

The

Summer 2009

No. 29

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# Internationalist



**For Workers Revolution Against the Dictatorship!**

## Upheaval in Iran



Getty Images

**No to All Wings of the Mullah Regime!  
U.S. Imperialism Hands Off!**

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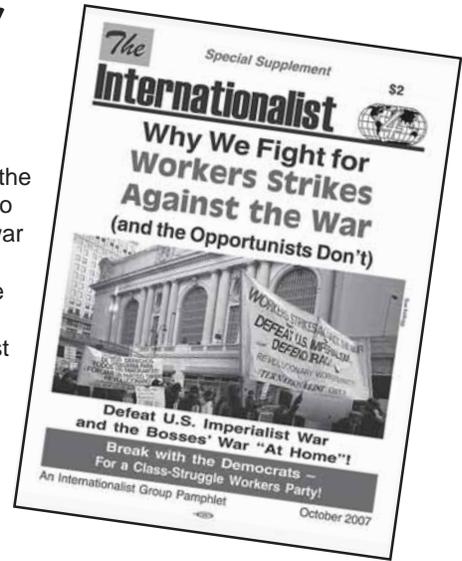
Cover photo: Demonstrators set burning barricades in streets during June 20 march protesting election fraud in Iran.

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**The Internationalist**

**A Journal of Revolutionary Marxism for the Reforging of the Fourth International**



**Publication of the Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International**

EDITORIAL BOARD: Jan Norden (editor), Mark Lazarus, Abram Negrete, Marjorie Salzburg.

The Internationalist (ISSN 1091-2843) is published bimonthly, skipping July-August, by Mundial Publications, P.O. Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A. Telephone: (212) 460-0983 Fax: (212) 614-8711 E-mail: [internationalistgroup@msn.com](mailto:internationalistgroup@msn.com) Subscriptions: US\$10 for five issues.

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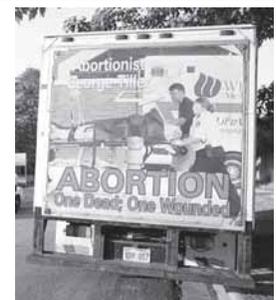
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## Defeat U.S. Imperialist Occupation – For Workers Strikes Against the War!

# How the “Anti-War” Movement Paved the Way for Obama’s War

*The following article is taken from a presentation by an Internationalist Group spokesman for a June 10 Revolution Film Club forum at Hunter College in New York.*

The United States has been officially at war for over seven and a half years, starting in Afghanistan in September 2001, going on to Iraq a year later, now in both countries and with escalating attacks on Pakistan. And that’s only the declared war in the Middle East and South Asian theaters. There are also the ongoing counterinsurgencies in the Philippines and Colombia, both of which involve hundreds of U.S. soldiers, special operations units, CIA teams and so on. Not to mention the tens of thousands of American troops stationed on the Korean peninsula, threatening to take military action against North Korea.

This is U.S. imperialism, the most extensive empire and powerful military force the world has ever known. The U.S. rains death down on countries on a mass scale. More than 600,000 dead in Iraq as of 2007, according to estimates by the British medical magazine *Lancet*. That’s on top of 3 million killed in Indochina during the 1970s, 2-3 million killed in Korea before the 1953 ceasefire. Plus nuking Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II, firebombing Tokyo, Dresden, and so on. U.S. rulers claim they are waging a war on terror. But terrorist attacks like the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center are small potatoes compared to the industrial scale slaughter the U.S. carries out, supposedly in retaliation but actually in order to get the world to bow down to Washington’s diktat.

The Afghanistan-Iraq-Pakistan war is already the longest war in U.S. history except for one: the Vietnam War. What was particularly significant about that imperialist war is that the U.S. lost it, for the first time ever, and while it was losing, a big antiwar movement grew up in this country, which was a factor in Washington’s decision to withdraw, but much less than the heroic resistance of the Vietnamese.

What’s striking is that by this point in the Vietnam War, eight years on, there were hundreds of thousands marching in the streets of New York and Washington opposing the war,



**President Barack Obama addresses U.S. troops at “Camp Victory” in Iraq, April 7. Under Obama, like Bush, tens of thousands of U.S. troops will continue to occupy Iraq for the indefinite future propping up a puppet government.**

now there is nothing. A few thousand at most, and that not very often. Why is that?

It’s not that the war is popular. The demonstrations at the outset of the war were as big as any during the Vietnam War. Five hundred thousand in Midtown Manhattan on 15 February 2003 protesting against the impending invasion of Iraq. There were even 300,000 marching in New York after the U.S. took Baghdad. But the protests have dwindled year after year. One reason for that is that the casualty rates of U.S. troops are not nearly as high as they were in Indochina. Something over 6,000 between Iraq and Afghanistan, compared to more than 50,000 U.S. dead in Vietnam. Of course, there are large numbers of severely injured, maybe 30,000 or so. But overall the impact is a lot less.

Second, there is the fact that in Vietnam there was a draft army, so that you had middle-class young men scrambling for draft deferments, taking off for Canada, and so on. Whereas now you have a so-called “professional” army, and what amounts to a poverty draft. They basically recruit poor youth, blacks and Latinos from the urban ghettos and barrios, and white youth from rural areas and economic backwaters like Appalachia or disaster zones like Midwest industrial regions where industry has shut down.

But there is also a major political factor behind the disappearance of the “antiwar” movement, and that is *the role of the leaders of this movement in tying protests to the Democratic Party*. This is key. For years, protests were dominated by banners denouncing “Bush’s war.” That was false, it was a deliberate lie for a very specific political purpose. The war on Afghanistan and Iraq was a *bipartisan* imperialist war from the beginning. Only one Congresswoman voted against the declaration of war on Afghanistan, Barbara Lee from Oakland, and she voted for the war budget. The Democrats regularly voted for the war budget in Iraq, even many of those who pretended to oppose the war. Then in 2006, the Democrats gained control of both houses of Congress ... and absolutely nothing happened.

Now you have a Democratic president Barack Obama, and ... the war keeps going on. He says he will have the combat troops out of Iraq by 2011, a couple of years from now, but he is planning to leave 40,000 to 50,000 troops “in country” indefinitely to “train” Iraqi soldiers and police, to protect diplomats, to strike at terrorists, whatever. Many of the troops will be the same ones that they previously called combat troops; now they will simply be “re-missioned” to call them something else.

In Afghanistan, Obama just appointed General McChrystal commander there. This guy was the head of the Special Operations Forces death squads in Iraq and then Afghanistan. He ran torture prisons. He had his people in Abu Ghraib where they were waterboarding prisoners, slamming them against walls, setting military dogs on them. They tortured a number of those detainees to death. This man is a war criminal of the first order. So Obama appoints McChrystal Afghan theater commander and what happens? Barely a peep.

Then there are the air strikes. The U.S. is massively slaughtering civilians over and over in Afghanistan and now Pakistan. The latest one in western Afghanistan killed about 140 civilians according the puppet Afghan government installed by the U.S. Scores of those were children. Last year the U.S. and its quisling Afghan army killed over 2,000 civilians, and the death toll is higher this year. In Vietnam you had constant demonstrations chanting, “Hey, hey, LBJ [Lyndon B. Johnson, the Democratic president], how many kids did you kill today?” But where are the demos at the White House chanting “Hey, Obama, how many kids did you bomb today?” Answer: there aren’t any. The “antiwar movement” is giving Obama a free pass.

This has been true for more than two years now. Why? Because the “antiwar” movement is dedicated to building support for the Democratic Party. During the Vietnam War it was notorious that every two years, when elections rolled around, the demonstrations would disappear as the whole “movement” dissolved into campaigning for Democratic “doves,” the so-called “peace candidates.” In the other years they would have a parade of Democrats on the speakers platforms and the antiwar demos. But now it has gotten so bad that since early 2007 there basically haven’t been any national antiwar mobilizations that you could shake a fist at. They called them off for the duration

of the presidential campaign, and then when they finally had one in Washington this past March there were maybe a couple thousand demonstrators at most, and they led them *away* from the White House across the river into Virginia, not even to the Pentagon but to war contractors in Arlington. They didn’t want to confront Obama.

The last issue of *The Internationalist* (No. 28, March-April 2009) reprinted a leaflet we wrote for a conference in Cleveland that proposed to resuscitate the 1970s Vietnam “antiwar movement.” We pointed out that Trotskyists had a very different program on how to fight against the Vietnam War. Going back to Lenin’s writings about World War I, we held that in a war between imperialism and a semi-colonial or colonial country, revolutionaries in the imperialist country must take the side of the colonial people fighting against imperialism, and must stand for the defeat of “your own” imperialism. So we hailed the U.S. defeat in the Vietnam War as a victory for the Vietnamese workers and peasants, *and for working people the world over, including in the United States*.

These “peace” coalitions are a variant of “popular fronts.” They tie opponents of imperialist war as well as the working class, oppressed minorities, youth, women and others to a section of the ruling class – in the U.S. case, the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. They always do that and always will.

In the 2008 elections, the Internationalist Group called straight-out to oppose all the capitalist parties, especially the Democrats and Republicans. After Obama’s victory, we noted that the election of a black president marked a significant social shift in this country founded on chattel slavery, where racist oppression is ever-present. But Obama doesn’t represent a political shift, it’s the same old capitalist Democratic Party.

In contrast, the vast majority of the U.S. left tried to get as close as possible to the Democrats. The International Socialist Organization (ISO) is particularly blatant about it, featuring a flattering photo of Obama on the front cover of its magazine with the headline, “Politics of Change or Politics as Usual.” Anyone glancing at this would conclude that they were supporting Obama. Some will be a little more “left” in their presentation while others like the Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA) are just out-and-out pro-Democratic Party. But one way or another, almost all of them try to sidle up to the Democrats, or at least not appear opposed to them. What they didn’t do is warn emphatically that Obama is going to continue the war, attack workers, immigrants, democratic rights and the rest. Yet the job of a revolutionary organization is to tell the truth to the masses, because that’s the only way to prepare for the inevitable struggle ahead. And the truth is that Obama is and always was an imperialist warmonger, a capitalist politician. We said it, they didn’t.

Obama since being elected has appointed an administration that is chock full of Clintonite “New Democrats,” who basically carry out the same policies as their Republican predecessors and successors. And he has adopted almost all the Bush national security policies: continuing wiretapping without warrants, refusing to release photos of torture at the U.S. interrogation centers, refusing to prosecute those guilty of

authorizing torture, continuing the war in Iraq, escalating it in Afghanistan and attacking Pakistan.

Now he is rattling sabres against North Korea because it had the audacity to test a nuclear weapon. Washington is threatening to “inspect” North Korean ships on the high seas, which is an act of war. North Korea has every right to possess nuclear arms, to protect itself against the threat of invasion by the U.S., which has tens of thousands of troops stationed along its border and which is armed to the teeth with thousands of nukes. North Korea a bureaucratically deformed workers state. Under the Kim dynasty, it’s a far cry from the Soviet democracy of Lenin and Trotsky. But they have expropriated the capitalists and that lays the economic basis of a workers state. So Trotskyists defend North Korea against counterrevolution while calling for a political revolution to open the way to genuine socialism. The same for Cuba, Vietnam and above all the Chinese deformed workers state, where capitalism has made big inroads and a showdown is approaching over which way it is going to go.

The Obama government is also attacking working people in the United States. In particular you can see this over the recent so-called auto “bailout.” After having handed over trillions of dollars to the Wall Street banks and continuing the Bush government’s policies of paying off the bankers who created the financial meltdown, now they have engineered the bankruptcy of Chrysler and General Motors. In the course of taking over and refashioning these huge companies, they are closing down more than two dozen plants and throwing close to 50,000 auto workers out of their jobs. This is a crime against the working class, and could spell the end of the United Auto Workers (UAW).

The capitalist rulers see clearly what is going on. As economic columnist Floyd Norris noted in the *New York Times* (2 May), “It took a conservative Republican to open relations to the largest Communist country in the world [China], it took a liberal Democrat to break the UAW.” And the UAW bureaucrats are carrying out Obama’s program, agreeing to cut new hires’ wages in half, sacrificing jobs.

The common denominator of the programs put forward by the reformist left is that they are all calling on the capitalist government to carry out one or another reform within the framework of capitalism. We Trotskyists by no means reject the fight for genuine reforms in the interests of the exploited and oppressed. But we do so in a revolutionary manner, putting forward a program for the working class to mobilize its own power against the capitalists. Leon Trotsky put forward this approach in the Transitional Program, where he called for a series of demands that would serve as a bridge leading from the present struggles of the workers to the goal of socialist revolution.

What does that mean in terms of the struggle against imperialist war? We have been calling almost since the inception of the Internationalist Group for workers strikes against the war, and for transportation workers to “hot cargo,” or refuse to handle, war material. And we have tried to the extent of our abilities to carry this out. Some groups like the once-Trotskyist Spartacist League (SL) argued that such de-

mands had no “resonance” in the working class.

But last year on May Day there was a strike against the war, the first ever by a U.S. union against a U.S. imperialist war. The International Longshore and warehouse Union (ILWU) shut down all 27 ports on the West Coast to stop the war on Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of the left just shrugged it off. The SL tried to pretend it was really a social-patriotic mobilization to “support our troops” and to support the Democrats, using the statements of the ILWU top bureaucrats, who fought tooth and nail against having the port shutdown in the first place and then tried to distort its meaning.

To fight against imperialist war, you have to fight to bring down the capitalist imperialist system. The counterpart of imperialist war abroad is the war on democratic rights, on working people, racial minorities, immigrants and other oppressed and exploited sectors “at home.” So the struggle against what is now “Obama’s war” must be linked to the struggle against Obama’s bailout of the Wall Street banks, and against the bailout of the auto bosses and destruction of the unions. We must defend immigrants against the onslaught of police-state raids and mass deportations.

In this country built on slavery, the fight against the persecution and oppression of black people, particularly black youth, is always key. We must fight against the racist death penalty which threatens the execution of former Black Panther and renowned radical journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, and currently of Troy Davis, whose lives hang in the balance. We must mobilize against the systematic arrest of young black men, which has produced the situation today where by the mid-1990s one-third of all black men between the ages of 20 and 29 were in jail, on parole or on probation, and there were more young black men in prison in that age group than in college. Yet Democrat Obama has consistently tried to avoid any fight against racism.

We have to fight for the rights of women, currently under mounting attack as the anti-abortion forces mobilize their “god squads” and killers to literally murder abortion doctors, as just happened with the assassination of Dr. George Tiller in Wichita, Kansas. And that means opposing the Democratic Party, which far from unconditionally upholding the right to abortion has joined the Republicans in chipping away at that fundamental democratic right by subjecting it to all sorts of restrictions.

Against the Democrats, and minor capitalist parties like the Greens, Trotskyists call to build a revolutionary workers party. That will be an arduous struggle in this politically backward country where there has never been any mass working-class party, even of a reformist sort as in Europe. It has to be waged in the unions, as part of the struggle to oust the bureaucrats who tie the workers to the Democrats. It must be fought out in the battle for immigrant rights, where the leadership of many immigrant groups supported Obama, yet the Democrats in office are continuing the anti-immigrant offensive. Such a party must be internationalist to the core, for the only way to put an end to this capitalist system is through international socialist revolution.

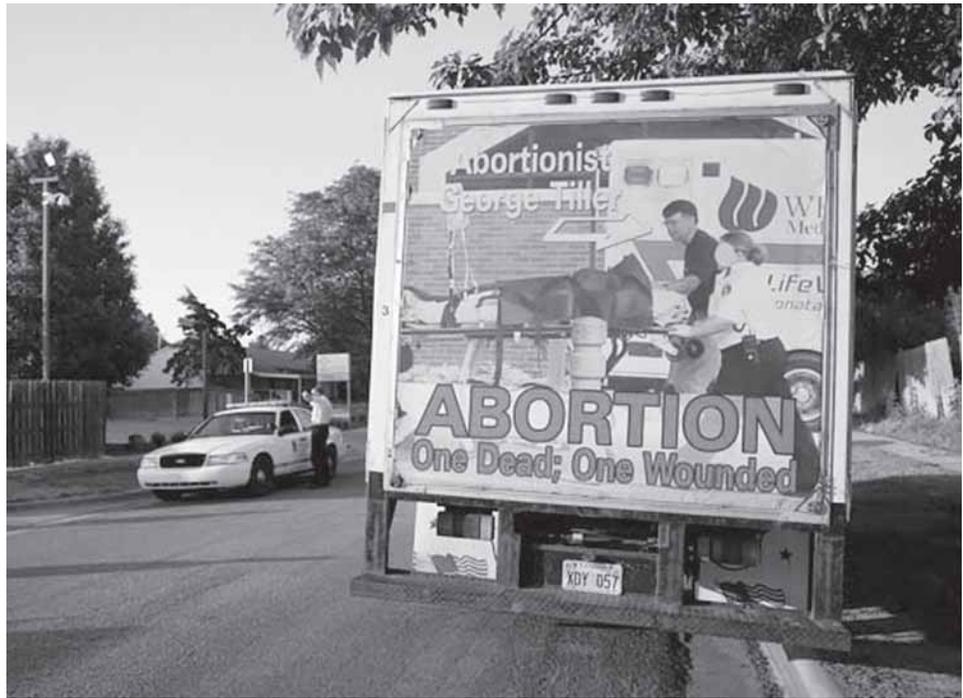
It’s a tall order, but as American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon said a half century ago, it’s the only road to peace. ■

## Obama/Democrats' Conciliation Emboldens Reactionaries

# Assassination of Courageous Doctor in Wichita: War on Abortion Rights Escalates

JUNE 11 – The vile murder of the courageous abortion doctor George Tiller at his church in Wichita, Kansas was not the deranged act of a lone gunman. This heinous crime marks an escalation of the war on women's right to abortion in this country. The constitutional protection hangs by a thread – a single vote in the Supreme Court. The “god squads” are in a frenzy, harassing women patients and abortion providers at the clinics. The reaction of the bourgeois feminists has been to look to the Democratic Party and the government of Barack Obama in the White House. Yet the Democrats are not allies but *enemies of women's rights*. Obama *opposes* the late-term abortions that Dr. Tiller provided while seeking “common ground” with the Bible-thumping bigots who harbor the abortion doctor killers. And the police, from local cops to the FBI, give a free pass to the assassins, whom they know well.

Dr. George Tiller, who provided medical services to women in need of abortion for 35 years, was hounded by the reactionary bigots for decades. In 1986 his clinic was bombed, in 1993 he was shot in both arms by a fanatical opponent of abortion. That year Operation Rescue, the largest organizer of anti-abortion mobs, moved its national headquarters to Wichita to target Tiller; more than 2,000 people were arrested as they besieged his clinic that summer. They then started stalking clinic employees. Tiller also faced an endless barrage of state legal actions, grand jury probes, regulatory and professional misconduct complaints, as opponents used any ploy to put his clinic out of business. After years of “investigation,” the Kansas attorney general charged him with improper actions in 19 cases of late-term abortions; this past March, a jury took barely 45 minutes of deliberation to find him innocent on all of these trumped-up counts.



Steve Hebert/Atlas Press for The New York Times

**Truck targeting Dr. George Tiller parked outside his Wichita clinic, two days after his assassination.**

The assassin, Scott Roeder, was no stranger to the anti-abortion protests, or to the police. A 2007 posting by a Scott Roeder on the Operation Rescue web site stated: “Tiller is the concentration camp ‘Mengele’ of our day and needs to be stopped...” (*Washington Post*, 2 June). The local office of the FBI was well aware of Roeder's activities, having warned him in 2000 about gluing shut the doors of a Kansas City clinic, a federal crime. On May 23, he was seen on a security camera gluing the doors at the same clinic, and he was chased away by a clinic worker on May 29, the day before the murder. The FBI was informed about both instances but said it could do nothing until a federal grand jury was convened. Police around the country proclaim “zero tolerance” of petty crimes, arresting people on the slightest violation, yet here they did nothing about blatant violations of federal law as the “perp” went from “vandalism” to murder.

No less important in setting the climate in which religious

**Mobilize to Defend the Clinics! Abolish All Restrictions –  
For Free Abortion on Demand!**

nuts and right-wing “right-to-lifers” spawn assassination are the bourgeois politicians. For the eight years of the George Bush regime, evangelical Christians and other abortion opponents concentrated on manipulating the Republican Party and the levers of state power. With the changing of the guard in Washington and the dominance of the Democrats, some of the reactionary fringe have grown frantic. From Texas to Notre Dame they have been showing up at presidential events with their grotesque depictions of fetuses and signs proclaiming Obama a “baby killer,” “Anti-Christ” and “terrorist.” The White House response has been feel-good talk about “civility” and finding “common ground.” This conciliation only emboldens blood-thirsty anti-abortionists, from right-wing instigators like Fox News’s Bill O’Reilly to “pro-life” killers who pull the trigger.

In his Notre Dame University commencement address, Obama repeated over and over the mantra about seeking “common ground” with these antediluvian reactionaries who want to turn women into incubators, deny them medical services and persecute those who provide this care. Obama’s rhetoric is not empty. He called to “work together to reduce the number of women seeking abortion” and to “draft a sensible conscience clause,” to absolve doctors for violating the Hippocratic Oath by refusing to perform abortions. Obama has said that he is personally opposed to abortion, and last July, he told the “progressive Christian” magazine *Relevant* that as long as there is a narrow medical exception for the woman’s health, “I think we can prohibit late-term abortions.” He is offering up the fundamental democratic right of woman to control their own bodies on the altar of his quest for a political bloc with religious reaction. To hell with that – there can be no common ground with these bigots, they must be defeated!

Obama took over this repulsive appeal from Hillary Clinton, who in 2005 prepared her bid for the Democratic presidential nomination by declaring, in a speech on the anniversary of the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion, that she was looking for “common ground” with abortion opponents on the basis that the “tragic choice” of abortion “does not ever have to be exercised or only in very rare circumstances.” This, in turn, was a continuation of Bill Clinton’s 1992 and ’96 presidential campaign slogan that abortion should be safe, legal and rare.” For more than a decade and a half, these capitalist politicians have been trying to unite with the ultra-right, or at least take the wind out of their sails, by cynically sacrificing women. Although bourgeois feminists fervently campaigned for them, *the Clintons, Obama and the Democratic Party as a whole have joined in the attack on women’s rights.*

All the talk about abortion as a “tragic choice” or as Obama put it, a “heart-wrenching decision,” are nothing but religious claptrap and attempts to make women feel guilty about trying to control their own lives by ending an unwanted pregnancy. What is tragic is forcing women to give birth against their will, and condemning more than 100,000 desperate women to death every year due to the consequences of botched abortions, often self-induced because they can’t find a doctor to do it. Abortion is a simple medical procedure and potentially one of the safest. A fetus is not an “unborn child,”

it is a part of a woman’s body until birth. This is as true in the third trimester as earlier. There is no such thing as a “partial-birth abortion” – this is a propaganda term by those who want to label abortion infanticide (“baby killing”). A fetus has no rights, the woman does – or should have. And the fight to defend those rights must be waged against *all* the capitalist parties and politicians, who in one way or another, to one degree or another, chain women to the family.

Dr. George Tiller was murdered because he defended the rights of women and stood by those who decided they had to end pregnancy in the face of all the abuse heaped on them and the death threats against him. His motto was “Trust Women.” So did Dr. David Gunn, shot to death outside his Pensacola, Florida abortion clinic in 1993, as was Dr. John Britton at another Pensacola clinic the next year; Shannon Lowney and Leanne Nichols, clinic workers gunned down in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1994; and Buffalo abortion doctor Barnett Slepian, killed in his kitchen in 1998. The politicians did not rush to defend the doctors whose names and addresses were published on hit-lists on the Internet, to be crossed off when they were murdered. None were in evidence at Dr. Tiller’s funeral. Instead, the Democrats want to find “common ground” with a “movement” led by fascistic elements like Randall Terry, who orchestrated the ’90s Wichita protests and the recent protests against Obama at Notre Dame.

Terry started out working for Guatemalan president Efraín Ríos Montt, the godfather of the death squads in that country. While various anti-abortion leaders issued hypocritical statements distancing themselves from the killing of George Tiller, Terry called the courageous doctor a “mass murderer” who deserved “execution.” It was striking, then, that various “mainstream” women’s organizations that issued statements lamenting Dr. Tiller’s death echoed the same conciliatory theme as Obama. For years, these groups have desperately sought respectability by avoiding a forthright defense of abortion. NARAL Pro-Choice America, which changed its name to eliminate the “A-word,” issued a “call on opponents of a woman’s right to choose to condemn this action completely and absolutely.” Planned Parenthood quoted Obama’s words, “imploring” the anti-abortion forces to drop the “hateful rhetoric”; it couldn’t even bring itself to mention abortion at all.

