champion of a welfare state. He was a mass murderer of Communists, Kurds, Shiites, Iranians and anyone else who stood in his way. But he was hardly the ogre and historically unique “monster” portrayed in U.S. war propaganda. Some erstwhile leftists who signed on as (often well-paid) propagandists for the American invasion, such as the execrable Christopher Hitchens, call Hussein a “new Hitler” and the Baath party “fascist.” Islamic fundamentalists are called “Islamofascists.” In fact, Hussein and the Baath ran a brutal bourgeois-nationalist regime of the sort frequently backed by Washington, such as Chiang Kai-shek’s murderous anti-Communist Guomindang regime in China. And the fact is that many of his worst crimes were carried out on behalf of, and with the active aid of, U.S. imperialism. As our leaflet (opposite page) headlined, “What an Obscenity! U.S. Imperialist Mass Murderers Execute Capitalist Dictator Hussein.”

As revolutionary Marxists – Trotskyists – the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International called during the 2003 invasion for the defeat of U.S. imperialism and defense of Iraq, and call today to drive the colonial occupiers out of Afghanistan and Iraq. But while fighting for proletarian action against imperialism, we give no *political* support to Hussein or any of the bourgeois forces currently opposing the U.S. The IG participated in the December 30 protest in New York City’s Times Square with a placard showing the infamous image of the Abu Ghraib torture prison and the comment “Who Gave U.S. War Criminals License to Kill Saddam Hussein?” (The AP circulated a photo of this sign internationally.) Other IG signs pointed out that Hussein rounded up and murdered Iraqi communists using assassination lists supplied by the CIA; and that he used poison gas against Iranians produced from chemicals supplied by the United States, with information furnished by U.S. military and spy agencies to pinpoint targets.

In their hand-wringing over the blowback from the execution of Hussein, various bourgeois commentators have lamented that the chaotic lynching didn’t have the “dignity” of the Nuremberg War Crimes trials following World War II. But those show trials were no less “victors’ justice” than their latter-day imitation carried out by the Iraqi High Tribunal in Baghdad. At the time, the U.S. Trotskyists exposed how the Nuremberg prosecution selectively highlighted crimes by the vanquished Nazi butchers while covering up the war crimes of the Anglo-American victors (such as the firebombing of Dresden). Any real trial of “crimes against humanity” committed in Iraq would find George Bush in the prisoners’ dock – along with his fellow war criminals including Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Robert Gates . . . and Democrats such as Bill and Hillary Clinton and John Kerry who not only voted for the war but have called for more U.S. troops to Iraq and imposed “U.N.” imperialist sanctions responsible for the deaths of over 1 million Iraqi children in the ‘90s.

To hold such a tribunal and enforce its verdict will require workers revolution to bring down imperialism. ■

**Who Gave Butchers of My Lai and
Torturers of Abu Ghraib License to Kill?**

What an Obscenity!

**U.S. Imperialist Mass Murderers
Execute Capitalist Dictator Hussein**

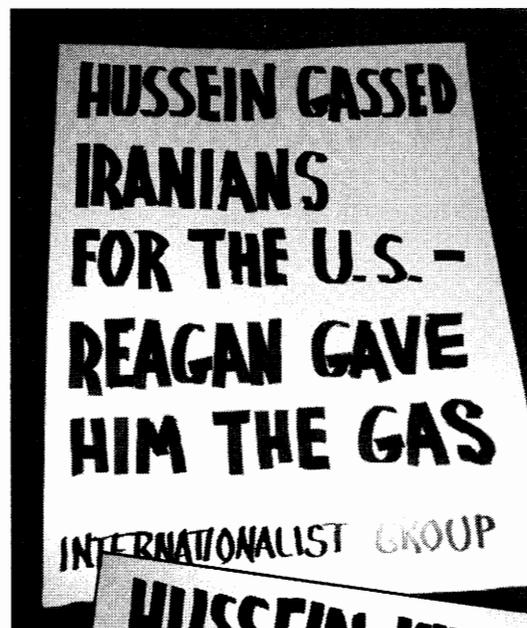
DECEMBER 29 – Today’s newspapers report that the execution of Saddam Hussein is imminent. The Internationalist Group will participate in a protest demonstration Saturday, December 30 in New York City.

Saddam was a capitalist butcher and brutal dictator. While U.S. rulers use this as a battle cry for their imperialist invasion and colonial occupation of Iraq, the fact is that many of Hussein’s most heinous crimes were carried at the behest of, and sometimes on direct orders from, Washington. In the 1970s and ’80s, he murdered several thousands of communists using hit lists supplied by the CIA. In mid-1980s, he used chemical gas warfare against Iranian troops with the full knowledge of the U.S., which supplied the gas, because at the time Reagan was backing Iraq against Iran.