The bourgeois feminists’ calls for the “full weight of the law” to be brought to bear against anti-abortion violence show deadly illusions in the capitalist state. The FBI has known of Tiller’s assassin, Roeder, for years, and at most gave him a “heads up” tip not to get caught violating the clinic access law. Likewise they had been keeping tabs on Paul Hill, who shot Dr. Britton in Pensacola. Dr. Slepian in Buffalo had been targeted by Operation Rescue, and among the 1993 besiegers outside his home was James Kopp, shown on tape making death threats against the doctor, whom he slew a year later. The blind faith of the “pro-choice” organizers in the police brings to mind the calls in the early 1960s on President John Kennedy to send the FBI to protect civil rights marchers. The feds did intervene, but they were so deeply tied to the KKK lynchers that their informants took part in church bombings. No matter who sits in the White House, it’s a given that the forces of bourgeois repression

Steve Hebert/Atlas Press for NY Times



### Anti-abortion fanatic at funeral of Dr. George Tiller, June 6.

will be on the side of bourgeois reaction.

As we have stated:

“The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International stand for abortion that is legal, safe, free, and on demand. That is, if a woman, of whatever age, wants an abortion to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, then she has the right to have it. No politician, priest or police, or husband or boyfriend or parent or anyone else, should be able to force her to give birth. Period, end of story. Rather than looking to the state to protect abortion providers and their patients, we call for class-struggle defense of the clinics against the anti-abortion ‘god squad’ thugs. We put forward this program in the United States, in Mexico, Brazil, Algeria and throughout the world as part of our program for women’s liberation through socialist revolution.”

—“Defeat the Anti-Abortion Crusade,” *The Internationalist* No. 23, April-May 2006

Obama seeks to conciliate the anti-abortion crusaders in the name of “overcoming” the “culture wars” that have rent the U.S. for decades. “Culture wars are so ‘90s,” he said in a 2007 speech to Planned Parenthood. And ‘80s, and ‘70s, and ‘60s, he might have added. Again, behind the political posture are concrete acts. Obama the candidate told PP “the first thing I’d do as president” would be to sign the Freedom of Choice Act, which in effect codifies *Roe v. Wade*. Yet Obama the president says the bill is “not my highest legislative priority” (*New York Times*, 15 May). The “culture wars” are not some ethereal dispute between conservatives and liberals over “values.” What they is really about is the reactionary drive to undo the limited gains of the civil rights movement, of women’s rights, of gay rights and democratic rights in general in order to return to the regimented social reaction of the Cold War.

These rights were won because of tumultuous social struggles, linked to the fact that the U.S. was losing an imperialist war. The tenuous and limited right to abortion embodied in the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* decision was partly in response to a growing women’s movement, but more fundamentally due to a general awareness of the ruling class that it could not simply clamp down on social unrest. In the same period, the death penalty was temporarily set aside. On the other hand, the rollback of women’s rights has gone hand in hand with attacks on blacks’ rights to vote; with mass round-ups of tens of thousands of immigrants thrown into concentration

camp and deported even though they committed no crime; with attacks on the unions and workers’ rights; and with imperialist war that has killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afghans, while police state repressive measures like the PATRIOT U.S.A. law.

Thus the fight to defend abortion rights must be part of a broad struggle to defend the exploited and oppressed against the “bipartisan” war being waged against them and their rights by both major capitalist parties. Today, the constitutional protection of abortion rights could be reversed with a single vote on the Supreme Court. Anti-abortion conservatives assume and “pro-choice” liberals fervently hope that Obama’s nominee, Judge Sonia

Sotomayor will be a consistent supporter of *Roe v. Wade*. But there is no evidence of that, and if she reflects Obama’s policy that would lead to decisions severely restricting the threatened right to abortion. Even today, when it is still legal, the Guttmacher Institute reports that no abortion services are available in 87 percent of U.S. counties.

We had wanted to present a map showing this, but cannot because many medical facilities who provide abortion fear that if this becomes known, they will be subjected to the same persecution as Dr. Tiller. Even the information that abortion is available in a particular county could lead these vigilantes to locate the facilities and track down the personnel. In short: abortion in much of the United States today is *semi-clandestine*. And now for women seeking third-trimester abortions, it has become almost unavailable. Less than one percent of all abortions are performed after 21 weeks, and these cases are almost always connected with deep problems: severe deformities of the fetus, very young teenagers who discover late that they are pregnant, etc. Dr. Tiller was one of only three doctors in the entire U.S. who publicly provided late-term abortions. One of the remaining two, Dr. Warren Hern of Boulder, Colorado has been the subject of death threats for years. He remarked on Dr. Tiller’s death:

“This is the result of 35 years of relentless and merciless anti-abortion harassment, violence and intimidation, hate speech and violent rhetoric, and this is the absolutely predictable consequence of that.... Clearly, the anti-abortion people will stop at nothing, including assassination, to impose their will on other people.... Dr. Tiller’s ‘crime’ was that he helped women.... We don’t have to invade other countries to find the terrorists. They’re here killing doctors who do abortions.”

Opponents of abortion got what they wanted with the assassination of George Tiller. He is dead, his clinic has been permanently closed, women who require the services he provided have almost nowhere to turn. Wherever possible, defenders of abortion should mobilize to defend clinics under siege. To defeat the forces of reaction that would deny women the fundamental right to control their own bodies requires a fight against all forms of social oppression and the system of exploitation that gives rise to them. Not Democrats or Republicans but a revolutionary workers party will fight to defend women’s rights, as in the early Soviet republic, led by Lenin and Trotsky, where for the first time in history the right to abortion was made real. ■

## For Workers Revolution Against the Islamic Dictatorship!



Ben Curtis/AP

Up to a million or more Iranians marched to Enqelab (Revolution) Square (above) on June 15 to protest election fraud in the largest opposition demo in the 30-year history of the Islamic Republic.

## No to All Wings of the Mullah Regime!

### U.S. Imperialism Hands Off!

JUNE 23 – For more than a week, Iran has been convulsed by mass demonstrations denouncing election fraud. Hundreds of thousands have repeatedly taken to the streets to denounce the government, which is now threatening, and beginning to carry out, a bloody crackdown. This time around, imperialist intervention is veiled: the White House feigns neutrality, the Western media go all out for the opposition, while in the background various agencies provide vital technical aid. In reality, all candidates in the presidential vote swear allegiance to the Islamic Republic, and the supposed moderate reformers are no less butchers and enemies of poor and working people than the conservative “populist” government. The situation cries out for revolutionary leadership independent of all factions of the theocracy, to wage a struggle for workers revolution against imperialism and clerical reaction.

On Friday, June 12, within two hours of the closing of polls, the state news agency announced a landslide victory for “hard-line” incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whom they credited with more than double the vote for his main opponent, the “liberal” Mir Hossein Mousavi. A few hours later, the election commission followed suit, declaring Ahmadinejad the hands-down victor by a 64 percent to 34

percent margin. (Another “reform” candidate, Mehdi Karrubi, was given less votes than the number of spoiled ballots.) Mousavi supporters, who had expected to win big, reacted with disbelief and outrage, charging massive vote fraud. Both of the leading contenders uphold Iran’s theocratic regime, but the dispute quickly spilled into the street, where events threatened to spiral out of control.

On Saturday and Sunday protests and clashes between demonstrators and the police and the Basij auxiliary of the regime’s Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) broke out in the capital city of Tehran. There were burning tires in the streets and buses were torched. A number of critics of the government, including prominent “reformers,” were arrested. Then on Monday, June 15 a massive protest was held in central Tehran bringing out hundreds of thousands of marchers, with some estimates of up to 1-3 million. Curiously, many of the Mousavi supporters carried signs in English saying “Where Is My Vote.” Mousavi, who initially only wanted to petition the clerical hierarchy, finally emerged to address the rally.

The next day there were competing pro- and anti-government mass demonstrations, the former held in the Ahmadinejad stronghold of impoverished south Tehran and latter in affluent north Tehran. Both rallies chanted “*Alahu akbar*” (God is great), the main slogan of the 1979 uprising that overthrew the hated monarchy of Shah Reza Pahlavi. Anti-regime protesters wore

green (denoting Islam), while government supporters waved the Iranian flag. Protest marches continued through Thursday, when Mousavi called a day of mourning for those slain to date (the regime admitted to seven, the actual number is at least several dozen).

In his much-awaited Friday sermon, “Supreme Leader” Ayatollah Ali Khamenei – who, backed by the “Guardian Council” of high-level Shiite clerics, is the real ruler of Iran – came down hard for Ahmadinejad and read the riot act to dissident leaders: “Nothing can be changed. The presidential campaign is finished,” he declared, threatening that if the “political elite” did not call off protests, “they would be responsible for the bloodshed and chaos” that would follow. At the same time Khamenei threw a sop to clerical factions backing rival candidates by scolding the president for accusing them of corruption.

With this, the battle lines were drawn. The next day, thousands of *pasdaran* and *basiji* occupied key squares in central Tehran, chasing out demonstrators. There were dispersed clashes with several thousand hard-core protesters who in different places managed to drive off government forces. Demonstrators and bystanders were shot, with up to 19 reported dead; an amateur video captured the wrenching agony of one young woman as she died from a bullet to the heart. Scores of wounded were arrested in the hospitals while others sought refuge in European embassies. But even this didn’t put an end to the unrest. On Sunday, June 21, there were new



**Government security men beat man protesting vote fraud in Tehran, June 14, as supporters rush to his aid.**

marches, this time with the main chant “*Mag bar dictator*” – Death to the dictator! Two days later, the Pasdaran warned protesters they would face a “revolutionary confrontation” if they continued to demonstrate.

Given the regime’s crackdown on news reporting (sending many foreign journalists home, confining others to their offices and arresting more than two dozen), restrictions on the Internet and sporadic blockage of cellular service, the world has mainly depended for several days on various “new media” for news. This had led to a lot of hype about a “Twitter Revolution.” If one believed the media one would think that every youth in Tehran has a Facebook account on their computer and is incessantly “tweeting” away on their cell phones in English. In reality, all this comes from a small and relatively well-off minority. Yet despite the rumors, speculation and disinformation, the deep fissures within the Islamic regime can no longer be hidden from view.

But there should be no illusions. Mousavi is not the soft-spoken debonair liberal architect the media make him out to be. Nor is the contest between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad about “democracy” versus “dictatorship,” whatever some of the former’s Iranian supporters may want. The “reformers” have no intention of ushering in a transition to Western-style bourgeois democracy, no matter what some imperialist pundits pretend. They merely want to streamline the theocracy and make it more palatable to the educated middle class. And just below the surface, this is all about settling of scores among the Islamic rulers: Ahmadinejad’s patron, Ayatollah Khamenei, is bitterly opposed by the force behind Mousavi, Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, notorious as the symbol of the capitalist greed of Iran’s “millionaire mullahs.”

## Solidarity?

Internationally, there have been various demonstrations and calls for “solidarity” with those fighting the clerical regime in Iran, notably in worldwide demonstrations called for June 26. But beware - many of those who claim to support the demonstrators in Tehran are no friends of the Iranian masses.

In protests in Los Angeles, Washington and London, some carried the Iranian flag with the imperial lion of the murderous shah. Zionists, of course, are also quite prepared to call for “down with the Islamic Republic of Iran.” And some of those talking about “revolution” in Iran and calling for “intervention,” are the same people who only a few months ago were calling to “bomb Iran,” as journalist Stephen Kinzer has pointed out (“Democracy, made in Iran,” [guardian.co.uk](http://guardian.co.uk), 22 June).

Even some of the labor support comes from the likes of the (ICFTU) International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the American AFL-CIO, who backed the pseudo-unions of the shah while genuine labor militants were being tortured by the SAVAK. Class-conscious workers must make no common bloc against the mullah regime with these supporters of imperialism.

Mousavi himself is no newcomer to the intrigues and power politics at the top of the Islamic dictatorship. While various would-be socialists hail the “movement” for this pseudo-democrat, it should be pointed out that during his stint as prime minister from 1981 to 1989 he oversaw the slaughter of *tens of thousands* of leftists, members of national minorities, homosexuals and women. When Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued his fatwa calling for the execution of writer Salman Rushdie in 1989, Mousavi was head of the government that offered a bounty for assassinating the author. And Mousavi is no friend of working people. In the presidential debates, he went after subsidies, including for food and fuel, which are vital to the subsistence of Iran’s impoverished millions. In an interview with the London *Financial Times* (13 April) he called for “targeting” (limiting) “the huge subsidies we give for various commodities.”

This standard-bearer for Iran’s modernizing bourgeoisie and upper middle class is in fact a blood-drenched free-marketeteer, which is why many imperialists would like to see him back in office. As for Mousavi’s call for a “return” to the principles of Ayatollah Khomeini, this is an appeal to conservative ayatollahs who consider Khamenei an ignorant upstart (he was jumped from *hojatoleslam*, a mid-level cleric, to ayatollah in order to be appointed Supreme Leader), and look askance at Ahmadinejad’s claim that the “Hidden Imam”, the Shiite messiah, guides him in running the country. Others are jealous that Ahmadinejad’s power base, the Pasdaran, have grabbed some of the juiciest plums in privatizing Iran’s state-owned industries.

***In Iran’s electoral battle, both sides are utterly corrupt, and both are partisans of the most brutal capitalist exploitation. But the explosion of popular discontent is not just about the vote. The lid has come off the pressure cooker of social tensions that have been building up for years. Particularly among youth who have lived their entire lives under the rule of the mullahs, there is a mass desire to be free of the stifling controls of the clerical dictatorship. The question is, where will this outpouring of discontent lead?***

### What Next in Iran?

Irrespective of the reported vote totals, Iran’s elections were a farce, because the candidates are always hand-picked by the Guardian Council and the country is subject to a mind-numbing system of religious and political censorship. For their part, the demonstrators were careful not to transgress the rules which forbid any kind of “anti-Islamic” gathering. Initially, as Beirut-based journalist Robert Fisk reported in the London *Independent* (17 June), Iranian special forces police even prevented Ahmadinejad’s *basiji* from attacking the crowds of Mousavi supporters. But the loyalty of the “forces of order”



**May Day demonstration in Sanandaj, Kordestan, a dozen labor activists were arrested.**

Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network

will now be put to the test as Khamenei decrees what is “un-Islamic” and what is not (as Khomeini before him liquidated one rival ayatollah after another).

With Tehran poised on knife’s edge and information from outlying cities where there have been protests (including Shiraz, Isfahan and Tabriz) sketchy at best, it is impossible to say at this moment what the outcome will be. The regime’s thugs easily overwhelmed student protests in 1999 and 2003. The current protests have been much more broad-based, though still primarily middle-class, and sometimes demonstrators have fought back, torching *basiji* motorbikes. This means that it will take a much bloodier crackdown to squelch the mass unrest with repression. This prospect could induce various leading clerics in the theocratic “republic” to intervene, thus posing sharply the question of where the police and army stand.

***But the one social force that has not entered the fray so far that has the power to upset the calculations of all wings of the rulers is the Iranian working class.***

Over the last decade or so, thousands of Iran’s workers have lost their jobs, particularly in the large state-owned industries, as the government privatizes with a vengeance. In the early years of Islamic rule, after independent factory committees (*shuras*) were destroyed and worker militants jailed en masse, a corporatist “labor” apparatus of Islamic *shuras* and “labor” organizations was built up. In recent years, some independent unions have managed to establish themselves through tenacious struggle. They are subject to relentless persecution, as this past May Day when more than 150 labor activists (including 30 women) were arrested out of a demonstration of 2,000 in Tehran’s Laleh Park, as were another dozen in Sanandaj in Iranian Kurdistan. More than 90 are still in jail, and we demand their immediate freedom.

The independent unions have won some victories, most recently when workers at the giant Khodro auto and truck plant (workforce 30,000) successfully struck this May to win back wages and the conversion of several thousand temporary work contracts into permanent positions. (The government promised



**Workers at the Iran Khodro auto plant (shown here in 2004) won strike in May for unpaid wages and conversion of temporary contracts into permanent positions. On June 18, the independent union at Khodro held a half-hour strike on each shift to regime's repression.**

to do so before the election, seeking to defuse worker discontent.) During the election campaign, the militant Vahed Bus Company Union in Tehran and suburbs, while emphasizing that it didn't support any candidate, posed a series of questions to each, beginning with where they stood on independent workers organizations. Naturally they got no response.

In the post-election turmoil, on June 18 it was reported that both shifts at the Khodro auto plant would strike for a half-hour against the repression. This was followed by a condemnation of the attacks on the protests by the Vahed union. At a rally, Mousavi called for a general strike in the event of his arrest, and the *New York Times* (22 June) reports that "opposition members were beginning to ask ... whether it was time to shift strategies, from street protests to some kind of national strike." But would workers heed this call? The pro-free-market Mousavi and the other "reformers" have absolutely nothing to offer the working class, let alone the urban poor who largely remain loyal to Ahmadinejad.

***In any case, a strike on behalf of one section of the mullah regime against its rivals should not be the goal. What is needed is independent class mobilization of the power of labor against all wings of the bourgeois rulers, whether they wear clerical robes or not.***

The government of Ahmadinejad and Khamenei clearly intends to glue up the cracks in their regime with blood. The intense social pressure to which they are subject leads them to turn even on their own, threatening their rivals Mousavi and Rafsanjani by detaining the latter's family members, albeit briefly. Protesters are now directly up against the "Supreme Leader" (*velayat-e-faqih*) who declares that he – and he alone – represents Islam. While up until now, various supporters of reform have become disillusioned with the Islamic system, even the rapid total suppression of the current protests would leave much wider sections of the population em-

bittered. And there is no guarantee that a crackdown will work.

Attempts to reform the Islamic regime have led into a bloody dead-end. The most basic democratic demands – freedom of the press, of speech, of assembly – let alone genuine equality for women, are counterposed to the Islamic order. While the "reformers" call for new elections, so long as the present rulers are in power the result would likely be the same. The demand for a *revolutionary, secular constituent assembly* is on the order of the day. But this could only come about through an insurrection overthrowing the Islamic regime and its "Supreme Leader" and "Guardian Council." The sole social force with the possibility of carrying this out is the working class, which must simultaneously create the organs of its own class power – *workers councils*.

Many Iranian protesters today talk of returning to the "ideals of the Islamic Revolution" of 1979-80. But those "ideals" meant the wholesale slaughter of leftists, national minorities, homosexuals and women who refused to wear the chador. What's needed instead is to return to the socialist ideals of the 1917 Russian October Revolution led by V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky. Many self-proclaimed socialists and even communists won't say this, not only out of congenital fear of doing anything that would make them unpopular, but also because like many erstwhile leftists as a result of the betrayals of Stalinism they no longer believe in proletarian revolution. They prefer to drape themselves in Islamic green rather than Bolshevik red.

Yet from the time of Iran's 1905 Constitutional Revolution against the Qajar monarchy, coinciding with the first Russian Revolution against the Romanov dynasty, there has always been a close connection between revolution and counterrevolution in Iran and Russia. The short-lived 1920-21 Gilan Soviet Republic was established with the aid of the Soviet Red Army, and was crushed by Reza Khan who seized power in Tehran at the head of a White Russian Cossack brigade and then proclaimed himself shah. His son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, was installed as shah in 1953 in a U.S. coup as part of the anti-Soviet Cold War.

Russia's Red October of 1917 confirmed the Trotskyist perspective of *permanent revolution*: that in the present imperialist epoch, even achieving basic democratic tasks including agrarian revolution, national liberation and democracy for the exploited and oppressed requires that the working class take power, backed by the peasantry and urban poor and led by a genuine communist party, to sweep away the capitalist state and establish a workers and peasants government to expropriate the bourgeoisie. This program is no less valid for Iran today, and would open the way to international socialist revolution, extending first and foremost to the Iraqi toilers subjected to colonial occupation by the U.S. imperialists.

Press TV



Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (above, left) and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Both were members of the Republican Guard (*pasdaran*) during Iran-Iraq war.

### The Imperialists and the Mullahs

Of course the protests have garnered massive sympathy and support in the imperialist countries, and the pro-Mousavi protesters have their numerous placards with slogans in English for international consumption. With their trademark spring green (as opposed to the Persian green of Iran's flag), at first glance this looks very much like a U.S.-instigated color-coded "revolution" (orange for Ukraine, rose for Georgia). While the bulk of the reformist left, notably the British Socialist Workers Party and the U.S. International Socialist Organization, has lined up behind the Mousavi "movement," those groups whose tastes run to "anti-imperialist" Third World despots, such as the Workers World Party, as well as conspiracy-mongering pundits like James Petras, have leapt to the defense of Ahmadinejad.

Certainly, the imperialists are up to their usual dirty tricks, although the White House has been at pains to give the appearance of standing aside. There's a division of labor. The capitalist media, liberal and conservative alike, have mounted a non-stop propaganda blitz for Mousavi, painting him as a "democrat" and "moderate" as opposed to the dictator and Holocaust denier Ahmadinejad. Under pressure from the Republicans, the U.S. Congress passed a virtually unanimous resolution condemning the repression in Iran. For his part, Democratic president Barack Obama declared, "It's not productive, given the history of the US-Iranian relationship, to be seen as meddling," (*Los Angeles Times*, 17 June). But the key words here are "to be seen as."

Barely a week earlier, Obama gave a major speech in Cairo, Egypt to declare that "America is not at war with Islam," even as he continues the U.S.' occupation of Iraq, escalates the U.S. war on Afghanistan and increases U.S. military strikes in Pakistan. He referred politely to the Islamic Republic of Iran, whereas Bush placed it on the "axis of evil"; conceded Iran had a right to "peaceful nuclear power"; came

out in support of women wearing the Islamic hijab (headscarf), even as many Iranian women are chafing at the enforced Islamic dress code; and said that the U.S. would not "presume to pick the outcome of a peaceful election" in Iran. Add it all up and this is a diplomatic appeal for a "moderate" government of an Islamic regime in Iran.

Obama's talk of "history" was referring to the 1953 CIA-backed coup against the country's nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq, who had begun to nationalize Iran's oil industry. (But at that time, the mullahs were used as CIA "assets" against Mossadeq.) The present regime in Washington engages in the same kind of skullduggery, just tries to hide it. The Democratic majority in Congress not only funded the occupation of Iraq, but in 2007 also agreed to Bush's request for \$400 million for a major escalation of covert operations against Iran. This gave the CIA a blank check to organize hit-and-run attacks on Iran. In the case of Jundullah, the Baluchi guerrillas in eastern Iran subsidized by the CIA, these are vicious Sunni Muslim reactionaries (who under other circumstances would simply be branded "al Qaeda") who are opposed to Tehran merely because the latter represents the Shiite variant of Islam.

So while there is plenty of evidence that U.S. imperialism is still in the subversion and "destabilization" business in Iran, and certainly lots more that is not public, it is not staking everything on overthrowing Ahmadinejad/Khamenei. Washington is prepared to do business with the mullah regime, as it has in the past. Remember the Iran/contra deal, supervised by John Poindexter, now head of the CIA, selling U.S. Hawk missiles to Iran to get funds for Reagan's mercenaries in Nicaragua. Or the 2001 U.S. invasion of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, carried out in close coordination with Tehran, the Pasdaran in particular. And don't forget that pro-Iranian Shiites acted as front men for the 2003 U.S. occupation of Iraq to overthrow Iran's nemesis, Saddam Hussein.

Moreover, as Obama told the press, on a host of issues

## Election Fraud? Undoubtedly, But Media Ignored Ahmadinejad Support

So what about vote fraud? While much of the bourgeois press treats it as a given that Ahmadinejad stole the election, some Western leftists (e.g., “Iran: What Fraud?” *Workers World*, 17 June) and even various geopolitical “experts” (e.g., “Western Misconceptions Meet Iranian Reality,” *Stratfor*, 15 June) dismiss this. What’s the evidence?

First, there is the timing of the announcement of the 64 percent total for the incumbent just hours after the polls closed, when given Iran’s communications it would be impossible to have vote counts from most of the country. Second, in at least two entire provinces more than 100 percent of registered voters voted. Third, representatives of opposition candidates were not allowed to observe the counting. Fourth, there is far less regional variation in the vote totals than in the 2005 election, with low counts for opposition candidates in their home provinces, even though many regime opponents sat out the last vote but voted this time.

It’s also not a given that Ahmadinejad is popular in the rural areas, as has been argued. A credible report posted to the Tehran Bureau about a village near Shiraz southwest Iran indicates Mousavi clearly beat the incumbent there as well. Iran has become a lot more urbanized in recent years, and the urban poor have been the president’s key constituency. Many are dependent on the commodity subsidies Ahmadinejad introduced. And the sacks of potatoes doled out by his election campaign, just as the Mexican PRI used to do with grain, can go a long way. Many poor youth join the *basiji* to avoid the draft and get loans and scholarships. But they are being pounded by inflation and unemployment.

There were few reports from plebeian south Tehran on election day, and those were contradictory. One, on the German ARD television network, painted a morose picture of residents complaining about the continuing lack of running water, one venturing to say, “But the parliamentary deputies and this president have done nothing for Islamshahr [a south-



Getty Images

Thousands of Ahmadinejad supporters rally in Tehran on July 14.

ern suburb of the capital.]” *Time* magazine editorialist Joe Klein, on the other hand, reported: “The lines at the central mosque were every bit as long as they were at the voting stations in sophisticated north Tehran. There was a smattering of Mousavi supporters, but the Ahmadinejad worship was palpable” (*Time*, 29 June).

Clearly, the Western media barrage focused on the English-speaking upper middle class in north Tehran who led the protests, and just as clearly, this privileged layer is not representative of Iran as a whole. But while Ahmadinejad supporters say there is no evidence of widespread fraud, the opposition presented almost 650 cases of election irregularities. Even the government admits that there were no less than 50 cities in which total votes exceeded the number of registered voters, which could throw at least 3 million votes into doubt. But its cavalier response is so what, it’s not enough to invalidate the election.

A number of observers, including veteran Mideast report Robert Fisk (*Independent*, 20 June), have raised the possibility that although there was indeed substantial election fraud, “Ahmadinejad might have scraped in, but not with the huge majority he was awarded.” Or won a plurality, in which case there would have been a run-off ballot, which the government was determined to avoid at all costs.

concerning U.S. imperial interests, there is little to choose from between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi. On economics, the latter’s embrace of free market capitalism would perhaps allow more U.S. penetration, but Ahmadinejad is no less committed to privatization and foreign investment (see below). Under every prime minister and president, the mullah regime has always been a model pupil of the International Monetary Fund (the IMF praised Tehran for its divestment

program in its May 2008 review). On foreign policy, while Mousavi attacked Ahmadinejad’s general clownishness and anti-Semitic remarks, the differences are mainly stylistic. In the end, both will talk turkey with the U.S.

The Iranian nuclear program has been the pretext for many imperialist war threats, including by Obama and his secretary of state Hillary Clinton, as well as by his opponent in the 2008 U.S. elections, Republican John McCain, who

Ali Rafiei/AFP



Mohammad Akhlaghi/SNA

**The power broker: Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani (left), the “billionaire mullah,” is the key backer of Mir-Hossein Mousavi (at right, meeting with clerics in Qom in April) in power struggle going on in Islamic regime.**

now feigns concern for the Iranian people while a few months ago his campaign rallies resounded to the chant “bomb, bomb, bomb Iran.” On this key issue, the positions of the Iranian contenders are identical. Ahmadinejad, Khomeini and Mousavi all insist on building up Iranian nuclear power capacity, which Iran has every right to, and all three say they are not building a bomb (the former two going so far as to insist that atomic weapons are contrary to Islam).

Despite the Iranian leaders’ rhetoric, and decades of U.S. hostility, the Iranian theocracy is not fundamentally opposed to the imperialist system. The history of relations between the mullahs and the West is complex. Israel’s Zionist war hawks and their “neo-conservative” allies in Washington actually prefer Ahmadinejad to serve as a bogeyman, and say so. But the fact that today the Obama administration wants to talk with Iranian rulers, whoever they are, doesn’t mean that tomorrow it won’t revert to coup-plotting or outright military attack. It’s just that for now the imperialist commander-in-chief, who is in trouble militarily in Afghanistan and bogged down in Iraq, doesn’t think it’s “smart” to start yet another war in the region.

In the face of U.S. attack or war threats, while giving no political support to any wing of the mullah regime, revolutionary Marxists are duty-bound to defend Iran as a semi-colonial country, using proletarian methods of class struggle. We demand an end to all U.S./NATO/U.N. sanctions against Iran. And we insist that *Iran has the right to obtain nuclear or any other kind of weapons to defend against intervention or invasion by U.S. imperialism – or its Israeli Zionist allies, who have hundreds of nuclear warheads and are crazed enough to use them.*

### Behind the Islamic Gang Warfare

Imperialist pundits consider it smart marketing that the Iranian opposition has insisted on identifying with the Islamic regime. But Mousavi and his backers – longtime pillars of the Islamic establishment – needed no U.S. coaching

for this. In the campaign, Mousavi was confronted by students over his responsibility for the mass executions as prime minister of Iran from 1981 to 1989. At the University of Zanjan (in his home region of Azerbaijan), they disrupted his speech asking, “Where were you in 1988, and how many people did you kill?” One placard read “Khavaran’s soil is still red,” referring to the Khavaran cemetery (now bulldozed), where thousands of victims were buried.

So let’s spell it out: the repression began almost from the minute the mullahs took power in February 1979. Women were attacked on the streets for not wearing the *chador*, the head-to-toe shroud “recommended” by the clerics. Kurdish leftists were shot. Homosexuals were stoned to death (as were women accused of adultery). But the bloodbath really began in earnest as the clerical regime consolidated in the wake of the Iraqi attack in 1980 and clashes with the Islamic Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (People’s Crusaders). Mousavi became foreign minister in August 1981 and prime minister that December. During that period almost 2,000 were executed, mainly Mujahedeen but also Guevarist leftists of the Fedayeen Minority, who broke with Khomeini, and Peykar, a Stalinist split from the Mujahedeen.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of leftists were arrested along with militant workers as the clerics went all out to exterminate independent labor activity in the plants. The estimated number of executions totaled 5,000 by 1985 as the war with Iraq dragged on. Upwards of 300,000 Iranians died in this reactionary war, where the carnage resembled the imperialist World War I. Mousavi bears criminal responsibility for this senseless slaughter and insists to this day that it was right to continue the war after Iran retook Khorramshahr in May 1982 (*Tehran Times*, 24 May). Partly as a result of his role as head of government during the war, Mousavi has some support among the paramilitary *pasdaran* (Republican Guard) and even the *basiji* vigilantes.

With the end of the war in August 1988, a horrific new

wave of killings took place as a result of a secret order, in which Rasfanjani reportedly played a key role. After the ceasefire with Iraq, which sealed a defeat for Iran, the mullah regime feared upheaval at home, so it decided to wipe out any possible leadership for the unrest. This time the victims went far beyond the Mujahedeen to include virtually every leftist group in the country. Prisoners who had been in jail for almost a decade had their cases retried and were sentenced to death. Even organizations that had loudly backed Khomeini were not spared, including Tudeh (pro-Moscow Stalinists) and the Fedayeen Majority. An estimated 12,000 were slaughtered, according to Ervand Abrahamian (*Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* [1999]).

Then there is the issue of corruption among the clerics. Mousavi's most powerful backer, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, is chairman of the Assembly of Experts, a body of Islamic jurists which is supposed to monitor Khamenei and theoretically could even depose him. Rafsanjani has been called "the mighty spider in the intricate web of the Islamic Republic" (Andreas Malm and Shora Esmailian, *Iran on the Brink: Rising Workers and Threats of War* [2007]). He is the key link between the Islamic regime and the commercial capitalists of the Iranian "bazaar," and is reputed to be the richest man in Iran. The pistachio king's family interests include a joint venture with Daewoo, one son manages the construction of the Tehran subway, another has been director of the National Iranian Gas Co., etc.

In one of the more notable events of the electoral campaign, Ahmadinejad slammed Rafsanjani by name for corruption during the televised candidates' debate, which earned him a rap on the knuckles from Khamenei. Denouncing the illicit enrichment of leading clerics has won the incumbent president popularity for years, along with provision of subsidies for the poor. In the debate Mousavi attacked Ahmadinejad's "charity economics." But even Khamenei has declared that the sharp fall in oil revenue is going to mean drastic cutbacks. In a speech calling for austerity (March 22), he declared that this would be "Improved Consumption Patterns Year." Since the Supreme Leader pointed to Iranians "squandering" both bread and water, it is clear *whose* "consumption patterns" are targeted!

Again, differences on economic policy between the candidates are quantitative rather than qualitative. The Khamenei/Ahmadinejad regime has pressed forward with privatization and lowering barriers to imperialist investment:

"Iran will no longer make a distinction between domestic and foreign firms that wish to purchase state-run companies as long as the combined foreign ownership in any particular industry does not exceed 35%....

"Among the new incentive measures announced, foreign firms may also transfer their annual profit from their Iranian company out of the country in any currency they wish."

—Press TV, 30 June 2008

The list of firms which have been, are being or will be privatized includes power companies, metals, most airlines, auto, banks and even elements of the oil and gas industry. The poten-



Inside Iran

**One of 40 women who tried to enter Tehran's national soccer stadium in June 2006 to protest ban on women attending sports events.**

tial spoils are immense, and the Pasdaran are a major player. This organization is not only a militia but a far-flung economic empire and machine for dispensing patronage. It has muscled into countless firms in true mafia style, and is also accused of using its mandate to bypass U.S. sanctions in order to dominate the black market in cigarettes as well as the alcohol, narcotics and pornography it is supposedly combating.

Of course, the policing of morals has been an invitation to extortion since the beginning of history. The accusations of corruption hit all of the contending factions among the Islamic rulers. If Rafsanjani is notorious as the billionaire mullah, Ahmadinejad's third Interior Minister in four years, Sadegh Mahsouli, is known as the billionaire minister. But rapacious as they are, the spoils of privatization do not fully explain why the gangsters of the Islamic regime have broken the "code of silence" and started to turn on each other. They are seeking desperately to either head off a looming social and political explosion, or alternatively to try to crush it in the egg. The two factions are thus oriented to different social clienteles.

In many respects the question of women was at the center of the election campaign. Where Ahmadinejad stands was never in doubt. This is the man who introduced segregation by sex in elevators in municipal offices when he became mayor of Tehran, and who as president has intensified the enforcement of the mullahs' dress code on women. Mousavi, on the other hand, even though he has the backing of a number of senior clerics, showcased his wife Zhara Rahnava as a symbol of female emancipation. (Rahnava, however, although she was known as a leftist in the early years of the Islamic Republic, has declared that "in Islam, women have always worn the veil.")

The potential clash between Mousavi's mealy mouthed promises and women's aspirations was shown by an incident in which a crowd of 1,500 of his female supporters in a south Tehran sports complex chanted "Stop the hijab police!"

Mousavi lamely replied that he would “re-view” laws unfair to women and would “work toward” reining in these regime thugs who harass, brutalize and blackmail women for even the most minor infringements of dress and behavior codes. In the photos of protests, there were many women, but none without the obligatory head covering. Nor were “un-Islamic” signs seen. Secular leftists and liberals, though undoubtedly present, were invisible, having accepted the discipline of an “Islamic opposition.”

In the last phase of the election campaign, various discontented sectors coalesced around Mousavi as the voice of the opposition, however muted, deformed and distorted, even though he actually promised them very little. Indicative of this was a message to the Tehran Bureau web site reporting a conversation with a contact in Sanandaj, the capital of Iranian Kurdistan, who said “that they all backed Mousavi because he had promised that in provinces where there was a second language it could be taught in schools. He said – we are so desperate we are not even bargaining for autonomy or anything, just for our language to be allowed at school... Which I think sums up a lot of Mousavi’s support, he’s not offering a lot but he is the only one offering certain groups anything at all that they can relate to.”

### The Iranian Working Class With Its Back to the Wall

The key potential social force that has yet to throw its weight into the balance is one which can expect nothing from either of the two Islamic factions: the 22-million-strong Iranian working class. It has faced heavy repression for decades. As noted earlier, the factory committee (*shura*) movement was broken in the period 1980-81. *Pasdaran* sized militant workers inside the plants and whipped them in front of their co-workers, when they were they were not simply dragged off to Evin prison and ultimate execution. It took almost a generation to recover.

But the privatization begun under the government of “reform” president Sayed Mohammad Khatami, from 1997 to 2005, leading to the closure of many factories, forced a series of struggles for sheer survival. These have continued under Ahmadinejad, since, despite his populist airs, the condition of Iranian workers has steadily worsened. Just as in the reviled “atheist”, “materialist” capitalist West, under the Islamic capitalist regime there has been a concerted drive to replace permanent employment with temporary contracts. When top prices for oil fueled inflation, there were continual battles over the minimum wage, which is well below the official poverty line. And profiting from the ferocious repression of every worker protest, many employers don’t even bother to



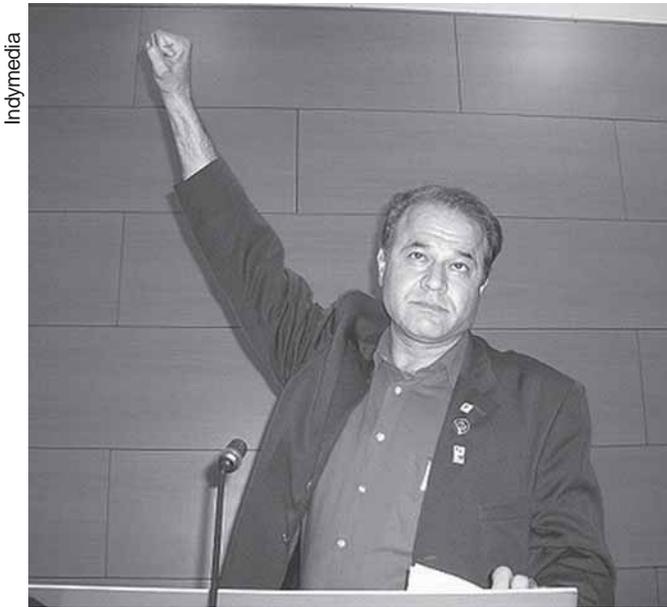
Tehran bus station. Vahed bus company union protested repression.

pay the pitiful wages owed.

The current phase of labor militancy began when 15,000 workers demonstrated in Tehran on 16 July 2002 against poor working conditions, low pay and a new labor bill making firings much easier. The following year thousands defied a government ban on demonstrating on May Day. One of the first major actions came in January 2004, when construction workers who had been building a copper smelting plant in Khatonabad in southern Iran were laid off. After having been promised permanent jobs, they blocked the factory. Special police units intervened: up to 15 workers were killed and another 300 were wounded (Malm and Esmailkiam, *Iran on the Brink*).

There were also strikes by auto workers at Iran Khodro and in textiles that spring. In March 2004, schoolteachers (80 percent of whom are women) struck nationwide. Their salaries have fallen well below the public-sector average, and they are also subjected to temporary contracts. As a result, 70 percent of teachers’ incomes are below the poverty line. An attempt to organize a May Day demonstration at Saqez (Kurdistan) in 2004 was broken up by security forces. It was followed by May Day rallies of workers in other cities during the next two years.

Following May Day 2005 and an attack by state forces on the bus drivers’ union, a national day of transport strikes was organized on 16 July 2005. This movement eventually led to a protest in which bus drivers at the Vahed company in Tehran refused to take passengers’ fares in December 2005, and then a strike in January 2006. They demanded in particular recognition of the bus drivers’ union (Syndicate of Workers and Employees of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company) and the freeing of their leader Mansour Ossanlou, who had been arrested after the first protest. Ossanlou was released, and then rearrested. Still in prison, his case has become an international issue. This year, as noted above, May



**Free Mansour Ossanlou! Leader of bus drivers union was jailed, tortured, released and rearrested.**

Day demonstrations in both Tehran and Kurdish Sanandaj were again attacked.

The result of all of these hard struggles has been the emergence of a series of clandestine worker networks grouped around two poles. The first, Komiteye-Hamahangi (“Coordinating Committee to Form Workers Organizations in Iran”) puts forward a “council communist” line opposed to political parties and trade unions as inherently reformist; it periodically issues calls for workers councils in the abstract. The second, Komiteye Peygiri (“Follow-up Committee for the Establishment of Free Workers’ Organizations in Iran”), pursues the illusory course of pressuring the Islamic regime for official recognition. It thus may rightly be considered the heirs of the capitulationism of the Tudeh and its allies of the Fedayeen Majority.

Both committees reject the need for a proletarian vanguard party to lead the *political* struggle to bring down the Islamic dictatorship through workers revolution. For its part, despite left rhetoric and a hard line against the mullah regime, the Worker-communist Party (which split in 2004) never really broke from the two-stage conception of first establishing bourgeois democracy, before going on to socialism. It is thus prone to calling on “democratic” imperialism to sanction the mullahs and has even on occasion raised the possibility of allying with the monarchists against the mullahs. In fact, a WPI spokeswoman recently called on the West to “isolate” Iran:

“What is clear from the protests is that there is a mass movement in Iran that can bring the regime to its knees and break the back of the political Islamic movement internationally. Now is the time for us in the West to exert pressure on our governments to politically isolate Iran’s rulers rather than legitimise them.”

—Maryam Namazie, spokesperson, Worker-communist Party of Iran, in the *Evening Standard* [London], 17 June

So here these self-proclaimed communists offer themselves up as frenetic advocates of even greater imperialist intervention!

Physically decimated and politically discredited, the bulk of the Iranian left organizations did not survive the 1980s, let alone the collapse of the Stalinist-ruled, bureaucratically degenerated workers state in the USSR and the deformed workers states of Eastern Europe. It is clear that those remnants of the left that did hang on are ready to begin the cycle of betrayal all over again. Thus the social-democratized Tudeh called for support to Mousavi and Karrubi [the other “reform” candidate] in the elections, and for unity of all “pro-reform” forces in the protest movement. These “popular front” politics of allying with a sector of the bourgeoisie are precisely what led the Tudeh to sell out the Iranian workers upheaval of 1978-79 and lead it into the deadly embrace of Islamic reaction.

### Lessons of 1978-79

In a country where even the most reactionary political forces call themselves revolutionary, it is not enough to call for a revolutionary party. In Iran where the Stalinist/Menshevik program of revolution in stages means binding the working class to a wing of the Islamic rulers, today led by Mir Hossein Mousavi, it is necessary to call explicitly for building the nucleus of a Leninist vanguard party of the working class, based on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution. This is the policy of the League for the Fourth International. It is not, however, the program of various other groups that falsely call themselves Trotskyist while in practice making political blocs with the bourgeoisie. This is not splitting hairs but a matter of life and death for the Iranian workers revolution.

To understand this question clearly it is necessary to go back to the events of 1978-79. For months strikes had rocked the country, particularly that of the powerful oil workers union led by the Tudeh party, extending from Abadan in the south to refineries in Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz and Tabriz. Joined by rail and steel workers, this became a *de facto* general strike. The possibility of a workers revolution was clear to all, and to head it off, bourgeois forces began turning to the Islamic clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The February 1979 overthrow of the shah’s regime was in reality a transfer of power to Khomeini and his mullahs by the generals, designed to keep the bourgeois army intact. It was only marred by last-minute resistance by the shah’s Imperial Guard. The clerical-dominated mass marches were a means of pressure to this end.

The tragedy of 1978-79 was that the masses’ illusions in Khomeini and the other ayatollahs were reinforced by the shameful capitulation of the Iranian left to the clergy in the name of “anti-imperialism” and “unity” against the shah. The worst were the Moscow Stalinists of Tudeh, the only party with a working-class following, which came out in support of Khomeini at the behest of the Kremlin (Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* [1999]). It’s not that they didn’t know what the mullahs were up to: three weeks *before* Khomeini’s takeover, the head of the oil strikers protested against the “dogmatic reactionary clergy” and “the new form of repression under the guise of revolution” (Assef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran* (1987). But instead of fighting it, he resigned!

*continued on page 75*

## For Workers Revolution Against Mullah Rule!

# Iran's Islamic Republic in Turmoil – What Program for Struggle?



Getty Images

Thousands of Iranian protesters defied government ban on demonstrations and massed in streets of Tehran, confronting police and paramilitary forces, on the tenth anniversary of the 18 Tir (July 9) student revolt.

**Free Jailed Protesters and Labor Activists!  
U.S. Imperialists Hands Off!**

JULY 25 –Iran is still wracked with turmoil a month and a half after the hotly disputed presidential elections. Aggressive attacks on demonstrators by police along with the militarized Revolutionary Guard (*pasdaran*) and paramilitary militia (*basij*) under the command of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei were able to wear down the largest protests in three decades – but only for a while. And they were unable to quell the deep anger that has now spread to millions and shaken the Islamic regime to its core. On July 6, mothers and sisters of the more than 2,000 people who have been arrested protested outside the notorious Ervin Prison, which is overflowing with political prisoners. On July 9, the tenth anniversary of the student revolt at Tehran University, thousands flooded into the streets,

stopping traffic, lighting fires and defying motorbike-mounted *basiji*. On July 13, a general strike paralyzed much of the province of Kordestan and other Kurdish areas, shutting down shops and transportation in Saqez, Mahabad, Bokan, Sardasht and elsewhere.

Then on July 17, the Iranian capital was convulsed by huge roving demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of protesters chanting “death to the dictator” (*mag bar diktator*) and “death to the coup d’état.” Heavy clashes with the forces of repression were reported at Enghelab (Revolution) Square, Azadi (Freedom) Square and Ferdowsi Square. Protesters surged through avenues and boulevards of central Tehran, and gathered outside the ministry of the interior, the state broadcasting agency and Evin Prison. The demonstrators began from the area around Tehran University where the former president of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, led Friday prayers in a hall jammed with supporters of Islamic “reform” candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who came out of seclusion to attend. After

**Revolutionary Guard motorbike squad regroups for another charge against protesters, Tehran, June 20. If Ahmadinejad government is a popular regime facing imperialist-sponsored destabilization, as some opportunist leftists claim, why does it resort to police-state measures instead of mobilizing its supporters to counter protests?**



several hours, police and auxiliaries managed to disperse the protesters with tear gas and baton attacks and use of taser guns. At least one death was reported, more than 100 demonstrators were arrested.

The hasty announcement last June 12 of a landslide victory for the incumbent Ahmadinejad after an election campaign in which the opposition mobilized multitudinous rallies set off a popular upheaval against the hard-line government of Iran's Islamic Republic. Meanwhile, there is furious maneuvering going on behind the scenes in the Islamic ruling circles. Although leftists were among the initial organizers, and many of those protesting the rigged vote are secular, the protests carefully hewed to the political limits laid down by the theocratic regime. With green ribbons, headbands, masks and banners to symbolize Islam, as in the 1979 "revolution" that installed the clerics in power, the signature chant of the pro-Mousavi protests has been "*allahu akbar*" (god is

great). An Iranian newspaper reported that when people tried to chant secular slogans, fellow protesters silenced them. Heavy-handed repression may yet stifle the opposition, but if the struggle deepens against an increasingly militarized regime, the Islamist political control of the protests could be called into question. The leaders of the competing camps are well aware of this.

While the crowds today follow Mousavi & Co., this could change if the clerical "reformers" try to call off the struggle. The candidate himself, although theatrically declaring his willingness to be a martyr, bowed to the pressure of the government saying he would no longer call for unauthorized marches. Ayatollah Rafsanjani was Mousavi's chief backer in the corridors of power, but as he began the July 17 prayer sermon, there were chants of "Rafsanjani, you are a traitor if you remain silent." The ayatollah called for freeing the prisoners and lifting press restrictions, but he pointedly did not call for overturning the vote. "Doubt has been created" about the results of the election he said. "We need to take action to remove this doubt." Rafsanjani's goal was to channel the discontent: "Sympathy must be offered to those who suffered from the events that occurred and reconcile them with the ruling system." The incumbent Ahmadinejad, in contrast, threatened to crack down even harder, declaring that "As soon as the new government is established," it will have "ten times more power and authority than before." Thus the stage is set for further confrontation.