Saddam Hussein was declared guilty of ordering the execution of 148 Kurds after an assassination attempt on him. As governor of Texas George Bush ordered the execution of 140 prisoners, more than any other state executive, for which he was known as Governor Death. In another grotesque touch, the announcement of Hussein’s death sentence was delayed until just before the November U.S. elections, in a transparent but unsuccessful attempt to increase the Republican vote.

The U.S. imperialists, who are responsible for the killing of more than 100,000 Iraqis since the 2003 invasion, and whose decade-long “U.N.” sanctions (under both Democrats and Republicans) led to the death of more than 1.5 million Iraqis, are executing their former hit man in order to cover up their own hideous crimes. What an obscenity – the world’s biggest war criminals, the torturers of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, claiming the “right” to hang Hussein after a sham trial that even the imperialist “human rights” groups denounced as a travesty!

- Defeat U.S. Imperialism – Defend Iraq!
- U.S. Mass Murderers and Their Quislings Have No Right to Hang Butcher Hussein
- U.S. Kills Hussein to Cover Its Own Heinous War Crimes
- Who Gave Butchers of My Lai and Abu Ghraib License to Kill Ex-U.S. Agent Hussein?
- U.S. Nuked Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Slaughtered 200,000 Japanese
- U.S. Napalmed Korea and Vietnam, Murdered Millions
- U.S. Has Killed Far More Iraqis Than Saddam Hussein
- Hussein Massacred Communists for U.S. – CIA Supplied the Hit Lists
- Hussein Gassed Iranians for U.S. – Reagan Supplied the Gas
- Democrats & Republicans, Twin War Parties – For a Revolutionary Workers Party!



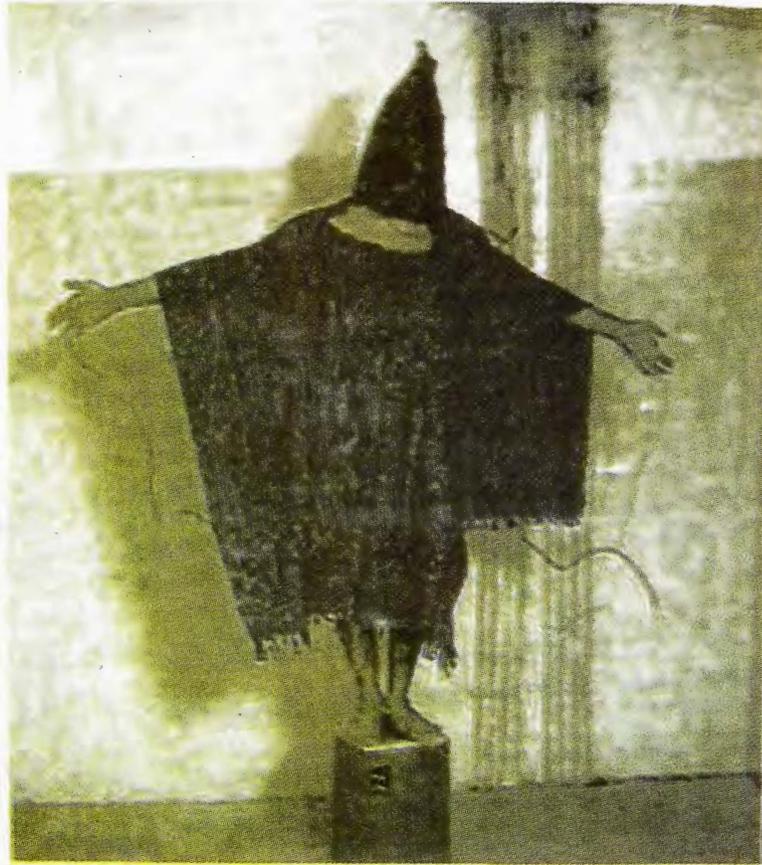
The Lynching of Saddam Hussein **U.S. Rips Apart Iraq**

**After Destroying
the Country with
Imperialist
Invasion and
Colonial
Occupation**

The execution of former Iraqi strong man Saddam Hussein on December 30, ordered by a puppet court orchestrated by the U.S. occupiers, was a hideous display of imperialist barbarism reminiscent of the Middle Ages. It was unadorned state murder carried out on the orders of the conquerors who have subjugated the oil-rich and strategically important Near Eastern country. It may also be a watershed in the history of Iraq, marking the "tipping point" after which it spirals irrevocably downward into a vortex of sectarian and communal strife. In addition to "terminating with extreme prejudice" its Iraqi nemesis, as the CIA used to describe its assassinations, the imperialist invaders may have killed off Iraq as well.

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ABU GHRAIB TORTURE INC.



Internationalist Group/FI

WHO GAVE U.S. WAR CRIMINALS LICENSE TO KILL SADDAM HUSSEIN?