"This is our revolution. We will not give up," a student demonstrator was quoted by the *New York Times* (10 July) as saying. Asked what the goal was, he replied: "We want democracy." In reality, the mass unrest is still far from being a revolution, or even a full-fledged revolt. Contrary to the pro-Mousavi propaganda of the Western media, Ahmadinejad and his faction still have a sizable base in the military apparatus and some support among the urban poor. Many have been influenced by the



**Mousavi supporter at protest in Tehran, July 16. No imperialist intervention? So how do you get worldwide demos within one day of Iranian election with uniform slogan in English, geared toward Western media, and trademark spring green color? But that doesn't mean huge upheaval in Iran was just a CIA plot.**

distribution of a small part of Iran's oil profits through commodity subsidies and other welfare measures, despite enduring poverty and mass unemployment. For their part, the imperialists constantly wave the banner of "democracy," by which they mean a pro-Western client state. Yet they have conflicting interests. The White House might desire a controlled "regime change" to a "moderate" Islamic regime in Iran, but doubts it can bring that off. Moreover, Obama and the U.S.' imperialist allies want to negotiate with Tehran over Iran's pursuit of nuclear capacity, and perhaps reinforce Iranian support in Iraq and Afghanistan. Hence Washington's cautious official posture.

In this explosive situation, revolutionary Marxists must first warn against and combat all imperialist intervention in Iran. We defend Tehran's right to obtain nuclear or any other weapons necessary to defend against the Western powers, who have plagued Iran since the turn of the 20th century, installing and removing rulers at will in order to subjugate the impoverished masses. At the same time, we put forward a program to mobilize the Iranian working people independent of and against all the factions of the theocratic regime. Communists politically oppose any form of religion-based government, be it an Islamic "republic" such as Iran (or an Islamic monarchy such as Saudi Arabia) or the "Jewish state" of Israel or avowedly "Christian" regimes such as Franco's Spain. While fighting against the "electoral coup d'état" by which the Islamist hardliners want to secure their perpetual dominance, Iranian workers should seek not to install Mousavi in office but to raise democratic demands, including for a revolutionary secular constituent assembly, as part of a struggle to establish their own class rule, by bringing down the clerical capitalist Islamic Republic and establishing a workers and peasants government that initiates socialist revolution.

We have detailed how Mousavi is a longstanding component of the Islamic regime. His hands are covered with workers' blood. As prime minister of Iran during the 1980s, he presided over a criminal war with Iraq and the bloody massacre of thousands of leftists. Today he is a staunch supporter of "free market" capitalism – as is Ahmadinejad (see "Mass Protests Rock Iran – No to All Wings of the Mullah Regime," on page 10). Iranian workers will only suffer further under a "liberal" Islamic government, as they did under "reform" president (and Mousavi ally) Sayed Mohammad Khatami from 1997 to 2005, whose privatization policies produced mass layoffs and set off the resurgence of labor militancy. Under "liberals" and "conservatives" alike, the Iranian clerical capitalist regime has been a star pupil of the "neo-liberal" policies of the International Monetary Fund. Leftists who politically back either side in the fight among the Islamic rulers are condemning the Iranian working masses to further impoverishment amid a worldwide capitalist economic crisis. It's necessary to break with all wings of the mullah regime.

### Apologists for Ahmadinejad

The situation in Iran today cries out for revolutionary

working-class leadership, yet the left is largely divided between a minority who tail after Ahmadinejad and the hard-line clerics in the name of "anti-imperialism," and the majority who hail the pro-Mousavi "movement" in the name of "democracy." In fact, neither of the contenders in Iran opposes the imperialist system or is in favor of even bourgeois democracy. All the leaders are committed to the Islamic Republic, a regime of clerical capitalism whose very existence required the wholesale extermination of the Iranian left. In 1978-79, even though the social upheaval that overthrew the shah's bloody monarchy was spearheaded by workers' strikes, self-proclaimed socialists and leftists capitulated to the Islamist movement led by Imam Ruhollah Khomeini. Today the inveterate opportunists are still tailing after one or the other camp among the feuding ayatollahs. This is not a game. The future of millions of Iranian working people is at stake.

Dealing first with the apologists for Ahmadinejad, they were led off by leftist academic James Petras, who dashed off an article on "Iranian Elections: The 'Stolen Elections' Hoax" with the same lightning speed as the Iranian Ministry of the Interior declared the incumbent president the hands-down victor. Noting "the West's universal condemnation of the electoral outcome as fraudulent," showing that the imperialists had a common line, which was true enough, Petras declares that "not a single shred of evidence in either written or observational form has been presented either before or a week after the vote count," which is simply false. (For a discussion of the evidence, see the box on "Election Fraud? Undoubtedly, But Media Ignored Ahmadinejad Support" on page 15 of this issue) Petras' main "proof" that the election was not rigged is what he called "a rigorous nationwide public opinion poll conducted by two U.S. experts just three weeks before the vote, which showed Ahmadinejad leading by a more than 2 to 1 margin...." Since this survey is cited by all leftist supporters of Ahmadinejad, let's examine it.

For starters, this poll was financed by the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, which in other circumstances would hardly have elicited the description "rigorous" from the likes of Petras. Second, the "2 to 1 margin" was actually 34 percent for Ahmadinejad to 14 percent for Mousavi, with 27 percent responding "don't know" who they would vote for and 22 percent giving no answer at all (i.e., no preferences from 49 percent of the respondents). Moreover, according to the report's authors, the large majority of the undecided gave other answers placing them in the "reform" camp. The poll takers concluded that most likely none of the candidates would win an outright victory, forcing a run-off. This is a far cry from the 62 percent for Ahmadinejad claimed by the Iranian government and upheld by Petras. And a poll of those with listed phone numbers by a polling firm calling from a "neighboring country" would be suspect on various counts. In a place like Iran where you can easily land in jail for opposing the government, many people would be naturally reluctant to express their political choice to an unknown caller.

Perhaps the most brazen leftist defender of the Iranian government over the election is the Workers World Party (WWP),



**Neda Agha-Soltan lies dying after being shot during protest. Workers World is so desperate to alibi Iranian regime that it invented whole scenario with “CIA-trained sharpshooter,” then told readers to believe its pure invention is “more believable.”**

an outfit with a predilection for anti-working-class “anti-imperialists,” whether “Third World” strongmen or Stalinist bureaucrats. (WWP founder Sam Marcy defended the Stalinist suppression of the Hungarian workers uprising of 1956 and the massacre of Chinese workers around Tienanmen Square in 1989.) WWP also cites the Rockefeller Brothers poll (without saying who financed it, or giving the actual numbers). But it goes further, seeking to deny that the Iranian regime killed protesters. A bizarre editorial titled “Who killed Neda Agha-Soltan?” (*Workers World*, 2 July) concocts a whole scenario of a “CIA-trained sharpshooter” taking position on a rooftop, with a contact waiting below with a camera who calls to say “She just got out of the car. A perfect target.” The assassin takes aim, shoots, disappears. Within an hour videos of the young woman bleeding to death arrive at the BBC and VoA. “Is that what happened to Neda Agha-Soltan?” it asks, adding, “We don’t know. But you don’t know either” and declaring their pure invention “more reasonable and more believable” than the media account.

The Marcyites have spent so much time singing paeans to the Kim dynasty in the North Korean deformed workers state that they have gone positively delusional. Could something like their scenario happen? Sure. But in Venezuela in April 2002 when government sharpshooters fired on a pro-Chávez crowd, killing several, and the news media then blamed the *chavistas*, there was an immediate chorus from eyewitnesses who reported what actually happened. In this case, there isn’t a single piece of evidence to back up the WWP’s hallucinations. The WWP’s justification for backing Ahmadinejad is that, while they might have some differences over the class struggle and ideology, and even though “some of the anger in the streets may reflect legitimate demands to improve workers’ and women’s rights,” in this conflict “his side is more anti-imperialist.”

This sliding scale of “anti-imperialism” is light-years from a Marxist class analysis. Not only do they give *political* support to anti-worker nationalist demagogues like

Ahmadinejad and Mugabe in Zimbabwe, using the same methodology of “progressive” vs. “reactionary,” they end up organizing for liberal capitalist politicians in the imperialist countries. One of the most vexing problems for opportunists is to keep their audiences apart. They try to practice what in capitalist business schools is called market segmentation. So when Democratic doves in Marcyite-led “peace” coalitions learn of Workers World support for the Stalinist bureaucrats of North Korea or the Islamist rulers of Iran, they go bonkers. And what about the WWP’s posture as the best defenders of LGBT rights, which they highlight in the same issue of their paper where they support Islamic hardliners in Iran? If the WWP lifted a finger to defend lesbian, gay, bi- and trans-sexual rights in Tehran they would be thrown into the mullahs’ dungeons in a flash. But with their segmented marketing, the Marcyites tiptoe around such issues.

### **Social Democrats Hail Mousavi “Movement”**

If “Third World” nationalists and Stalinoid tendencies like the Marcyites line up with the hard-line Islamist Ahmadinejad, the larger social-democratic leftist groups take their place in the Mousavi camp. They dutifully reflect the propaganda coming from the bourgeois media about a drive for “democracy” in Iran, just as they regularly do elsewhere, particularly when the “movement” is directed at regimes on the outs with liberal imperialists. Seeking recruits from the milieu of the Democratic Party in the U.S., the Labour Party in Britain and mainstream Socialists and Social Democrats in Europe, they may oppose crude calls for a war for oil resources from a right-winger like Cheney, or calls for a “crusade” from Republican Bush, while being soft on the “human rights” war cries emanating from the Democratic Clinton or Obama administrations. Hence the reluctance of “antiwar” coalitions like United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) to mobilize against the war in Afghanistan (as opposed to Iraq) or to protest war threats against Iran.

In the U.S., the pro-Mousavi demos in Tehran were strongly backed by the Communist Party (CPUSA) and Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism (CDDS – a 1991 split from the CP), both of which openly support the Democratic Party and who together run the UFPJ, tying the “peace movement” to this partner party of American imperialism. While hailing the protests in Tehran, CDDS leader Carl Bloice’s main concern was Republicans trying to force the White House to denounce vote fraud in Iran, saying they were out to “destroy the Obama Presidency” (*Black Commentator*, 25 June). The CPUSA mainly published statements by Tudeh, Iran’s erstwhile pro-Moscow CP, which issued “Ardent Greetings to the Heroic People of Iran” in the “Glorious Demonstration Against the *Velayate Faghih* (Theocratic) Regime” (Tudeh CC statement, 15 June). Tudeh’s choice of slogans is deliberate. By focusing on the *faqih*, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, it makes clear that it does *not*

challenge the Islamic Republic as such, only “the reactionary, dictatorial and free market clique” currently running it.

Tudeh accuses Ahmadinejad and Khomeini of aiming at “putting an end to the ‘Republic’ system and establishing an Islamic Caliphate<sup>1</sup> with absolute rule and reliance on military forces” (*People’s Weekly World*, 23 June). In the July 12 elections, Tudeh called to support Mousavi, the former prime minister who presided over the execution of hundreds if not thousands of their own comrades! Tudeh now opposes the “theocratic regime,” but when Khomeini instituted it, the Stalinists went all out to support the establishment of clerical rule, voting for the Islamic Republic, supporting the Islamic courts and denouncing leftists as “CIA agents” for belatedly criticizing these organs of Islamic dictatorship. Prior to that, Tudeh called not for socialist revolution but for a “national democratic” (bourgeois) revolution, and (on orders from Moscow) did nothing to bring down the shah, even though it had strong support in the Iranian working class and led the key oil workers unions. Today Tudeh has become thoroughly social-democratized, and is as shamelessly reformist as ever, capable only of sabotaging revolution.

The International Socialist Organization (ISO), currently the largest left group in the United States, likewise waxed enthusiastic that “the mass movement that took shape around Mousavi’s election campaign has already been transformed into a broader fight for democracy” which “will not dissipate anytime soon” (*Socialist Worker*, 23 June). It’s pretty hard to present Mousavi himself as a democrat – he was, after all, prime minister of the Islamic Republic for almost a decade, 1981-89 – so the emphasis is on the “movement” around him. A week later (*Socialist Worker*, 1 July) this is referred to as a “mass democracy movement” and a “pro-democracy movement” that has the “potential” to morph into “a new movement for democracy and revolutionary change.” This is later elaborated, in an article by Saeed Rahnema, a professor at York College in Canada, as “the genuine movement within the vibrant Iranian civil society” whose “strategy is to gradually and non-violently replace the Islamic regime and its hegemony with a secular democratic one” (*Socialist Worker*, 15 July).

There are a number of problems with this construct. First, there is the presidential candidate himself, a thoroughly establishment figure in the Islamic regime, whose main backer is Ayatollah Rafsanjani, the quintessence of the “millionaire mullahs” (in his case, billionaire) and poster boy for corruption in this clerical capitalism. The ISO tries to get around this by presenting Mousavi as the standard-bearer of the “Islamist left,”

<sup>1</sup> This is a direct appeal to Shiite Muslim clerics. Shia Islam rejects the legitimacy of the first three caliphs (khalifa) – rulers of the community of believers – who are considered by Sunni Muslims to be the successors of Muhammad. The caliphates were the traditional Sunni Islamic religious and governmental organization up until Kemal Atatürk abolished the institution in 1924 in establishing the secular Turkish republic. In Shia tradition, the fourth caliph, Ali, Muhammad’s cousin and son in law, was the rightful heir, whose succession was passed down through religious leaders (imams) who exercise ultimate clerical authority over temporal government.

as opposed to an “Islamist right” whose candidate was Ahmadinejad. This is ludicrous. As head of government in the ’80s, the supposed Islamic leftist Mousavi not only “oversaw extensive state control of Iran’s economy,” he also *oversaw the execution of more than 10,000 leftists!* Currently he is pushing hard to accelerate privatization of Iran’s economy and slash subsidies of consumer goods for the poor.

The claim that Mousavi was an Islamist leftist is a repetition of the alibi offered up by much of the left in 1978-79 for capitulating to the mullahs – the idea that the “movement” would somehow slough off its established political leadership. The split between the hard-line Islamists and the “reformers” who want to loosen up a little on the infuriating social regimentation in order to preserve the system is not a difference between left and right.

Then there is the question of “democracy,” and what is meant by it. Marxists always underline the *class character* of democracy, stressing that *bourgeois* democracy defends the rights of exploiters against the working people they exploit. By talking of democracy in classless terms, liberals and social democrats like the ISO play the imperialists’ game: Reagan and Bush claimed to be defending “democracy” against “communism” or “terrorism.”

Moreover, in Iran today, whatever demonstrators may privately wish, the pro-Mousavi protests did *not* call for democracy, and certainly not secular democracy. This is not by accident. They called to overturn the announced election results, which is quite different. The ideologues of the regime insist that Islamic rule is “religious democracy” based on the will of Allah. This is the basis of the system of *velayat-e-faqih*, in which the Supreme Leader has veto power over everything. The minute the demonstrations call for “democracy,” they will confirm what the Islamist hardliners have been saying all along, that they are really protesting against the Islamic Republic itself, and thus the protesters are apostates, to be crushed.

And how exactly would this struggle against election fraud by the clerical-bonapartist state become a movement for “revolutionary change”? No doubt many of those protesting the rigged vote could be won to the need for revolutionary struggle against mullah rule. But that requires that revolutionaries drive home that it is a *deadly illusion* to think they can “gradually and non-violently replace the Islamic regime.” While denouncing the repressive electoral putsch, and defending the demonstrators who have bravely confronted the regime’s thugs and murderers, revolutionary Marxists explain that in Iran today even formal bourgeois democracy is impossible not only in an Islamic “republic” but more broadly within the confines of capitalist rule. In many semi-colonial countries, a minuscule ruling class faces a vast mass of poor and working people such that it cannot hope to maintain its power by anything resembling democratic means. That is one reason why throughout the Near East military dictatorships, monarchies and oligarchical regimes abound. Iran under the iron heel of the shah or the mullahs is no exception.

Communists do not belittle the struggle for democratic rights – on the contrary, we call for a fight for full equality

for women, for free abortion on demand, for self-determination for national minorities, for full rights for homosexuals, for freedom of religion and separation of mosque and state, for free public secular education for all, for unions and workplace organizations free of state/clerical control, and for a revolutionary secular constituent assembly. But each and every one of these democratic demands poses a frontal clash with the Islamic dictatorship, and can only be won by bringing it down through revolutionary action. As Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution holds, in the imperialist epoch, in countries of belated capitalist development, the tasks of the great bourgeois revolutions can only be accomplished by the seizure of power by the working class, supported by the urban and rural poor and led by an authentic communist party, which proceeds to expropriate the bourgeoisie and extend the revolution internationally. That is what Lenin's Bolsheviks did in Russia in 1917. It's what must be done in Iran today.

Thus we of the League for the Fourth International fight for a workers and peasants government that initiates socialist revolution, in Iran and beyond. The ISO, in contrast, tails after Mousavi and a wing of the Islamic rulers. And not for the first time. In an article on "The roots of Iran's revolt" (*Socialist Worker*, 1 July), Lee Sustar briefly recalls the 1978-79 "Islamic Revolution," highlighting the general strike against the shah, the factory occupations and factory councils or *shoras*. He adds laconically, "But the central leader of the revolution wasn't the left, but the clergy and middle-class elements who looked to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.... These forces dismantled working-class organization and divided the left – and later, violently smashed it." What Sustar doesn't say is that the Khomeinists had some help from the left that *hailed* the mullahs' "revolution" – and that includes the ISO. *Socialist Worker* of January 1979 headlined "The Form Religious, The Spirit – Revolution!" The accompanying article declared, "Khomeini stands for the masses of the urban poor and the poorer bazaris..." (see illustration on next page).

Today the ISO is singing a different tune, but their methods are the same. They're just tailing after another "movement." Opportunists not only require segmented audiences, but also short memories. Revolutionaries, on the other hand, "tell the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter" (rules of the Fourth International), even if it makes them highly unpopular at the time. The truth is that the "Islamic Revolution" spelled death and oppression for women, national minorities, workers and leftists – and the opportunist left supported that because they believe that to fight for socialist revolution is "sectarian," and impossible.

## "Karavan's Soil Is Still Red"



**Families visiting unmarked graves at Khavaran grave site in south Tehran. Khavaran is the burial place for many of the thousands of political prisoners who were executed in 1988 when Mir-Hossein Mousavi was prime minister. In January, authorities sent bulldozers to cover the graves with soil and plant trees, destroying numerous ad-hoc grave markings placed there by families, in an attempt to eliminate evidence of the massacre. During the election campaign in May, students at Babolsar, Qazvin and Zanzan universities demanded of Mousavi, "Where were you in 1988, and how many people did you kill?" A placard read, "Khavaran's soil is still red." Mousavi evaded answering the questions.**

## In the Soviet Union, Iran, Afghanistan or the U.S., State Caps Trip Over the Class Line

The ISO in the United States was formed in the mid-1970s by sympathizers of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) led by the late Tony Cliff. In particular, they embraced Cliff's characterization of the Soviet Union under Stalinist rule as "state capitalist." This was not so much a "theory" as a justification for his split from the Trotskyist Fourth International at the height of the anti-Soviet Cold War, refusing to defend North Korea and the USSR against the U.S./U.K./U.N. onslaught in the Korean war. The Cliffites' refusal to recognize the *class line* separating the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state from capitalist imperialism also blinded them to the nature of Islamic clerical reaction in Iran under Khomeini ... and today. In the recent upheaval in Iran, the British SWP responded even more enthusiastically than its now estranged cousins in the ISO. "People Power Rocks Iran" proclaimed the British *Socialist Worker* (20 June): "There is a new popular power sweeping Iran." The next issue included no less than seven articles on Iran, starting out: "Iran is in the grip of a popular rebellion, the like of which has not been seen since the 1979 revolution."

# — God's "Socialists" —

**THE FORM-  
RELIGIOUS  
THE SPIRIT-  
REVOLUTION!**

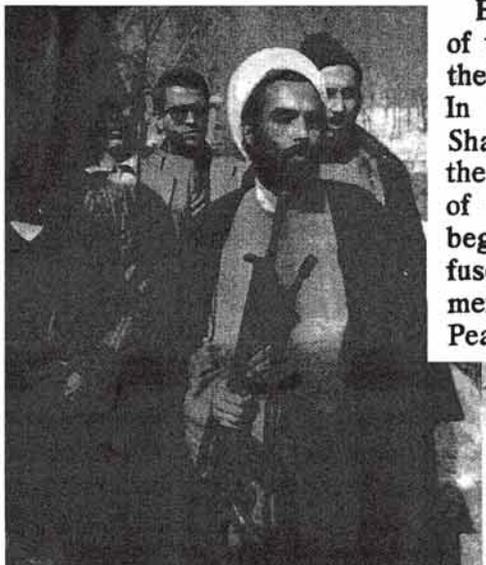
*Socialist Worker*, January 1979



Figures like Ayatolla Khomeini have been able to say things against the monarchy that no other established personalities would have dared. The identification with Khomeini in particular is one which allows even the humblest on the streets of Iran to feel that their opposition to the Shah is shared by others.

While there is widespread suspicion of other leaders whose record of double dealing is well known, Khomeini stands for the masses of the urban poor and the poorer bazzaris who either have not benefited from the Shah's modernization or have actually been made worse off by it.

## Rebellion in the name of religion



*Armed Mullahs in Teheran*

But in revolt it is the Islam of the poor that drives back the pretensions of the kings. In the struggle against the Shah, all the faces of Islam, of the peasants, of the workers, of the small merchants and beggars, and even of the rich fused together behind Khomeini against the Islam of the Peacock Throne.

*Socialist Worker*, January 1980

## ISO Hails Khomeini...

*Socialist Worker* of October 1978 says of the Iranian islamists, "They are at the head of the mass opposition movement because there is no alternative. Both the left and the nationalists are too weak to challenge their leadership....

"To call them reactionaries in comparison to the brutal dictatorship of the Shah is to brutalize the truth."

## ...then covers its tracks

**Trotskyists said  
Down with the Shah,  
No to Khomeini!**

When the Islamic Republic's brutal repression of the left begins, *Socialist Worker* (June 1979) sermonizes, in an editorial titled "The choice for the left: build a mass party or be crushed," "many failed to distinguish between support and dependence. They were already committed in theory to taking a back seat [to the Islamists] in the anti-Shah campaign." But if there was "no alternative," what else could be done?

If the ISO tried to explain away, downplay or ignore the Islamic character of the recent protests, the British Cliffites revel in it. “For the majority of ordinary people it has become a battle to reclaim the spirit of the 1979 revolution,” they write. (How they know what the majority of protesters believe is left unexplained.) A third piece says: “The majority now believe the solution for Iran is for a separation of religion from the state.” But, they caution, “This does not, as some suggest, spell the end of political Islam.” Rather, it is a “call for secularisation of the state by an Islamist reform movement” (*Socialist Worker* [UK], 27 June). To be sure, they say this “opens up space for more radical forces to emerge.” But not if those “radicals” seek to gain favor with the “green wave” demonstrators by hiding the chasm separating Islamism from socialism – which is exactly what the British SWP does. It is also what Cliff & Co. (and a host of others) did in 1979, with horrific consequences for the Iranian left and workers movement.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran was created by a mighty, popular revolution,” they write today. But, they add, “the powerful left believed that Iran was not ready for socialism and argued for alliances with ‘progressive’ capitalists to modernise the country. This was disastrous.” Indeed it was, and the Cliffites share responsibility for that disaster. Back when these events were unfolding in real time, the SWP put out a pamphlet by Joanna Rollo, *Iran: Beginning of a Revolution* (1979), which waxed lyrical:

“It is almost as though the masses have seized on a tradition that is embodied in their history – the tradition of religious opposition – the one thing they know is common to all, understood by all, and hammered this religion of theirs into a mighty weapon, that has nothing to do with godliness, or holiness and everything to do with mass power.”

In a 30-year retrospective on “Iran’s 1979 revolution” (*Socialist Worker* [UK], 24 January), the Cliffites cited another key moment in the consolidation of Islamic rule in Iran, the occupation of the U.S. embassy beginning that November by students “following the imam’s line”:

“Khomeini ordered an occupation of the US embassy, and moved against allies considered ‘moderate.’ This helped to seal Khomeini’s domination of the post-revolutionary state. Khomeini and his allies argued that national unity was needed to defeat the US. Any dissenters were enemies of the revolution. The left didn’t know how to respond.”

Actually, the opportunists vociferously *hailed* the embassy takeover, while Khomeini used phony “anti-imperialist” ploy in order to jail hundreds of leftists. But revolutionary Trotskyists, then organized in the international Spartacist tendency, which included the founders of the Internationalist Group, were not taken in by this maneuver, writing:

“The Teheran embassy seizure and hostage-taking was a *diversion*. It was fundamentally an attempt to refurbish Khomeini’s anti-shah credentials in a period of growing disillusionment with, and opposition to, his clerical-reactionary rule.”

–“Iran Embassy Crisis,” *Workers Vanguard* No. 244, 23 November 1979

Meanwhile, U.S. imperialism was stoking reactionary

opposition to moderate social and land reforms next door in Afghanistan, provoking Moscow to intervene militarily (in January 1980) to prop up the weak Kabul government under attack. As Trotskyists, we strongly defended Soviet intervention against imperialism and the CIA-backed Islamic *mujahedin* (holy warriors), saying “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” and calling to extend gains of the October Revolution to the Afghan peoples. The Cliffites (and a host of pseudo-Trotskyists) instead joined the imperialist chorus demanding “Soviet Troops Out of Afghanistan!” And when Moscow did pull out nine years later, the British SWP declared: “The Mojahedin victory will encourage the opponents of Russian rule everywhere in the USSR and Eastern Europe” (*Socialist Worker*, 4 February 1989). The Kremlin’s Afghan withdrawal was in fact a key factor accelerating counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in 1991-92, a world-historic defeat for the working class which Cliff et al. *greeted*.

This was the bitter fruit of these “Socialists Following the Imam’s Line.”

### Communism vs. Imperialism and Islamism

The “state capitalist” epigones of Tony Cliff are hardly the only ones to line up politically in the camp of the Islamist “reformers” led by Mousavi and Rafsanjani. The same line is taken by the United Secretariat (USec), followers of the late Ernest Mandel, which for decades has masqueraded as the Fourth International. The same Iranian academics are quoted, and the same arguments about a “dynamic of popular mobilisations” that “deeply destabilises the edifice of the Islamic Republic” are repeated (Babak Kia, “Crisis of the Iranian regime and popular mobilisation,” *International Viewpoint*, July-August 2009). Again, this is hardly the first time that the Mandelites have made common cause with the Cliffites: they had virtually identical positions over Afghanistan and Polish Solidarnosc in the 1980s, supported Yeltsin’s counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in 1990-91, and have been doing a mating dance in Euroleft conferences for years, without ever quite getting around to marriage. This only shows that the USec has long-since become reformist – now codified in the formation of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France which makes no pretense of Trotskyism, and in which the heirs of Mandel and Cliff comfortably cohabit.

In Britain, virtually the entire panoply of the Labourite social-democratic left has politically climbed aboard the pro-Mousavi protests, while coyly trying to distance themselves from their “reform” Islamist leadership. Each tendency has its own particular formula. The Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) of Sean Matgamna, latter-day followers of the anti-Trotskyist Max Shachtman, proclaimed “the birth of a new political movement” and called “For a secular democratic Iran” (*Solidarity*, 25 June). With this purely bourgeois program the AWL had no qualms about supporting the June 26 international “labor” solidarity rallies carried out in league with the pro-imperialist union federations. The Socialist Party of England and Wales, the leading section of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) of Peter Taaffe, proclaimed the mass demos in Tehran a “massive

movement for change” and declared “a revolution is unfolding in Iran” (“Where Now for the Iranian Revolution,” 25 June). But rather than posing the need for a *class* opposition to mullah rule, they call for “real democratic organisations” in “every workplace, university and district involving the middle class.” Again, it’s a bourgeois program.

We discussed at some length in our earlier article the even more effusive accolades of Taaffe’s former comrade Alan Woods and his International Marxist Tendency to the “Iranian Revolution,” which “has begun!” we are assured, although for about the third time in the last decade. With the repression unleashed by Ahmadinejad, however, Woods is no longer saying we are in a “1905 Revolution” which will prepare a “1917,” but rather that in “the next round (which is inevitable)” the “revolutionary ferment” (which “has inevitably expressed itself first among the students”) will be on “a qualitatively higher level” and “The Iranian equivalent of 1905 is being prepared. When that hour strikes the whole world will shake!” (“Iran: The defiance continues,” *In Defence of Marxism*, 10 July). Behind the bombast, all the talk of inevitability, like the USec harping on a “dynamic of popular mobilization,” is an *objectivist* justification for not fighting for an independent revolutionary vanguard and instead tailing the mass movement. If Lenin and Trotsky had that line, there never would have been a Bolshevik Revolution.

What position Marxists should take toward Islamism has been at issue in the left for decades. The current upheaval in Iran poses the question point blank, but it is also vital in formulating a revolutionary program for struggle throughout North Africa, the Near East, elsewhere in Asia and in imperialist countries like Britain. In Egypt, for example, since 2007 there has been a series of strikes of textile workers, miners, postal workers and other government employees, along with protests over U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Palestinian struggle against Zionist occupation. In all these issues the question of what attitude to take toward the Muslim Brotherhood is unavoidable, as it is the largest opposition force under the dictatorship of Mubarak. Cliffite supporters mouth a few phrases about not relying on the Brotherhood, but then seek political alliances with these extreme Islamic reactionaries, even though they are notorious strike-breakers who would jail and execute communists just as quickly as Mubarak’s military-based dictatorship. Trotskyists must warn against making political blocs with the Islamists and sharply combat their influence in the working class.

Elsewhere in the Near East, Cliffites and Mandelites have both supported making political alliances with Hezbollah in Lebanon. British SWP leader John Rees prominently participated in a November 2006 “anti-imperialist” conference in Beirut sponsored by the Shiite fundamentalist party. (Also in attendance was Workers Power/League for the Fifth International, presumably in the name of an “anti-imperialist united front,” its excuse for supporting the mullah-led Iranian “revolution” in 1979.) Rees is a regular attendee of the annual Cairo peace conferences, which he praises as a place where “senior people from Hamas, Hizbullah, the Muslim Brotherhood, people from the revolutionary left and people from the anti-war movement around the globe” can hobnob (*Al Ahram Weekly*, 5 April

2007). In Britain, the SWP played a key role in building the Respect coalition, whose most prominent spokesman was the former Labour MP George Galloway, until it blew up as Galloway attacked the SWP last year. In order to make common cause with bourgeois Islamic organizations (including some with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood), who constituted the bulk of Respect’s electoral base, the SWP went so far as to oppose including the right to abortion in its platform.

Likewise, in Iran today, giving political support to the pro-Mousavi mobilization means accepting the limits imposed by the clerical bonapartist regime. Such is the price of admission to a political bloc with Islamic reaction: as in classic “popular fronts,” it is the bourgeois component which determines the “lowest common denominator” program. Yet every genuinely democratic demand requires breaking the mullahs’ stranglehold on the state. Marxists combat the attempts to demonize Islam by various pro-imperialist ideologues, from Vietnam war hawk Samuel Huntington, with his talk of a “clash of civilizations,” to ex British SWPer Christopher Hitchens, who popularized the notion of “Islamofascism” taken up by “neo-conservative” backers of the Iraq/Afghanistan war. However, the Cliffites’ campaign against “Islamophobia” goes beyond this to give political support to various bourgeois Islamic and Islamist forces. Trotskyists, in contrast, defend Iran under the Islamic Republic – as well as Iraq under Saddam and Gaza under Hamas – against imperialist attack and threats, while politically fighting Islamism.

Various opportunists justified their capitulation to Khomeini by arguing, as did the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, “Socialists do not fight against religion” (*Intercontinental Press*, 17 September 1979). This is (a) not true (as atheists, Marxists oppose all religion; the question is *how* to fight the influence of this “opium of the people”); and (b) not the issue. *Islamism is a political doctrine for a theocratic state which communists fight tooth and nail as we insist on the separation of church and state.* Christian fundamentalists oppose this fundamental bourgeois-democratic principle as well, as do Zionists with their anti-democratic proclamation of a Jewish state. But “integrist”<sup>2</sup> tendencies are strong in Islam which predominates in regions and countries that have not yet had a bourgeois revolution. In the West under feudalism, when the Holy Roman Empire dominated Europe, as well as under the reformers Luther and Calvin, the *unity of church and state* was as pronounced as in the Muslim caliphates. Capitalism in its ascendant phase overcame this medieval political order; today, decaying capitalism fosters such reactionary currents.

What is striking about the political response of the left to the Islamic regime in Iran is the phony ingenuousness. “Who knew” Khomeini would end up slaughtering leftists, they argue. When there are new developments in the class struggle, Marxists respond, as scientists do, by a series of approximations as they work out a program. This was the case with the rise of imperialism, the appearance of fascism and the popu-

<sup>2</sup> From the time of the French revolution, Catholics who rejected the authority of the secular republic and preached obedience to the Papacy were known as integrist.

Hossam el-Hamrawy



**Independent union activists in Cairo, July 2009. Egypt is in the middle of biggest strike wave since 1946. What position to take toward Muslim brotherhood is key issue in labor struggles.**

lar front. In the post-World War I period, communists were very tentative in responding to bourgeois-nationalist and pan-Islamic movements, with little prior experience to go on. But by 1979 this was not a novel question, and the answer was no mystery for genuine Marxists.

Rather than conciliating and politically allying with backward-looking forces that seek to “modernize” their capitalist economies while imposing a medieval political system, Trotskyists fight to achieve the democratic gains of the bourgeois revolutions the only way possible in this epoch – by overturning capitalism through international socialist revolution. As early as the Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920, the question of what attitude to take toward Islamist forces was hotly debated. While there were distinct weaknesses in the theses on the colonial question, notably ambiguity about temporary alliances with national-revolutionary forces in colonial and semi-colonial countries, Lenin (who drafted the original theses) was emphatic about “the need for a struggle against the clergy and other influential reactionary and medieval elements”; and even more so about “the need to combat Pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with a strengthening of the position of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc.”

This was specifically in response to the efforts by the Dutch Communist Maring (Henk Sneevliet) to join with the Sarakaat Islam movement in Indonesia. Maring later, on Stalin’s instructions (and over Trotsky’s objections), ordered the Chinese Communist Party to join the bourgeois nationalist Guomindang led by Chiang Kai-shek. By then Stalin had adopted the Menshevik policy of “two-stage” revolution, directly contradicting the Bolshevik program of the October 1917 *workers* revolution. This led to the 1927 Shanghai massacre when Chiang’s nationalist army slaughtered over 30,000 communists and labor militants. Yet with the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern, communists around the world were indoctrinated with the stagist program. They kept on

making alliances with bourgeois nationalists and strongmen for decades.

One of the most tragic examples was in Indonesia, where the world’s third-largest Communist party, closely aligned with Mao’s China, subordinated the workers and peasants to the nationalist Sukarno government. The result was the 1965 bloodbath in which the army, together with Islamist death squads, murdered an estimated *one million Communists, trade unionists, members of the Chinese minority and others*. This massacre, actively aided by the CIA, brought to fruition proposals by Cold War Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that U.S. imperialism use Islamist groups as a “bulwark” against “atheistic communism.”

By 1979 the Iranian Stalinists and Stalinist-influenced leftists almost reflexively ceded power to the Islamic reactionary Khomeini, even though it was the workers who brought down the shah with their general strike. The Islamists proceeded to suppress the left and workers movement, picking off the various organizations one by one.

The *defeat* of the Iranian workers uprising of late 1978 and early 1979 was the result of Stalinism, but not just of the treachery of the Stalinist Tudeh party that sold out to Khomeini as it had earlier sold out to the shah in the interests of Kremlin foreign policy. It was also due to the adoption of Stalinist/Menshevik conception of “two-stage revolution” held by militant guerrilla groups like the Fedayeen, and *de-facto* by the whole host of fake Trotskyist groups that hailed Khomeini even as his minions were using blacklists supplied to the shah’s secret police, SAVAK, by the CIA in order to track down leftists to be jailed and killed.

This included members of the HKS (Socialist Workers Party) affiliated with the United Secretariat, even though they supported the proclamation of the Islamic Republic and supported Iran in the war with Iraq. Against this *suicidal* capitulation, genuine Trotskyists stand for permanent revolution, holding that in countries of late capitalist development, “the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving *democracy* and *national emancipation* is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all its peasant masses” (Leon Trotsky, “What Is the Permanent Revolution?” [1929]).

In Iran today, this means fighting against the electoral coup of the hardline Islamists Ahmadinejad and Khamenei at the head of the repressive forces (police, pasdaran, basiji) and defending the protesters while making no political alliances with the “moderate” Islamists led by Mousavi and Rafsanjani, and raising a series of democratic demands as part of a program to bring down the Islamic Republic through workers revolution. The key is to begin cohering the nucleus of a Leninist-Trotskyist party that draws the lessons of the disastrous experience of the past, in order to open the way to a victorious struggle for an Iranian workers republic in a socialist federation of the Near East. ■

“Bolshevik Bobbies”? You’ve Got to Be Kidding

# Her Majesty’s Social Democrats in Bed with the Police

## Britain: The Logic of Labourite Reformism

On April 1 and 2, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown played host to delegations of politicians and bankers from 19 other leading capitalist powers at the Group of 20 (G20) summit in London. While “world leaders” huddled to plan new rounds of slashing cuts to public services and trillions in handouts to the biggest banks, tens of thousands of protesters attempted to assemble to voice their opposition to the plans of the rulers. Instead the “forces of order” gratuitously beat, slammed, shoved, man-handled and “kettled” the demonstrators. Clearly the intention of this orgy of cop violence was to “teach them a lesson.” The police murdered a man, Ian Tomlinson, a newspaper vendor, who wasn’t even demonstrating, just trying to walk home from work.

The resulting outcry is still reverberating as commissions “investigate,” “reforms” are floated and “guidelines” rewritten. But cosmetic changes will not alter the fact that the police are the guard dogs of capital, whose job is to keep us down. In mobilizing the workers movement and all defenders of democratic rights to protest every new atrocity, the only solution to cop terror is a fight for socialist revolution.

That the police action was named “Operation Glencoe” (the 1692 massacre of the Macdonald clan in Scotland engineered by the English crown) speaks volumes. The Metropolitan Police brought in an army of 4,700 cops, in uniform and plainclothes disguise, deployed to the streets with shields, clubs, electric shock weapons and dogs, an equal number waiting in reserve. The protesters, gathered under a number of liberal, anarchist and trade-union coalitions, were subject to 122 arrests and vicious beatings that left many bloodied. Police from the Territorial Support Group smashed demonstrators outside the Bank of England with their heavy riot shields, bashed their heads with batons, kicked them, slapped and punched them in the face.

The Climate Camp, a street festival for harmless eco-



Chris Ison-pa/AP

**Police attack demonstrators outside the Bank of England in the City (financial district) of London, April 1, as thousands protest against the G20 summit.**

liberals, was attacked by repeated baton charges as protesters chanted “This is not a riot.” They were then held for four hours in a “kettle”—surrounded by impenetrable police phalanxes and not allowed to exit—until about midnight when more police with dogs and armored vehicles were brought in for the final assault on the picnic. The next day the police attacks resumed early in the morning with raids on two anarchist communal houses. The Earl St. Convergence Center and Ramparts “squat” in Whitechapel were surrounded by police wearing baklavas (ski masks). Later, armored cars were brought in as riot police smashed down the door with a battering ram and stormed into the buildings to flush out the counter-culture activists and protesters.

The bourgeois press did its part: while the tabloids screeched “Blood on the Streets” (*Daily Star*) and “Anarchy Does Not Rule UK” (*Daily Express*), the more respectable *Guardian* (2 April) wrote that “a man died” during the G20 protests as “bottles were thrown at police medics trying to help him.” They quoted “Commanders at the Met, who are said to be among the best public order officers in the world.” Yet a video showed that Tomlinson was clubbed from behind

by a Met cop and shoved to the ground for no reason at all; he died hours later of internal bleeding. Several videos show officers in “Police Medic” uniforms being particularly aggressive in hitting demonstrators. And some months later it was revealed in a report by the chief inspector of the constabulary that “Metropolitan police commanders at the G20 demonstrations ordered officers to clear the streets of protesters using ‘reasonable force’ if necessary, minutes before a police constable attacked the newspaper vendor Ian Tomlinson” (*Guardian*, 7 July).

Britain’s ostensibly socialist left naturally condemned the cop violence, but how to stop it is another matter. The initial response of the Socialist Workers Party was vague calls like “Don’t let the police off the hook,” and “keep the pressure on” through “campaigning and mass pressure” (*Socialist Worker*, 18 April). This was followed by “Disband the riot squads,” saying the Territorial Support Group should be “abolished immediately” (*Socialist Worker*, 25 April). That’s already been tried once: the notorious Special Patrol Group was disbanded following the uproar over the police murder of protester Blair Peach in 1979. The SPG was replaced by the TSG, and they’re still up to their old “dirty tricks.”

The Socialist Party of England and Wales, the leading section of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) led by Peter Taaffe, called for investigations and changing police “tactics”: “What is needed is a genuinely independent inquiry into policing demonstrations, which includes representatives of protesters and trade unionists.... At the same time, the oppressive tactics of ‘kettling’ and other attempts to infringe upon our right to protest must be revoked” (*The Socialist*, 22 April). The idea that the capitalist state would countenance a “genuinely independent” inquiry including protesters, or that any change of tactics in “policing demonstrations” it would implement would not infringe the right to protest, is the purest bourgeois-democratic illusion.

“Steps need to be taken to ensure this never happens again,” wrote the Socialist Appeal group in the Labour Party, the mother group of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) led by Alan Woods. But how is this to be accomplished? “Bringing the police to accept responsibility,” they suggest. Lots of luck with that. They add: “The death of Ian Tomlinson has proved yet again that the forces of the state are not neutral, but hostile – sometimes murderously so – to the working class movement. The sooner this fact is appreciated the better” (*Socialist Appeal* web site, 9 April).

Yes, indeed, the police are the armed fist of the capitalist state. Every worker who has been on a picket line, every resident of predominantly black or Asian neighborhoods knows what kind of “work” the cops do. They are the essential force that guarantees the capitalists freedom to exploit labor by neutralizing or destroying any potential opposition among



London Evening Standard

**“Bolshevik Bobbies”? Hardly. Richard Barnbrook (circled), London leader of the neo-Nazi British National Party, marching in front ranks of 23 January 2008 Police Federation march for higher pay.**

those they exploit and oppress. Police herd scabs and break up protests. They spy on activists, framing and sometimes assassinating them. They oppress the Catholic population of Northern Ireland. They enforce the oppression of racial minorities and immigrants: in Britain, the police help deport 20,000 immigrants each year.

Yet barely a year earlier, the same “Marxists” published an article titled “Bolshevik Bobbies” (*Socialist Appeal* web site, 28 January 2008). “There is rebellion in the air. A pillar of the state is in a mutinous mood,” swooned the IMT. They were ecstatic when they “got a phone call from the ‘Police Review’ asking for permission to republish an article from our website on the police strikes of 1918-19.” This was a sign, they wrote, that “we are heading for explosive times.”

That January 23, 25,000 British police officers paraded through London to demand a retroactive pay raise. The Labour government had cut the Met police pay increase from a scheduled 2.5 percent to only 1.9 percent, and the police thought they deserved better for their services to Her Majesty’s government. Some “mutiny”! For its part, the CWI cheered the march as “a momentous occasion” (*The Socialist*, 31 January 2008) and took pride in the success of its sales team (five copies in 20 minutes!).

### Police “Unions” – Enemies of Workers

“Bobbies” is an affectionate nickname for the police named after Sir Robert Peel, who founded the Metropolitan Police in 1829. Even as they swear that the state is “not neutral,” reformist British socialists have an abiding concern for “their” bobbies. The most egregious are the offshoots of the former Militant Tendency led by the late Ted Grant, which for decades was buried deep in the Labour Party (where Socialist Appeal/IMT remains). Back when Woods and Taaffe were Grant’s deputies, Militant Labour published a pamphlet, *The State: A warning to the Labour movement* (1983), which declared in its introduc-

Akira Suemori/AP



**Guard dogs of capital. Met police charge G20 protesters on April 1.**

tion: “While opposing the repressive role of the police, however, Militant has always rejected the crude anti-police attitude of some groups which claim to be Marxist.”

Militant Labour also “rejects the idea put forward by pseudo-Marxists that the police ranks are ‘one reactionary mass’.” Cops “are inevitably influenced by wider events in society. In periods of the radicalisation of the working class the police too have been radicalised.” So how did Militant propose to “radicalize” the police? “Particularly by taking up the issue of trade union rights for the police ranks, the labour movement could have a decisive influence on the way the police move.” In particular they supported (and support) police demands for better “pay and conditions.” Yet a few pages further on in the same pamphlet, Taaffe himself admits that “the big wage increases to the police and army granted by Thatcher” showed the capitalists’ concern that they may need to use “the same brutal methods as in the past – i.e. the police and army – to curb the movement of the working class.” No matter how much bloody evidence cops serve up to the contrary, the CWI and IMT persistently raise their “trade union rights” and lobby the labor movement to admit these deadly enemies of labor with open arms.

Genuine Marxists have a very different view. For us, Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin’s dictum that the state consists of “special bodies of armed men” is not abstract words or an empty formula. Lenin spells it out for anyone who cares to read: “A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power.” The CWI and IMT (as well as the SWP and a host of other “socialist” reformists) claim to agree, but then add a treacherous “however.” In reality, when police demonstrate for higher pay and “union rights,” it is not in the interest of class-conscious workers to support them. The cops, *whether they get their pay raise or not*, will attack those who fight for the least bit of economic or social justice – not to mention, social revolution.

On 15 October 2008, the Police Federation reached a three-year compromise deal on pay for cops in England,

Wales and Northern Ireland. The agreement improved on Home Secretary Jacqui Smith’s original offer, which had led to the January protests. And with their pay and pensions secured, the “bobbies” were soon back at work, beating up “anti-neo-liberal” protesters! Faced with mounting criticism over the police violence, Simon Reed, the Vice Chairman of the Police Federation, defended the cops and blamed lenient courts that “do not always convict,” as well as ten years of “under-investment” in the forces of Law and Order (Observer, 19 April). “Bolshevik bobbies”? Not hardly.

### **“Bobbies” Defend Shoot-to-Kill Orders: The Execution of Jean Charles de Menezes**

The cops are not merely interested in higher pay. They have a well-developed political program. Police unions and semi-union organizations, like the British Police Federation or the Fraternal Order of Police in the U.S., are *anti-working class political organizations* whose programs represent a grave danger to the workers and the oppressed. The Fraternal Order of Police in the U.S. has been the loudest voice clamoring for the execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal, an innocent man whose “crime” was to be a black radical who spoke out eloquently against racist police brutality. In Britain, the Police Federation calls for harsher sentences for marijuana smokers, heavier arming of the police, and less “bureaucratic” oversight of warrant-less arrests.

*Socialist Appeal* and *The Socialist* politely leave out these other concerns of the “bobbies” when they write articles yearning for a police strike. In particular, they cover up the police defense of the murder of Jean Charles de Menezes, an electrical worker from Brazil, who was shot dead by a squad of London Met police on 22 July 2005 in the Stockwell tube (subway) station. De Menezes was unarmed, was not wanted for any crime, did not flee from the police and did not match the description of any “suspect.” Police shot him seven times in the head and once in the shoulder after physically restraining him. They justified the killing in terms of the “war on terror.”

“If (the public or others) make those decisions [to shoot] harder for us to make, we’ll have less people wanting to make them and that means the terrorists will win,” Police Federation president Jan Berry, who later led the 2008 pay protests, told the New Zealand *Dominion Post* (9 August 2005). The Federation launched a campaign to discredit and impede the investigation into the shooting by the Independent Police Complaints Commission – a toothless government body meant to shield killer cops by binding and gagging victims of police brutality with bureaucratic red tape. And when the murderers were rein-

stated over protests from the De Menezes family, the Metropolitan Police Federation celebrated their return.

The murder of Jean Charles de Menezes was not an accident or an exceptional circumstance. The “socialists” who would later tag along after the London police march termed the seven shots to De Menezes’ head a “blunder” (*The Socialist*, 25 August 2005) and called for an end to “shoot to kill.” A *Socialist Appeal* editorial (9 September 2005) urged a change in policing protocols. But all the procedures that led to his murder – the police dragnet against immigrants that made suspects of De Menezes’ neighbors, the stake-out of his apartment, the undercover cops who followed him to the train station, and the execution of the unarmed man who was already in their custody – are standard operating procedure of the U.S./U.K. imperialist terror war, from Basra to Bogside and Brixton.

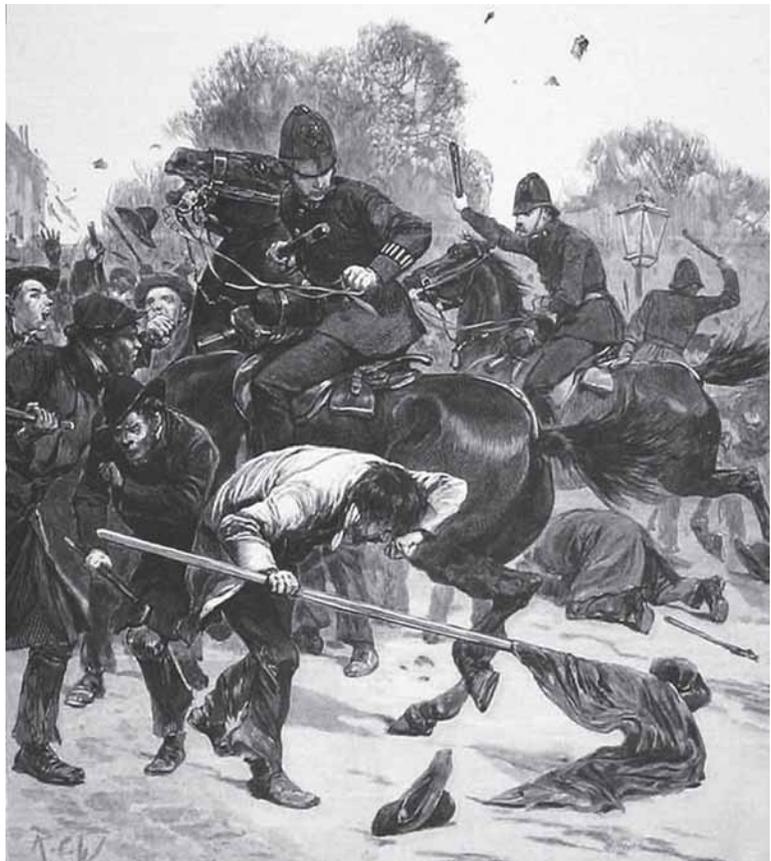
Oppressed blacks, Irish Catholics and immigrants know the daily injustice of racist police harassment. But the capitalist Labour government with its “kettling” police traps and “shoot to kill” cops is *Socialist Appeal*’s government. These “Marxists” voted for it and remain in the governing imperialist war party. Rather than bring it down through revolution, they would modify the government’s policies. But no “reforms” can or will change the nature of the police, an essential pillar of the capitalist state.

### The 1918-19 Police Strikes in Britain

For the CWI and IMT epigones of Ted Grant’s Militant tendency, the strikes by British police in 1918 and 1919 are the touchstone of their appeals for unionization of the cops. The CWI article on the January 2008 police march for higher pay noted that “the last time they took any action over pay was 1919.” In his history of Liverpool (where Militant Labour led the city council in the early-mid 1980s) Socialist Party/CWI leader Peter Taaffe devotes 15 paragraphs to the “remarkable” one-day police walkout of 1 August 1919 (compared to three brief paragraphs on the impact of the Russian Revolution). Saying that the police were “infected with the spirit of revolt,” he writes: “The National Union of Police and Prison Officers was founded in August 1918<sup>1</sup> to fight for the interests of ‘workers in uniform’.”

That phrase, “workers in uniform,” sums up the Militant view of the police. While accurate when applied to soldiers conscripted into the army, it is dead wrong when applied to the police, which is a body of professional agents of repression.

Woods’ *Socialist Appeal*/IMT waxes even more enthusiastic about the 1918-19 police strikes. Its “Bolshevik Bobbies” article starts off: “‘The spirit of Petrograd,’ cried [the left socialist leader] Sylvia Pankhurst on hearing the news of a police strike in 1918. ‘The London police on strike. After that, anything can happen.’” The IMT has produced two lengthy ar-



Illustrated London News

**Police attack unemployed protest in Hyde Park, October 1887**

ticles on the NUPPO strikes. The first, published on the 90th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, began breathlessly: “The revolution had begun: or so it seemed when the very sentinels of the State revolted in the late summer of 1918.” Rather than saying forthrightly that Pankhurst’s enthusiastic exclamation of anticipation was illusory, the IMT feeds the illusion.

The National Union of Police and Prison Officers was formed in October 1913 to defend constables disciplined for unlawful arrest of an innocent man. NUPPO carried out two walkouts: a London strike in 1918 that gained higher wages and less autocratic discipline, and a strike for recognition in 1919 when only a small minority of officers walked out and were immediately fired. The authorities set up the Police Federation, which includes commanding officers, and proscribed NUPPO, effectively breaking the “union.” Hardly a heroic event, except to those who are desperate to link the police to the labor movement (and vice versa).

The IMT quotes remarks where police “union” officials sought support by mouthing some regrets about the strikebreaking role of the cops. But Woods & Co. then elaborate: “NUPPO militants aimed to sever the connection between police and State in favour of the labour movement, which in [and] of itself had revolutionary implications” (“The ‘Spirit of Petrograd’? The 1918 and 1919 Police Strikes in Britain,” *Socialist Appeal* website, 7 November 2007). This is a conscious distortion.

Even in their speeches to garner the support of organized labor, “radical” NUPPO leaders were explicitly against “severing the connection between police and the State.” *The*

<sup>1</sup> Actually, NUPPO was founded five years earlier, see below.

*Night the Police Went On Strike* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968) by Gerald W. Reynolds and Anthony Judge, a history written with great sympathy for the police “union” cause, quotes the speech by NUPPO president James Marston to the Labour Party conference of June 1919:

“I know that the history of the police stinks in the nostrils of the majority of the community. It has not been easy for us to convince you that we now stand in the ranks of the worker, but it is so. *At the same time, the Union is fully conscious of our duty to the public and the Government*, for we are looking forward to the day when Labour shall be in charge of this country.” [our emphasis]

*Socialist Appeal* cites Reynolds and Judge among its sources. Note that when NUPPO officials looked forward “to the day when Labour shall be in charge of this country,” they were not talking of a workers government, but a capitalist government administered by the same Labour fakers that had supported Lloyd George’s imperialist coalition government throughout World War I.

Marston’s statement that the NUPPO was fully conscious of its duty to the government gives the lie to the IMT’s effort to sidestep Karl Marx’s stern warning to communists, that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes.” As Marx wrote at the time of the Paris Commune, the task of the coming revolution will not be “to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to *smash* it” (letter to Kugelmann, April 1871).

Another aspect of the 1919 police strike is that rank-and-file workers were none too eager to support the police, despite the urgings of their bureaucratic leaders. The IMT chides them for not showing proper solidarity:

“The police were hated by much of the working class community on Merseyside. This was because of the role they so often played during strikes, in effect acting as stooges for the bosses by defending scabs and strike breakers under the guise of safeguarding law and order. To their credit, some local trade union leaders urged their members to show solidarity with the striking police, but they had decades of accumulated bad memories to overcome.”

– “A policeman’s lot; the police and industrial action,” *Socialist Appeal* website, 4 June 2008

Here the worker ranks had a clearer vision of the nature of the police than their bureaucratic leaders or the “Marxists” who scold them nine decades later for their healthy class instinct. To the Labourite opportunist, police brutality against the working class is an unfortunate incident, a “bad memory to overcome,” not, as Lenin insisted, the very essence of the state itself: an organized force of ruling-class violence against the oppressed.

### “Socialism” By Parliamentary Enabling Act

It is important to understand *why* the British “left” social democrats, particularly the remnants of the Militant tendency, are so heavily invested in the illusion of the police as “workers in uniform” and their treacherous efforts to bring the cops into the workers movement. The Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal group are appendages of the Labour/trade-

union bureaucracy whose stock in trade is peddling Labourism with a thin “Marxist” veneer. They are deeply wedded to the notion of the peaceful transformation of Britain by a Labour government coming to power committed to “socialist” policies. They made this clear in the 1983 pamphlet on *The State* cited previously.

Peter Taaffe writes that labor militants must call for “measures to make the state more accountable to the labour movement.” What kind of anti-Marxist drivel is that – making the *capitalist* state “accountable” to labor! He then goes on:

“Experience has shown that only a decisive change in society can eliminate the danger of reaction and allow the ‘democratisation of the state machine’ to be carried through to a conclusion with the establishment of a new state controlled and managed by working people.”

And what kind of “decisive change in society” might that be, which would “democratize” the state machinery? Certainly not a revolution:

“If the next Labour government introduced an Enabling Bill into Parliament to nationalise the 200 monopolies, banks and insurance companies which control 80 to 85 per cent of the economy, a decisive blow would be struck against the 196 directors of these firms who are the real government of Britain. By the economic power they wield, they dictate the course to be followed by both Tory and Labour governments.”

Lest anyone think that he is talking of expropriation, Taaffe assures the bourgeoisie: “They would be compensated for the nationalisation of their assets on the basis of ‘proven need’.” He sums up:

“Such a step, backed up by the power of the labour movement outside parliament, would allow the introduction of a socialist and democratic plan of production to be worked out and implemented by committees of trade unions, the shop stewards, housewives and small businessmen....”

“A peaceful socialist transformation of society, would be entirely possible if such bold steps were to be taken by a Labour government,” Taaffe wrote, but the Labour leaders will only provide half-measures. So there you have the Militant program: “peaceful socialist transformation” by a parliamentary Enabling Act!

When Marx, Engels and Lenin insisted that the workers cannot simply lay hands on the existing state machinery and use it for their own purposes, they were attacking the fundamental conception of reformists like Militant.

### Militant and the Police: Democratic Illusions

So where do the police fit in this social-democratic, Labourite utopia? In another article in the same 1983 pamphlet (which Taaffe’s Socialist Party reissued in 2006), Lynn Walsh writes of “the contradictory character of the police.” While they are admittedly “an arm of the state” and “make up the capitalists’ repressive apparatus,” Walsh writes, “the police, like the armed forces, are composed of men and women drawn overwhelmingly from the working class, and they have their interests and demands as workers.” But the cops’ interest “as workers” is to be better paid and better armed for their work of beating up workers, minorities and the poor. *There is*

*nothing contradictory about the class character of the police, who are at the core of the capitalist state.*

Splitting the army along class lines, between the lower ranks of workers (and peasants in semi-colonial countries) and the bourgeois officer corps, particularly in conscript armies, is a crucial task for Marxists. Police forces on the other hand are made of career oppressors. That the occasional cop may harbor leftist ideas or sympathies does not change the class character of these supposed “workers” who “produce” violent repression. That cops desire more money is not a “contradiction.” Top-level MI6 and CIA employees would also like to earn more. Should socialists demand union rights for anti-communist assassins?

Walsh points to episodes in history when the police seemed to be wavering, when individual police expressed discontent with their role in capitalist society, when the workers movement hoped or believed that the police would take its side. But in the end, Walsh is only able to point to hopes, speeches, what-ifs. The police never took the side of the workers, not in Paris in May 1968, not even in Berlin in 1919, when Emil Eichhorn, a member of the centrist Independent Social Democrats (USPD), was the police chief!

To be sure, Walsh writes that in a “fundamental change of society” (got to avoid that “r word”), “all the existing institutions of the state will be shattered and replaced by new organs of power under the democratic control of the working class.” Sounds almost like something a Marxist would say, but then comes the inevitable “however”:

“While basing itself on the perspective of the socialist transformation of society, however, the labour movement must advance a programme which includes policies which come to grips with the immediate problems posed by the role of the police.”

For Trotskyists, a program to “come to grips with the immediate problems posed” by the police would include intransigent defense of democratic rights, such as the right to demonstrate, and transitional demands for militant labor defense of oppressed immigrants, racial minorities and class war prisoners, for union defense guards to protect picket lines, steps toward the arming of the proletariat – the first steps towards workers military organization to counter the organized violence of the capitalist state and prepare the way to revolution. *However*, that is not what Walsh had in mind.

Marxists say the police are the armed fist of the capitalist state, *therefore* the workers and oppressed must organize to resist and defeat their attacks. Social democrats say, “yes, of course, socialist transformation of society, etcetera, etcetera. *However....*” However, they hold dear their illusions in “their” bobbies and



Above: Battle lines: police hold back striking coal miners Below: Officers were dubbed ‘Maggie’s Boot Boys’ following clashes

**Not bloody likely. Police know which side of the class line they are on, even if social-democratic fake-lefts don’t. Above, illustration of *Police magazine* (March 2009) 25th anniversary review of the 1984-85 coal miners strike.**

the “democratic” façade of the capitalist class dictatorship, and therefore Walsh advances a reformist fantasy of democratic control of the police, which will check police brutality and “ensure that any racist elements or fascist sympathisers within the police are weeded out of the force.” And of course, the police must be allowed “an independent, democratic trade union organisation to defend their interests as workers.”

### Liverpool, the Police and the 1984-85 Miners Strike

Walsh’s Labourite daydream continues:

“Through such police committees, the labour movement, in areas where Labour controlled the local councils, would be able to establish democratic checks and controls on the role of the police.”

Ah, yes, the Labour-controlled local councils, there’s the tip-off. Now you see what Militant is driving at. They’re talking about the “Liverpool city council, led by Militant” from 1983 until they were purged by the Labour Party tops in 1987. For both the CWI and IMT, this is their claim to fame, when they were playing in the big time. So how did “democratic control” of the police work out there? The test was soon to come.

In 1984, miners in Britain went on strike, challenging the Tory government of Margaret Thatcher. Crack squads of police were dispatched to the coal pits and power stations; mass preemptive arrests were made of suspected strikers. Police worked overtime arresting flying pickets, attacking strike rallies and shepherding scabs. In Merseyside, the county including Liverpool, the Labour government and police authority ordered Chief Constable Ken Oxford to stop budgeting overtime for his cops. *Police magazine* (March 2009) reports: “When the police authority ordered Oxford to withdraw the force from the NRC<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The National Reporting Center was composed of coal barons and top government ministers, a body set up to direct the police work in herding scabs and attacking strikers.

arrangements, he said that obeying such an order would be an abrogation of his legal responsibilities.” The chief constable simply refused, and that was that. So much for Militant’s “democratic control” of the police.

*Police* magazine is the voice of the Police Federation, whose aspirations for union rights are hailed by the CWI and IMT. The passage cited above is from its historical review of the role of the police and their Federation in the great miners strike of 1984. At the time, the Police Federation *criticized the right-wing Thatcher government for failing to take a hard enough line against the miners union!* *Police* reports:

“Leslie Curtis, the chairman of the Police Federation, called on several occasions for the government to implement its own laws, designed to prevent mass picketing and intimidation, but he never received an answer from the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary. For months, it was left to the police to confront the hordes of pickets. In these clashes, some 1,300 officers sustained injuries. A total of 11,000 miners were arrested; 7,000 injured and eleven people died during the strikes, according to the NUM [National Union of Miners]. Only towards the end of the strike did the government go to court and obtain orders to sequester the entire funds of the NUM. This led to the eventual collapse of the strike.”

In South Yorkshire, the heart of the miners strike, the Labour-controlled police authority proposed to disband the mounted police and canine units. The police went to court to overturn this, and “democratic control” evaporated. At the 1984 Labour Party conference a motion was passed calling for a future Labour government to disband the Police Support Units and to stop Special Branch spying on trade unionists. This was nothing but a blustering gesture to obscure Labour’s actual betrayal of the strike. “Leslie Curtis made a public statement saying that if this became party policy, the police would have difficulties in working with a Labour Government,” *Police* reports. But Labour leader Neil Kinnock said he would never implement the Labour Conference motion and the row was over.

The short report in *Police* magazine about the 1984 miners strike can teach more about the nature of the capitalist state and its armed detachments than whole volumes of fake-Marxist ditherings about the “contradictory” character of “working-class” cops and their “unions.”

### **CWI, IMT and Prison Guards: “Socialist” Screws?**

In his fundamental work, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels was quite clear about the role of prisons: “This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds....” Police officers, prison guards, private police and security guards: they are all part of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist ruling class. They are enemies, not friends or potential allies of labor. But that doesn’t deter the ex-Militant “Marxists.”

While the relationship of these Labourite socialists to the police and their “union” organizations is generally con-



**John Hancock, branch secretary of Prison Officers Association at Wormwood Scrubs prison, which is notorious for racist torture of prisoners, speaking at 2008 conference of Socialist Party/CWI.**

finned to starry-eyed admiration from afar, the CWI in particular cultivates a cozy relationship with the Prison Officers Association (POA). *The Socialist* runs friendly interviews with POA General Secretary Brian Caton, who spouts vague liberal rhetoric about prison “reform” and complains about the underfunding of prisons and the consequent overwork of the guards. Perhaps we will see the Socialist Party, or their U.S. affiliate, Socialist Alternative, chanting at anti-war demonstrations, “Money for prisons, not for war!”

John Hancock, the branch secretary of the Prison Officers Association at the notorious Wormwood Scrubs prison, was a keynote speaker at the annual Socialist Party conference in March 2008, where the first ever national job action of “screws” was celebrated. Not two years earlier, a scandal broke over torture of prisoners by guards at that same prison. Over 160 Wormwood Scrubs prison guards were implicated in “a regime of torture which saw savage beatings, death threats and sexual assault inflicted on inmates” (*Guardian*, 13 November 2006):

“In one incident, an Irish inmate was choked as eight officers beat him, with one shouting for him to call him ‘English master’. Others were left with broken bones; one was so terrified that he slashed his wrists. On several occasions officers psychologically tortured prisoners by threatening to hang them.” Peter Quinn, the whistleblower who leaked the report of “the worst case of prisoner abuse in modern history with 164 officers involved from 1992 to 2001,” told the *Guardian* that at least 50 of the officers involved were still employed at Wormwood in 2006.

The London *Independent* (4 March 1999) reported on earlier revelations: “The allegations include claims that inmates at Wormwood Scrubs in west London were beaten, burnt with cigarettes, forced to eat paper and subjected to obscene abuse about members of their families.... Most of the original complaints were by black prisoners. One said he was forced to eat a ‘Black is Beautiful’ poster that was taken from his wall. Many white prisoners have also now come forward claiming they were brutally treated.” The POA disputed the allegations and defended

the guards. While both *Socialist Appeal* and *The Socialist* carried numerous articles praising POA job actions and supporting “union rights” for cops and screws, we have not found a single article from either the IMT or CWI about the racist torture at Wormwood Scrubs prison.

Besides agitating for higher pay for the bosses’ racist thugs, the POA, like the police “labor” organizations, lobbies for political changes, like replacing minimum-security “open” prisons with fortified, fenced-in jails. The POA also represents members in Northern Ireland, who have threatened to strike if Irish Republican prisoners are granted separate accommodations and other rights due to them as political prisoners. Recall that IRA prisoner Bobby Sands led a hunger strike to protest brutal treatment and demand that Republican inmates have their status as political prisoners be reinstated. Sands was elected to parliament from his cell in H-Block, yet died a painful death as the British state refused to give in.

Revolutionaries stand with Bobby Sands, while the IMT and CWI stand with the screws who made his life and that of his comrades hell. We call for freedom for all imprisoned Irish Republicans. We defend the oppressed Catholic population, calling for all British troops to get out of Northern Ireland, and for the sectarian police (formerly Royal Ulster Constabulary, now called the Police Service of Northern Ireland) to stay out of Catholic neighborhoods. As for the prisons, the plebeian masses of Paris showed the way during the great French bourgeois revolution of 1789 when they marched on the Bastille to free their comrades and fellow workers.

### Labourism or Leninism?

We have concentrated on the heirs of Ted Grant’s Militant Labour tendency, the Socialist Party/CWI and Socialist Appeal/IMT, but they are hardly the only ones defending trade-union organization of the police and prison guards. The August 2007 Prison Officers Association walkout for higher pay, for example, was also supported by *Workers Power*, *Socialist Worker*, *Weekly Worker* and *Permanent Revolution*. The pernicious illusions in the nature of the cops and the capitalist state of which they are the backbone are part of the common heritage of Labourism which permeates and corrupts the British left, of Fabian<sup>3</sup> conceptions of achieving “socialist transformation” of Britain according to Clause IV of the Labour Party constitution<sup>4</sup> and through peaceful “democratic reforms” rather than revolution.

The First World War marked the end of British world domination. Britain’s bourgeoisie rose to wealth and power largely

<sup>3</sup> The Fabian Society was founded in 1884 by Sydney Webb, George Bernard Shaw and other “moderate” socialists who put forward a program of “municipal socialism” and social democracy through reformist and gradualist methods.

<sup>4</sup> Clause IV of the 1918 constitution of the Labour Party, written by the Fabian Sydney Webb, called for “common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange.” It came to symbolize the socialist pretensions of left Labourites, although in office Labour never lifted a finger to carry it out. At a Party conference in 1995, Tony Blair with great fanfare eliminated the call for common ownership as a hallmark of his “New Labour.”

on the basis of its dominance of the trade in African slaves and gave birth to modern imperialism, but has long since degenerated into senile decrepitude only capable of acting on the world stage as a junior partner of U.S. finance capital. Leon Trotsky analyzed the contradiction between the decline of British imperialism and the potential power of the large and well-organized trade unions in his 1925 pamphlet *Where Is Britain Going?* Even should a Labour Party government, under pressure from a working class in rebellion, touch off a confrontation with the British bourgeoisie; even if this *bourgeois workers party* (as Lenin characterized it), contrary to every inclination of its pro-capitalist leaders, should attempt to carry out a program of nationalizations of key industries, Trotsky warned: “The police, the courts, the army, the militia, will be on the side of the disorganizers, the saboteurs, the fascists.”

The co-organizer of the October Revolution had no illusions in “democratic” control of the police, not did he equate cops with soldiers. Trotsky described the attitude of revolutionary crowds in Petrograd in the February 1917 Revolution:

“The police are fierce, implacable, hated and hating foes. To win them over is out of the question. Beat them up and kill them. It is different with the soldiers: the crowd makes every effort to avoid hostile encounters with them; on the contrary, seeks ways to dispose them in its favor, convince, attract, fraternize, merge them in itself.”

—*History of the Russian Revolution* (1930)

“But that was barbaric, tsarist Russia, while this is civilized, democratic England!” exclaims the Labourite social democrat, convinced that Met police “bobbies” and prison screws would not treat him or her as British troops treat the population they oppress in Iraq and Afghanistan, or as SAS<sup>5</sup> commandos did to Catholics as they were marauding in Northern Ireland.

Just as Militant Labour argued that a radicalization of society would produce a radicalization of the police, on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power in Germany, the Social Democratic Party took solace in the fact that many police chiefs and even more policemen were card carrying “socialists”: surely they would side with the workers and resist a fascist putsch. Leon Trotsky urgently warned otherwise:

“In case of actual danger [from the fascists], the Social Democracy banks not on the ‘Iron Front’ [a popular front with minor ‘republican’ bourgeois parties] but on the Prussian police. A deceptive calculation! The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker. Of late years these policemen have had to do much more fighting with

<sup>5</sup> Special Air Service, a component of Britain’s special forces, which became notorious for its “shoot-to-kill” and “snatch squad” operations in Northern Ireland, ambushing suspected Republicans, killing a 16-year-old boy, abducting IRA suspects across the border in the Republic of Ireland and killing three unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar.

## Brazilian Trotskyists Fought to Drive Police Out of the Unions

In late 1995, Brazilian Trotskyists in Luta Metalúrgica (LM - Metal Workers Struggle) won the leadership of the municipal workers union of Volta Redonda (SFPMVR). Their program declared that the armed forces, military police and *guardas* (municipal police) are “all of them, the armed fist of the bourgeoisie,” and “alliance” with them is incompatible with class independence “since they bring men armed and trained by the bourgeois state into the unions” (see the Internationalist Group pamphlet, *Class Struggle and Repression in Volta Redonda, Brazil* [1997]). Immediately upon taking office they undertook to remove *guardas* from the union.

Volta Redonda is Brazil’s “steel city,” the site of the CSN, the largest steel plant in Latin America, where mass illegal strikes helped to bring down the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985, and led to military occupation of the plant in 1988. Having earlier launched a campaign to defend Mumia Abu-Jamal, in fighting to remove police from the union, LM sought his assistance. Mumia responded with an essay titled “Police: Part of, or Enemies of, Labor?” Shotgun-wielding military police invaded and shut down a union assembly that had the disaffiliation of the *guardas* on the agenda. But the Brazilian Trotskyists persisted.

In response, the capitalist courts intervened, ordered cops to shut down the union meeting where exclusion of the police was to be voted, removed Geraldo Ribeiro and other LM supporters who had been elected leaders and installed pro-police elements at the head of the union. The popular-front city government and its police sought to silence Trotskyists by ordering leaflets and union bulletins confiscated. More than ten lawsuits by supporters of the police were brought against the union and its elected leadership. Yet in defiance of a court order, on 25 July 1996, a union assembly reaffirmed Geraldo Ribiero as president of the SFPMVR and voted to disaffiliate the cops from the union. This struggle was key as well in transforming LM into the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB), section of the League for the Fourth International.



Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil at November 1999 strike called by CUT union in Rio de Janeiro that included demand for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal. LQB signs say: “For Strikes and Work Stoppages to Free Mumia!” “Police Out of the Unions!” “Victory to the Mexican Students’ Strike!” and “Women’s Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!”

Though the police and their supporters were ultimately successful in using the state apparatus to remove the Trotskyist leadership of the municipal workers, the struggle to drive out the cops posed a fundamental challenge to a whole range of opportunists masquerading as Trotskyists. The next year, there were strikes by “unions” of state and federal military police, including some with leaders affiliated to or supported by ostensibly Trotskyist groups. Yet in the middle of the strike, police in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul came off strike to attack a picket of striking workers at a General Motors plant (see “Brazil: Crisis of the Capitalist State,” *The Internationalist* No. 3, September-October 1997; and “Latin America: Opportunist Left Embraces the Cops,” *The Internationalist* No. 4, January-February 1998).

Today, even supporters of a “left-wing” union federation, Conlutas, seek to affiliate police unions as the cops gun down shantytown residents. In contrast, the LQB’s principled struggle to put the Trotskyist program into practice points the way forward.

revolutionary workers than with Nazi students. Such training does not fail to leave its effects. And above all: every policeman knows that though governments may change, the police remain.”

– *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* (1932)

If Taaffe’s crowd doesn’t like quotes from Trotsky, how about Friedrich Engels? “Because the English bourgeois finds himself reproduced in his law, as he does in his God,” observed

Engels, “the policeman’s truncheon which, in a certain measure, is his own club, has for him a wonderfully soothing power. But for the working-man quite otherwise!” (*The Condition of the Working Class in England* [1845]). Of course, that was the 19th century. But does the baton of a unionized “Bolshevik Bobby” seeking higher pay land more lightly on protesters heads today? Whether it’s Engels, Lenin or Trotsky, Marxist class analysis gets tossed out the window in the reformist wonderland of British social democracy.

## Cops Out of the Unions! Build a Trotskyist Party!

The entire chummy family of Her Majesty's Right and Proper Socialists accepts the framework of Britain's imperialist "democracy." It's no accident that the Socialist Party invited the top thug at Wormwood Scrubs to its national conference, while passing over the horrendous abuse committed on workers and the poor by his "union" brothers. Nor is it coincidence that the CWI's U.S. section, Socialist Alternative, has published in its paper only one article in five years on the world's foremost class-war prisoner, Mumia Abu-Jamal (*Justice*, June-August 2008). Moreover, this article which limply calls to defend Mumia reflects the views of various liberals and reformists in neither asserting his innocence nor calling for his freedom!

A Bolshevik party in Britain must be founded on intransigent combat against Labourism. During a wave of strikes and union militancy inspired by the Russian Revolution and the post-war economic crisis, Lenin and Trotsky urged the fledgling British Communist organizations to enter the nascent Labour Party, and to "support" Labour candidates "like a rope supports a hanged man." Their aim was to destroy the reactionary, petty-bourgeois Fabian leadership and win the workers to Bolshevism. This is light-years from the Militant tendency's half-century coexistence in the bowels of the decrepit Labour Party of Cold War anti-Communism, a bankrupt policy that Woods' IMT continues to this day while Taaffe's CWI seeks to recreate the Labour Party of old. Their history is the very antithesis of Trotsky's fight for an independent Bolshevik vanguard party of the working class.

Police violence against workers and the oppressed is inherent in capitalism. No amount of legalistic "reforms" or toothless inquiries will change that. Today Britain, if not (yet) a police state, is certainly headed in that direction as demonstrators are subjected to the tender mercies of the TSG and tens of thousands of blacks and Asians are "randomly" searched under the Terrorism Act, although not a single person detained has ever been convicted of an offense under that law. Meanwhile, it has already become a "surveillance society" with pervasive closed-circuit TV cameras (4.2 million of them watching public places in Britain as a whole in 2005, largely in London, and many more now). It's not a policy but a system. The answer to racist, anti-working-class cop terror must be to fight for socialist revolution.

Likewise, the wholesale attacks on unions, wages, and benefits currently being carried out by the Labour government in Britain are not a neo-liberal "policy" that can be countered by reformist demands and narrow trade-union struggles for higher pay. Nor can they be defeated by forming a "New Workers Party," as the CWI is campaigning for, that seeks to recreate the old Labour Party, before the Tony Blair/Gordon Brown "New Labour" gang took over. The vicious assault on working people, minorities, immigrants and democratic rights is the common program of Labour, Tories and the entire British bourgeoisie.

Having succeeded in carrying out counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and the bureaucratically deformed workers

states of Eastern Europe, the imperialist rulers now seek to beat down and discipline the working class to gain a higher rate of exploitation and profit than their imperialist rivals. Together with police-state attacks on civil liberties, massive deportation and racist attacks on immigrants, and bloody colonial occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, these are preparations for the next inter-imperialist world war.

The League for the Fourth International (LFI) seeks to win militants in Britain who fight to cohere the nucleus of an authentically Trotskyist party. Forging a revolutionary working-class leadership requires unyielding struggle for "complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state," as Trotsky wrote in 1940. That includes driving the cops and prison guards, key components of the repressive apparatus of that state, out of the unions. Such a struggle will generate fierce resistance, from the cops themselves and also from their "left" apologists. We can speak of this from our own experience in Brazil, another country where numerous pseudo-Trotskyists embrace police "unions" (see box page 38).

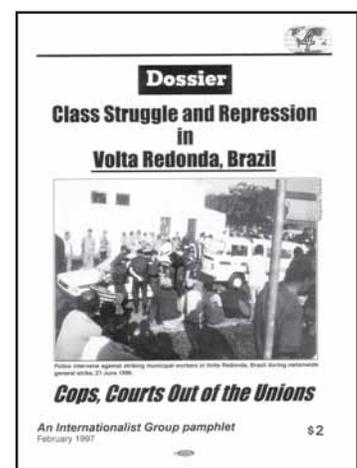
A genuine revolutionary workers leadership in Britain would campaign against anti-immigrant chauvinism, raising the demand for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*. In contrast, *Socialist Appeal* and *The Socialist* supported and built racist, anti-immigrant strikes at the Lindsey Oil Refinery whose objective was to secure jobs for "British" workers at the expense of "foreign workers." (Naturally the fascist BNP also supported these reactionary strikes.) Trotskyists in Britain would call for workers action to *defeat* "their own" imperialists in Iraq and Afghanistan, arguing that such a defeat would strike a powerful blow against the racist, anti-labor police state measures being implemented by the Labour government.

Those who maintain that police and prison guards who beat up and shackle anti-war demonstrators and union pickets, who stop blacks on the street in "random" searches seven times as often as they stop whites, who enforce the oppression of Catholics in Northern Ireland, are "workers in uniform" who could be subject to "democratic control" are incapable of forging a Leninist-Trotskyist party in Britain as a *tribune of all the oppressed*. ■

Documents the police and judicial repression against the Brazilian Trotskyists in retaliation their campaign to remove police from the Volta Redonda municipal workers union.

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**Mobilize the Workers To Defeat the Putsch!**

# **Honduras: Coup d'État in the Maquiladora Republic**



Orlando Sierra/AFP

**Down with the reactionary coup! Honduran civilians defending the referendum confront the military putschists in the streets of Tegucigalpa, June 28**

*The following Internationalist Group leaflet was distributed in English and Spanish at demonstrations in New York City and San Francisco protesting the Honduran coup.*

JUNE 29 – In the early morning of Sunday, June 28, some 200 soldiers of the Honduran army kidnapped the president of the republic, Manuel Zelaya Rosales, at gunpoint and expelled him to Costa Rica. Soon after, strategic points of the capital, Tegucigalpa, and the main commercial center, San Pedro Sula, were occupied by armored personnel carriers. With General Romeo Vásquez (who had been removed by Zelaya as armed forces chief) at the head of the military, and with the backing of the Supreme Court, the oligarchical Congress named the vice president of the House of Deputies as puppet president. This

was how the coup played out, the first in the region since the genocidal murderer Efraín Ríos Montt seized Guatemala in 1982 at the height of the anti-Soviet Cold War. This first coup of the presidency of Barack Obama awakened fears of a return to the days of the *gorilas* (ultra-rightist military thugs) and the “years of blood,” when Honduras served as a launching pad for the Nicaraguan contras and the Salvadoran death squads which sowed terror throughout Central America.

There was a quick but weak response from the population: by mid-morning, several hundred supporters of Zelaya surrounded the APCs, braving the gun barrels and burning tires to block the streets. The teachers union called an unlimited strike. In the afternoon up to 20,000 workers and resi-

**Yankee Imperialism, Hands Off!  
For a Federation of Workers Republics of Central America!**



**Coup plotters:**  
**(Left) General Romeo Vásquez, a graduate of U.S. Army's "School of the Americas," known as the School for Dictators. (Right) Roberto Micheletti being sworn in as the puppet "president."**



Edgard Garrido/Reuters

dents congregated in front of the occupied Presidential House, but they dispersed after a downpour. Military roadblocks on the highways prevented more from arriving. At the diplomatic level, the U.S. president expressed "deep concern" over the coup, while Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "condemned" it. The United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Rio Group, the Mercosur (South American Common Market) and other organizations of Latin American governments likewise opposed it. The Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), a group of reputedly "progressive" countries led by Venezuela and including Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua – which Honduras joined last year – met in Managua, Nicaragua. Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez announced that he would "overthrow" the putschists.

But in the concrete, all this has so far had no effect whatever, and the army is still in control of Honduras. Revolutionary Marxists stress that this is a class question: to defeat the coup we can only count on mobilizing the working people, in Honduras as well as throughout Central America, in Mexico and the rest of the continent. Nothing will be resolved by simply reinstalling Zelaya in the presidential seat while the authors of the coup and the bankers and landowners who instigated it remain in place. It will only be a matter of time until there is a new takeover attempt. It is the bourgeoisie itself that overthrew the president, fearing that he was "playing with fire" by making too many concessions to those that they ruthlessly exploit.

Moreover, the Honduran army doesn't move a finger without the Pentagon and the CIA knowing about it. As protesters chanted, correctly and insistently, at a demonstration of some 150 people in New York on Monday, June 29, "Ejército golpista, instrumento imperialista" (coup-plotting

army, instrument of imperialism). And don't doubt for a minute that the top bosses of regional ultra-rightists are involved in the affair. The only way to sweep away the coup plotters is by workers revolution throughout the region, extending into the heart of the empire, the United States.

In contrast to this view, bourgeois liberals and petty-bourgeois reformist leftists see the matter as a question of "democracy" vs. "dictatorship," and from this standpoint they feed illusions in the new U.S. president. Some are even calling on the Obama administration to reinstall the deposed Honduran president in the Presidential House. Among them is President Zelaya himself. In an interview with the Madrid (Spain) daily *El País* (29 June), the Honduran leader remarked a day before the coup:

"Everything was ready here to carry out a coup, and if the U.S. Embassy had approved, there would have been a coup...."



Oswaldo Rivas/Reuters

**By the day after the coup, June 29, mass opposition to the putschists was growing (above in Tegucigalpa). For the last month, Honduras has been paralyzed by marches, highway occupations and ongoing strikes by teachers unions and several nationwide work stoppages. What is urgently needed is revolutionary working-class leadership.**



**“The Strike of 50,000 Honduran Workers Exploited for More than 50 Years by the United Fruit Co. Monopoly Is a Just Cause.” Block print by Alberto Beltrán of Mexico’s Taller de Gráfica Popular was a solidarity poster.**

If I am sitting here right now speaking with you in the Presidential House, it is thanks to the United States.”

But a few short hours later, he was no longer sitting in the Presidential House. If the U.S. had really wanted to prevent the overthrow, the coup plotters would never have dared to carry it out, or they would long since be gone. The reality is that, at the very least, Washington is tolerating the coup. But watch out for imperialists who undo coups d’état: they can also orchestrate them!

After vituperating for years against the awful president Bush, even comparing him with Satan, many now think that with the election of Barack Obama it’s back to the times when the U.S. was a “Good Neighbor,” like under Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They forget that under FDR, occupation by the Marines was replaced by installing puppet dictators in the Dominican Republic (Trujillo) and Nicaragua (Somoza). Honduras under strong man Tuburcio Carías became the quintessential “banana republic,” as he ruled the country from 1932 to 1948 in the interests of the United Fruit Company, known throughout Latin America as El Pulpo (the Octopus, whose tentacles reached everywhere). But despite his replacement after World War II by the “democratic” government of Juan Manuel Gálvez, anti-working-class repression continued ... and imperialist intervention became even more blatant.

This came to a head in the great banana strike of 1954, when workers on United Fruit plantations (owned by its subsidiary the Tela Railroad Company), as well as Standard Fruit, the ports and even Rosario Mining Company all stopped

work. Gálvez, a former lawyer for Tela Railroad, brought out the army against the strikers. They, however, had organized a powerful strike committee that resisted the onslaught. Left-wing newspapers such as *Vanguardia Revolucionaria* and *Voz Obrera* (Workers Voice) circulated widely. As Ramón Amaya Amador, the novelist of the Honduran working class, wrote in his novel *Destacamento Rojo* (Red Detachment):

“He brought to their attention the formation of study groups on Marxism and the problems of the countryside which opened them up to the revolutionary ideology of the working class.... Union organization was spreading, which the government fought against declaring that these were subversive activities by loafers set on disrupting social peace, anarchists who recognized neither god nor the law. They waved the anti-communist flag, applying heavy sanctions against anyone who talked about organizing the workers.”

—quoted in Mario Posas, *Luchas del movimiento obrero hondureño* (Educa, 1981)

When troops and anti-communist propaganda proved insufficient to defeat the strike, the government appealed to its “Good Neighbor” to the north. This was taking place just as the U.S. was intervening next door in Guatemala, by means of a secret army trained on Honduran soil. Once their subversive work in Guatemala was accomplished, Washington dispatched some “labor advisors” to Honduras to attack the “reds” from within, by forming parallel “unions” which broke up the strike. “Honduras became the test case for a policy to be used throughout the Third World in order to preserve it from communism, for capitalism” (Alison Acker, *Honduras: The Making of a Banana Republic* [South End, 1988]). This history of anti-communist union wrecking is described in detail in the pamphlet, *The AFL-CIO in Central America* (1987), published by the Labor Committee on Central America.

In Central America, meddling by the “AFL-CIA” has always gone hand in hand with U.S. military pressure. Following the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua in 1979, the United States shifted the center of its re-



**Workers assembly during the 1954 Honduran banana strike.**

EFE



**Honduran president Manuel Zelaya (center) along with Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega and Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, on arrival in Managua, June 29.**

gional military activity to Honduras. They built the enormous military base of Palmerola, which served as operations central for the contras besieging Sandinista Nicaragua, as well as for American “trainers” in the Honduran army. Between 1983 and 1987, some 70,000 U.S. military personnel passed through the country. Honduras in this period was controlled by the American ambassador, John Negrofonte, known as the Proconsul, who went on to become U.S. ambassador to Iraq under the administration of George Bush II, and later Director of National Intelligence of the United States. At this time as well, Battalion 316 was formed, a veritable military death squad, which under General Álvarez Martínez tortured and murdered hundreds, if not thousands, of Honduran activists with the supervision of the CIA and fascistic “advisors” from the Argentine military dictatorship.

Despite being a small country, like its neighbor El Salvador, Honduras has been a key piece in the strategy of Yankee imperialist domination. And as we have noted, even though it is the second poorest country in Latin America (after Haiti), with 80 percent of the population living in poverty or extreme poverty, Honduras has a long history of labor struggle. Today it has ceased to be a banana republic and has instead become the country of maquiladoras (free trade zone factories). In the framework of the Free Trade Agreement, with more than 120,000 workers, mainly women, toiling for miserable wages in conditions of semi-slavery, Honduras is today in third place worldwide for maquila production. These workers have a tremendous potential for struggle, but they need the aid of their class brothers and sisters in the United States and Mexico. There are also important unions in Honduras, such as the STIBYS in the bottling plants, which are part of the International Union of Food Workers, to which the UFCW in the U.S. is affiliated.

One of the grounds for the military action ousting President Zelaya was his recent moves toward Hugo Chávez’ Venezuela with Honduras’ entry into ALBA last year, and his visits to Cuba where he had a friendly chat with Fidel Castro.

But the trigger for yesterday’s military coup was the holding of a non-binding referendum on a constituent assembly, scheduled for that day (June 28). The then-chief of the armed forces, Romeo Vásquez, refused to cooperate with the civic exercise, and was supported in this by the Supreme Court and the Congress. The bulk of the capitalist class feared that such an assembly could undercut their narrow domination, and like their counterparts in Bolivia and Ecuador, they decided to use every means at their disposal to prevent it. In the latter two cases, the reactionaries failed because the population was mobilized. However, in Honduras the government of Zelaya, a rancher who was elected in 2005 on the basis of a right-wing law-and-order program, has relatively limited roots among the working masses.

After the coup, several organizations of workers and peasants mobilized. The Mexican paper *La Jornada* (29 June) established contact with various groups of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations (COPIN). Miskito and Lenca Indians and the Garifuna population are also preparing to fight. There is a small liberal party with a social-democratic tint (the Democratic Unification Party) which supports Zelaya. However, Carlos Reyes, the general secretary of the STIBYS union, stated before the coup that the workers movement was prepared to struggle, not to back Zelaya but to support the right of the population to express itself politically:

“President Zelaya received the direct support of much of his party while the three trade-union federations and the Honduran Popular Bloc as well as a whole series of social organizations are supporting the referendum on Sunday, not President Zelaya.”

—“Honduras on the Verge of a Coup d’État,” *Rel*, 27 June

There is a readiness to fight, and distrust of the bourgeois parties as well. But what is missing is key: a revolutionary leadership capable of organizing the discontent and opposition to the coup among the working people in a powerful class movement.

The League for the Fourth International, which bases itself on Leon Trotsky’s program of permanent revolution, urges workers to fight against the coup while offering no political support whatsoever to the right-wing president who for his own reason has slipped the leash of his buddies in the Honduran oligarchy. The working class, led by a genuinely Leninist vanguard party, must place itself at the head of the poor peasants to establish its own class rule with a workers and peasants government that expropriates the entire bourgeoisie, the industrialists and the ranchers, in order to put an end to the infernal cycle of military coups and oligarchical pseudo-democracies that has repeated itself throughout Latin American history.

At the time of independence, a Federal Republic of Central America was established. Today we struggle for a Central American federation of workers republics, as part of a Socialist United States of Latin America, in close collaboration with the North American working class in the fight for international socialist revolution. ■

## Obama's First Coup...

*continued from page 80*

that would expropriate the oligarchs and the entire capitalist ruling class, as part of workers revolution throughout Central America, and beyond.

Today resistance is being organized through bodies such as the National Front Against the Coup d'État (FNCGE, according to its initials in Spanish). This is a "popular front" formation which unites labor and leftists with the Democratic Unification Party, a minor capitalist formation. Today tens of thousands of Hondurans are courageously protesting in the face of the guns of the military. But should opponents of the coup succeed in any degree in pushing back the coup plotters, this *bourgeois* opposition coalition will be a barrier blocking any struggle against the Honduran ruling class which spawned the coup. To overcome this roadblock to revolution it is necessary to begin organizing the nucleus of a *revolutionary workers party* that is politically independent of all capitalist politicians, parties and coalitions.

The League for the Fourth International calls to defeat the coup by fighting for *socialist revolution against capitalism*.

### Washington's Hand in the Coup

An old joke in Latin America goes, Question: Why has there never been a coup d'état in the United States? Answer: Because there is no American embassy in Washington. Of course, there was the 2000 judicial coup in which the Supreme Court, by a vote of 5 to 4, placed George Bush in the White House despite losing the popular vote.

Whether Republicans or Democrats are in power, U.S. imperialism is still the power behind the most reactionary forces in the hemisphere. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton clucked her tongue criticizing the putsch, but pointedly did not call it a coup d'état, as that would have required a cutoff of U.S. aid to the very forces that carried out the coup. She called on Costa Rican president Óscar Arias to "mediate." This amounted to de facto recognition of the de facto "government" headed by the puppet Robert Micheletti. Clinton also sharply criticized Zelaya as "reckless" for attempting to go back to Honduras. So the military-backed regime is simply doing nothing, hoping to run the clock out until "elections" this fall.

We wrote in our first article that "the Honduran army doesn't move a finger without the Pentagon and the CIA knowing about it," and "at the very least, Washington is tolerating the coup." Soon information began coming out that U.S. "diplomats" were up to their necks in the coup plotting. The *New York Times* (30 June) reported that:

"As the situation in Honduras worsened, Assistant Secretary of State Thomas A. Shannon Jr., along with Hugo Llorens, the American ambassador to Honduras, spoke with Mr. Zelaya, military officials and opposition leaders....

"There was talk of how they might remove the president from office, how he could be arrested, on whose authority they could do that," the administration official said. But the official said that the speculation had focused on legal maneuvers to remove the president, not a coup."

So Washington was discussing for weeks with the plotters about how to "remove" Zelaya, even "arrest" him ... and then the U.S. acts surprised when, after getting the okay from the Honduran Congress, the Honduran Supreme Court and the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, the military goes ahead and ousts him! The U.S. just objected that the job was done so crudely.

Then, after the coup, and the wave of denunciations in Latin America, the Obama administration decides it has to do something, so it calls on Arias, an old pal of the Bushes (father and son) and an old hand at dousing conflagrations in Central America that threaten the stability of the empire. When the representatives of coup "president" Micheletti showed up in San José, they brought with them an "adviser," one Bennet Ratcliff, a San Diego-based political consultant with ties to the Clintons. The *New York Times* (13 July) reported: "'Every proposal that Micheletti's group presented was written or approved by the American,' said another official close to the talks, referring to Mr. Ratcliff."

In Washington, the Honduran Business Council hired lobbyist Lanny Davis to represent the coup "government." Davis was Bill Clinton's personal lawyer during the Monica Lewinsky affair. During last year's primary elections, he was a surrogate for Hillary Clinton (whom he met at Yale, along with George W. Bush) making some of the harshest race-baiting attacks on Obama. (Davis is also a "senior advisor and spokesman" for The Israel Project, a Zionist PR operation. Israel, incidentally, is the only country to have recognized the coup "government" in Honduras.)

Meanwhile, the U.S. ambassador to Honduras, Hugo Llorens, is a Cuban *gusano* exile who was in charge of Andean affairs on the National Security Council at the time of the 2002 coup that briefly seized Hugo Chávez, in which the U.S. was heavily involved. On top of this, various long-time Reagan/Bush operatives have been active in Honduras recently, including Otto Reich (another *gusano*) and John Negroponte (known as The Proconsul when he was U.S. ambassador in the 1980s), both heavily involved with Nicaraguan contras and Salvadoran death squads.

Various leftists have used the Clinton ties to argue that that was "Clinton's Soft Coup" and an "attempt to torpedo Obama's effort at détente in Latin America, including with Cuba" (Guillermo Almeyra in *La Jornada*, 2 August). All this shows is that illusions in Barack Obama are still strongly held in Latin America (and the U.S.). The Honduran coup plotters may have figured they could force the U.S. president's hand. They are certainly identified with extreme right-wingers. Hillary Clinton may be particularly hostile to Zelaya and Chávez. But this is the Obama administration, not the Clinton administration, and the U.S. government as a whole, not just one putative faction, was preparing the ouster of Zelaya.

### Smash the Coup – Workers to Power!

The Honduran coup was not some local matter but an event of continental importance. It was clearly intended to send a message to the presidents of El Salvador, Mauricio Funes of the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front), and Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega of the FSLN (Sandinista National Libera-

tion Front). These former leftist and guerrilla groups have become bourgeois parties carrying out “free-market” capitalist economic policies. Ortega, now a born-again Christian, even outlawed abortion under all circumstances. But that is not reactionary enough for the likes of the antediluvian Central American right. (In El Salvador, ARENA, the party of the death squads, ran a full-page newspaper ad calling to recognize the Honduran regime and telling Funes the same could happen to him.)

For the past month, Honduran trade unions, peasant and indigenous groups have been insistently mobilizing in the streets against the civilian-military dictatorship. The teachers unions have been one of the strongest points of resistance, shutting down schools for three weeks, then participating in two national work stoppages, and now back on indefinite strike following the cold-blooded assassination of two teachers, Roger Vallejo and Martin Riviera. The brewing and bottling industry union (STIBYS), has also been prominent, with its union hall acting as an organizing center for protests. The union’s general secretary, Carlos Reyes, an independent candidate for president, was badly beaten during the second national work stoppage.

So far the “civic work stoppages” have been largely limited to public sector workers, as the maquiladora operators keep their employees under tight control. A real general strike that shut down the maquiladoras, banana and mining sectors, cutting off Honduran exports would have a considerable impact. But that represents a whole different political orientation, organizing on a program of internationalist *class* struggle rather than on the bourgeois-democratic and nationalist basis that has dominated so far.

Many leftists are taking part in and leading protests. The FNCGD issues appeals to the world working class. Yet their program is to reinstall “Mel” Zelaya in the Presidential House. The demonstrations wave the Honduran flag and chant, “Mel amigo, el pueblo está contigo” (Mel, friend, the people are with you). But Zelaya is taking his marching orders from Washington, and if he does return it will be to bury any hopes that poor and working people may have had in his presidency. The referendum on holding a constituent assembly, a key issue that triggered the military takeover, is a dead letter.

Various would-be socialists and even self-proclaimed communists argue that everything must be subordinated to the fight to restore Zelaya’s presidency, even though he is no radical and certainly no representative of the impoverished working people. This was not the program of the revolutionary Bolsheviks Lenin and Trotsky, who in the lead up to the 1917 October Revolution called to defeat a coup attempt by the tsarist general Kornilov, without defending the bourgeois government of Kerensky. As Lenin wrote, “in these circumstances, a Bolshevik would say: ‘Our workers and soldiers will fight the counter-revolutionary troops if they start an offensive now against the Provisional Government; they will do so *not* to defend the government . . . but to independently defend the revolution as they pursue their own aim, the aim of securing victory for the workers, for the poor, for the cause of peace, and not for the imperialists or for Kerensky” (“Rumors of a Conspiracy,” August 1917).

It was Stalin, the “great organizer of defeats,” who sacrificed the Spanish Revolution (and murdered the revolutionar-

ies) on the altar of the Popular Front, massacring the Barcelona workers on the grounds that they threatened the bourgeois Republic. Yet it was the Spanish Republican government and its Stalinist-controlled police and army that prevented a victory over the reactionary militarist Franco, by blocking the workers and peasants from carrying through the revolution that had begun to expropriate the capitalists and landowners.

In Honduras today, revolutionary Marxists would mobilize to defeat the coup regime, but on a program of organizing workers revolution, not making political alliances with Zelaya and other bourgeois political forces. The important participation of the unions in the resistance should be used not to restore conditions to what they were on June 27, but to fight against all the capitalist politicians and their system that has condemned 75 percent of the population to a life of misery. Honduras has the lowest wages in Central America, with teachers earning US\$130 a month and maquiladora workers US\$140 a month (for 12-hour days). That is the main reason the clothing apparel and shoe manufacturers have come there in the first place.

Clearly such a fight takes preparation. It can begin in the course of the present battles, seeking to transform “civic” work stoppages into a nationwide strike by workers and their allies. It is crucial to extend the struggle to the workers in the maquiladora manufacturing plants, the fruit plantations and transport sectors. Working people in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica should mobilize, including with strike action, to oppose the Honduran coup, which is a direct threat to them as well.

Workers outside Central America should seek to implement the call by the International Transport Workers Federation to refuse at this key moment to load or unload Honduran-flag ships, a ban which should be extended to any cargo from or to Honduras. Demonstrations in the United States, Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America should demand release of the hundreds of Hondurans being held in the dictatorship’s jails. Teachers unions should solidarize with their valiant sisters and brothers in Honduras who have risked all to defeat the *gorilas*. And we must continue to demand that the U.S. government get out of Honduras, that the Soto Cano military base at Palmerola be shut down, and that it cut off all aid to Honduras.

Mobilization against the *capitalist coup* must be on a class basis, forming *councils of workers, peasants and the urban and rural poor*, drawing in the oppressed black and indigenous populations. Such councils that can provide the basis for sweeping away the entire class of capitalist exploiters. Above all, what is needed is a struggle to forge the nucleus of a revolutionary workers party in Honduras and throughout Central America. Such a party can only be built on the program of *permanent revolution*, of Leon Trotsky’s Fourth International, namely that in the imperialist epoch even basic democratic demands including agrarian revolution, national liberation and democracy for the exploited and oppressed in semi-colonial countries like Honduras can only be achieved by the workers taking power, at the head of the peasantry and poor and led by their communist party, to establish their own class rule, and extend the revolution internationally. ■

## Two Years of the Cananea Strike

# Mobilize to Defend Striking Mexican Mine Workers!

As of July 30, some 2,000 workers have been on strike for two years at Cananea (in the state of Sonora), Sombrerete (Zacatecas) and Taxco (Guerrero) against the biggest mining company in Mexico, centrally over issues of safety (see “Mexican Miners Strike for Safety, Against Anti-Worker Attacks,” on opposite page). The company, Industrial Minera México, claims it is shutting down the mines because they have “exhausted their reserves.” This is a total fiction. The most important of the struck pits, at Cananea, is the one of the largest copper mines in the world, with more than 80 years worth of remaining reserves.

The real reason behind the company’s maneuver was summed up by the firm’s lawyer last April in asking the courts to declare the strike “non-existent”: if the mine is closed, there is no contract, and “there being no contract, then there also is no strike” (*La Jornada*, 16 April). The court granted the company’s petition, but the miners held out and soon another judge issued an injunction blocking the shut-down, as has happened before in this bitter strike. Yet the conflict will not be settled in the courtroom but on the battle lines of the class struggle. Mexican and U.S. workers have an important stake in seeing this strike through to victory. And that requires action, *now*.

What’s at stake is an attempt by the politically influential company, part of the Grupo México owned by Germán Larrea, to break this powerful sector of the proletariat. Larrea bought Cananea at a giveaway price when it was privatized by then president Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1989. Then as well, the purpose of the sale was to break a miners strike. Military forces occupied the historic mining town, site of the 1906 strike that was a precursor to the Mexican Revolution (see “Cananea: A Century of Internationalist Class Struggle,” on page 46).

Grupo México also owns the Pasta de Conchos coal mine in the state of Coahuila, where in February 2006 some 65 miners were buried alive due to the company’s negligence. Cananea miners went on strike to protest and stayed out for several months, while others went back after a day. A year later, they struck again, this time over atrocious working conditions in their own mine, and the company’s contract violations.

Looming behind this battle is the government’s vendetta against Napoléon Gómez Urrutia, president of the Mexican Mine and Metal Workers Union (SNTMMSRM). The SNTMMSRM was a corporatist labor body rather than a workers union, and Gómez Urrutia was a loyal cog in the government machinery of labor control. He was installed by the labor secretary of then-president Vicente Fox of the rightist



Ulises Gutiérrez/La Jornada

**Cananea mine workers during a changing of the guard at the occupied mine (red-and-black strike flag on the gate), April 2009. The miners, on strike for more than 730 days, face an army of federal troops and cops who have occupied the town.**

National Action Party (PAN).

But when, under pressure from the miners’ ranks, Gómez Urrutia declared that what happened in Pasta de Conchos was “industrial murder” and accused the company of responsibility, the regime cracked down hard. The labor secretary peremptorily declared Gómez Urrutia no longer president of the “union,” and installed a compliant flunkey. The attorney general ordered his arrest on trumped up charges. Recalling the fate of other bureaucrats who ran afoul of the president, the SNTMMSRM chief fled to Canada.

The bourgeois press pretends that what the strike is about is forcing the government to recognize Gómez Urrutia. Yet this is nowhere mentioned in the strike demands. What is true is the administration of Felipe Calderón (also of the PAN) has continued Fox’s vendetta, and in order to break the mine workers’ resistance it is going after the strikers with a vengeance. But the battle-hardened miners are not intimidated.

Meanwhile, Cananea is under the gun, literally. The copper town has been occupied by 800 soldiers and federal police since January 2008 (see “Cananea Must Not Stand Alone!” on our web site, [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org)). This April, when rumors spread that the strikers occupying the mine were about to be evicted, the miners responded by putting stones in the road. A federal police commander promptly termed these “bar-

*continued on page 59*

Strike in Cananea, Sombrerete, and Taxco

December 2007

# Mexican Miners Strike for Safety, Against Anti-Worker Attacks



El Internacionalista

Striking miners in Cananea during December visit of SITUAM union delegation.

**Bring Grupo México to its Knees  
With a Nationwide Miners' strike!  
Down with the PRI, PAN and PRD,  
Parties of the Bourgeoisie!  
Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

*The following article is translated from a December 2007 supplement to El Internacionalista published by our comrades of the Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico and distributed to miners in Cananea.*

DECEMBER 15 – The strike of copper miners in Cananea, in the northern Mexican state of Sonora, at a zinc plant in Sombrerete, in the state of Zacatecas, and at silver mines in Taxco, Guerrero, is now halfway into its fifth month. The walk-out, which began on July 30 demanding compliance with the contract and with the most elementary job safety standards, has met with a concerted hard-line response from the bosses (Industrial Minera México, belonging to billionaire Germán Larrea's infamous Grupo México<sup>1</sup>) and the bourgeois government of Felipe Calderón, whose labor secretary is blatantly at the beck and call of Grupo México. One week into the strike, the Federal Mediation and Arbitration Board<sup>2</sup>, declared it “non-existent,” only to reluctantly permit it when a federal judge

<sup>1</sup> Grupo México is the owner of the Pasta de Conchos coal mine responsible for the murder of 65 miners who were buried alive due to criminally negligent safety conditions in early 2006 (see below).

granted an injunction to the mine workers organization.

In September, the same labor tribunal granted legal recognition to a new company union, the “Single Union of Mine Workers” headed by Francisco Hernández Gámez, and ordered a new vote to decide who would have the contract at Grupo México's plants. At the beginning of December, Germán Larrea threatened to shut the mines if the miners didn't return to work. This is not the first time he has used this ploy: during the Cananea mine workers' strikes of January 2003 and October 2004, he brandished the same threat. But this blackmail by the copper baron is all smoke and mirrors, particularly when you consider that Cananea alone represents 64 percent of Grupo México's potential earnings, and its copper deposits are estimated to last for anywhere from 30 to 82 years of production at current rates (*La Jornada*, 4 December 2007). In other words, any “closing” would simply be a legal maneuver.

The truth is that the miners have Larrea by the throat. Now what has to be done is squeeze, by launching a nationwide mining strike against all the affiliates of Grupo México, and if necessary, to extend the strike to the conglomerate's other sectors, like FerroMex (rail freight), and to other companies like the steel mill complex in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán. But in order to do this, *it will be necessary to confront the whole corporatist control apparatus that the capitalist state imposes on Mexican labor relations.* This is the heart of the problem.

<sup>2</sup> Mexico's Junta Federal de Conciliación y Arbitraje (JFCyA) is derived from the 1931 Federal Labor Law (LFT), modeled on Mussolini's corporatist institutions in fascist Italy.

In the course of their attack against the mine strike, the bosses and their government have maintained that all issues pertaining to safety have been resolved. It's all lies. We all know what Grupo México means by "workplace safety standards": dead workers. This is the company that is responsible for the murder of 65 miners at Pasta de Conchos, in the state of Coahuila, in February 2006. One of the Cananea miners' demands that the company deems "unacceptable" is for the recovery of the remains of the dead miners at Pasta de Conchos. It has been amply demonstrated that management's actions sent the miners to the slaughter, with the complicity of the state and federal governments. But the bureaucracy of the corporatist miners' "union," the SNTMMSRM<sup>3</sup>, shares the blame for this "industrial homicide."

As it was a century ago, mining is the most dangerous branch of industry, even though the technology exists today to make it substantially safer. This isn't just true of the mines of Grupo México, either: capitalist mining in this country is built upon the systematic murder of mine workers. Putting an end to this macabre spiral of death should not only fall on the shoulders of the militant local 65 of the SNTMMSRM in Cananea, which has gone on strike nearly every year over the last decade, despite suffering defeat each time. The heroic miners of Cananea must not stand alone. The miners' strike in Cananea, Sombrerete and Taxco should be a spark that ignites a proletarian counter-offensive across the country to defeat the bosses' attack. What's needed is a *national strike against the repressive starvation policies of the Felipe Calderón government*.

This, in turn, requires a struggle for complete independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie, its parties, its strong men, and its state. It's not enough to just struggle against the federal government in the hands of the PAN (Calderón's National Action Party). The workers must also tear off the corporatist straightjacket that binds them to the capitalist state and its former state party, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), and break as well from the popular front around the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. With this revolutionary perspective the miners' present struggle, like the historic strike in Cananea one hundred years ago<sup>4</sup>, could presage the beginning of a revolutionary struggle. The next Mexican revolution must be a *workers socialist* revolution, and it requires above all else a struggle to forge a revolutionary leadership.

### Workplace Safety and Workers' Blood

Not long after the current strike began, a miner from Taxco commented that for the mine bosses, the death of one worker costs less than purchasing the necessary safety equip-



**Workers hang banner of solidarity greetings from Union of Workers of the Metropolitan Autonomous University (SITUAM) to striking Cananea miners, December 2007.**

ment: "If one of us gets killed on the job, the insurance policy pays. On the other hand, if a machine is damaged, the company is liable" (*La Jornada Guerrero*, 10 August 2007). In Taxco, red and black flags (the traditional sign in Mexico denoting a struck enterprise) have been placed at three silver mines. Miners say that the prevailing conditions there are the same as they were in Pasta de Conchos in the fateful pre-dawn hours of 19 February 2006. The electrical system is deficient, with cables tangled around the water lines, fuse boxes without insulating covers, machinery without emergency brakes, and rock slides. Forced to make do with obsolete, run-down equipment, the miners have suffered an escalating rate of accidents in recent years.

The situation is no different at the zinc plant at Sombrerete. A report published last June stated that three miners had been killed there. Besides the terrible condition of the electrical system, the buildup of silica dust and the lack of air-filtering systems is a constant threat to the health of the miners. The same goes for the Cananea mine, where dust is caked on every surface. The extraction of copper from this open-pit mine requires the successive crushing of the mountain's rock into ever-finer particles. The accumulated dust produces a whole range of respiratory disorders, including silicosis, the miner's scourge, and can cause lung cancer.

Today, the technology exists that could allow the mines operate at high standards of safety. All it would require is investing in the physical plant and its maintenance. Furthermore, the miners could be given personal safety gear, such as artificial respirators, and plastic barriers to isolate poisonous gases, etc. Many mines in the United States and Europe rely on powerful suction fans with filters to remove the deadly silica dust. However, implementing such basic safety precautions is contrary to the thirst for profits that drives production under capitalism. For the mining firms, whether state-owned or private, it is more profitable to keep the unhealthy

<sup>3</sup> Sindicato de Trabajadores Mineros, Metalúrgicos y Similares de la República Mexicana.

<sup>4</sup> See "Cananea: A Century of Internationalist Class Struggle," on page 52 of this issue.

conditions that ensure death to the workers.

It does not have to be this way: the workers should force the implementation of the necessary measures to save their lives. *Union safety committees* must be formed, *empowered to stop production when health or lives are at risk*. It is essential that such committees be made up only of workers, because the decisions to protect the miners' lives must not be influenced by financial considerations. The ubiquitous "tripartite" worker/management/government commissions only exist to prevent the workers from acting. Workers safety committees must have the physical means (master switches and circuit breakers) and coverage, with delegates in every work area and department, so that decisions can be carried out on the spot. In fact, in Cananea, a North American labor journalist reported:

"We know what's safe and what's not,' one miner commented, 'but they never want us to spend time fixing problems – just get the production out. If we tried to stop the line for safety problems, we would lose our jobs.' Many safety lines running alongside the conveyers, which should stop the speeding belt in case of an accident, have been cut so they can't be pulled, or are simply absent."

–David Bacon, "The Killing Dust," *Truthout*, 11 October  
Bacon points out that in various areas of the facility, air filters haven't been turned back on since the 1999 strike; water tanks, essential for dust abatement, have huge holes rusted out:

"So for the past eight years, dust that should have been sucked up by the collectors has ended up instead in the miners' lungs.... But there are other dangers. Many machines have no guards, making it easy to lose fingers or worse. Electrical panels have no covers. Holes are open in the floor with no guardrails. Catwalks many stories above the floor are slippery with dust and often grease, and are crisscrossed by cables and hoses. Not long ago, one worker tripped and fell five stories to his death onto a water pump below."

It is truly an infernal image. A commission of eight doctors and specialists in industrial safety who inspected the facility at Cananea at the beginning of October produced a detailed report in which they enumerate the broad variety of violations to the most basic safety rules. The findings are enough to make your hair stand on end:

"The conditions observed inside the mine and processing plants, and the work practices reported by the interviewed workers, paint a clear picture of a *workplace being 'deliberately run into the ground.'* A serious lack of preventive maintenance, failure to repair equipment and correct visible safety hazards, and a conspicuous lack of basic housekeeping has created a work site [where] workers have been exposed to high levels of toxic dusts and acid mists, operate malfunctioning and poorly maintained equipment, and work in simply dangerous surroundings.

"The deliberate dismantling of dust collectors in the Concentrator area processing plants by Grupo Mexico approximately two years ago means that workers in these areas have



Photos: MHSSN

**Report by international commission organized by Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network documented how dust collectors have been disconnected by the company (above), leading to huge accumulations of deadly silica dust as well as dangerous holes in the floor.**

been subjected to high concentrations of dust containing 23% quartz silica, with 51% of sampled dust in the respirable particle size range, protected only by completely inadequate personal respirators. Occupational exposures to silica can lead to debilitating, fatal respiratory diseases including silicosis and lung cancer." [emphasis in original]

–*Workplace Health and Safety Survey And Medical Screening of Miners At Grupo Mexico's Copper Mine Cananea, Sonora, Mexico*, dated 12 November, available online at <http://mhssn.igc.org/CananeaOHSReport.pdf>.

The report is chock full of details of the terrible conditions that prevail in the mines and the surrounding factories. The workers not only face the constant risk of inhaling poison dust, but also chemical vapors, electric shocks, falls from great heights, etc.

### **Break the Shackles of Corporatism! Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

Clearly, the miners' strike needs no further justification. Even so, it has been attacked on many fronts. The powerful Grupo México, a conglomerate that benefited from the privatizations undertaken by Mexican presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), and subsequently has been protected by the PAN governments of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón, has used the labor boards to its advantage, besides resorting to open gangsterism (which left one miner dead in Cananea last June) and the formation of a company union. But at bottom the current unsafe conditions in Mexico's mines are the result, at least quantitatively, of the privatization of the mining industry that was carried out at the end of the '80s *with the connivance of the miners' "union,"* a corporatist formation (known in Mexico as *charro unions*<sup>5</sup>) integrated into the state apparatus through its incor-

<sup>5</sup>See note, page 63.

poration into the PRI.

The former head of the SNTMMSRM, Napoleón Gómez Sada, father of the current president, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, always functioned as a government man, the rightful heir to the founder of the corporatized mining union, Jesús Carrasco, in the 1940s. Thus, for example, one of the principle demands of the current miners' strike in Cananea is for the reopening of the workers' clinic, closed by the bosses after the defeat of the 1999 strike, when the national miners' "union" not only failed to support the Cananea strikers, but openly took the side of the government and the bosses (see "Cananea: A Century of Internationalist Class Struggle").

The corporatist "unions," fully integrated into the capitalist state, have chained the workers to their exploiters. These organizations' primary function has been to suppress the workers' expressions of discontent and to impede the formation of genuine workers' organizations. The "charro" union leaders and their thugs constantly break strikes, assaulting and even murdering hundreds of dissident workers. As we highlighted in our article "Capitalist Murder in Pasta de Conchos" (*El Internacionalista*/Edición México No. 2, August 2006), the SNTMMSRM under Gómez Sada played a central role in knifing workers' struggles against privatization and massive layoffs, or if he could not prevent these struggles from breaking out, in isolating them. Today his son has fallen out of favor of the PAN governments, despite having been a favorite of the fascistic Carlos Abascal, Fox's first labor secretary.

What is happening is that the corporatist system that characterized the one-party regime, the PRI-government, that ruled Mexico for seven decades is decaying, but has not yet disappeared. When the mines were state-owned and the PRI controlled the governmental apparatus at every level, there was a circulation of government functionaries such that today's "union" chief could be a government official or PRI

parliamentary deputy or senator tomorrow, and later the head of the company. Since the privatization of the state enterprises that began in the '80s, and accelerated with the PRI's defeat in the 2000 presidential elections, cracks have begun to appear in what was once a monolithic edifice of capitalist state control. However, the corporatist regime came into existence for reasons that have not themselves disappeared: the weak Mexican bourgeoisie confronts, on one hand, a proletariat with enormous potential power, while on the other, it is subject to the powerful influences of Yankee imperialism.

Thus, the corporatist "union" apparatus, though weakened, has persisted in functioning as the bourgeoisie's labor police. Those elements of the PAN government closest to the leading capitalists would like to do away with these legacies of the PRI regime that they now consider unnecessary, while other capitalist sectors see the need to maintain a "union" security buffer. Thus while Secretary of Labor Francisco Xavier Salazar Sáenz took aim at Gómez Urrutia in 2006, the head of Mexico's powerful interior ministry (Gobernación) Carlos Abascal continued to recognize him as head of the union. And in April of 2007, in accordance with a federal court ruling that discovered irregularities and falsifications in his dismissal as president of the SNTMMSRM, the Labor Department reinstated Gómez Urrutia and withdrew its endorsement of his replacement, Elías Moralez Hernández. Nevertheless, there are still a series of court cases pending against the miners' leader, and he has had to take refuge in Canada. We demand that all the charges against leaders of ostensible labor organizations be dropped, since they serve as an attack by the capitalist state against the mine workers.

We of the Grupo Internacionalista have opposed all capitalist government intervention in the affairs of the workers movement. We supported the mine workers' strike in March

## The Internationalist

Annual subscription US\$10 for five issues



**A Journal of Revolutionary Marxism for the Reforging of the Fourth International**

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of 2006, which was called off after the legal deadline of 72 hours in compliance with the judicial ruling declaring it non-existent, and we called for its extension to the whole working class in a nationwide strike against government repression. We came out for freeing all the imprisoned workers, and for all charges against them to be dropped, at the same time as we continue to fight for the independence of the unions from state control. Thus, we wrote:

“What is needed at this moment is to overcome the state framework and launch a *national strike against the murderous government*, to fight for *victory to the teachers strike* in Oaxaca and to the miners’ strikes; for *total independence of the unions* from the bourgeoisie, breaking the shackles of corporatist pseudo-unionism and rejecting the government’s attack on the miners and metal workers; for freedom and dropping of all charges against all the workers, peasants and teachers arrested as victims of the ruling class’ repressive onslaught.”

—*El Internacionalista*/Edición México No. 2, August 2006

The fact that we oppose bourgeois repression does not change the bourgeois character of the corporatist apparatus one bit, nor does it postpone the struggle to replace the corporatist unions with genuine workers’ organizations. To make a truce with the *charro* bureaucracy condemns the struggle against anti-working class persecution to failure, because in the final analysis these cogs of the capitalist state machinery take their orders from their bourgeois masters.

It is precisely in the struggle against anti-union repression that workers’ committees can be formed that break with the corporatist structure and champion complete independence from the bourgeoisie. In this struggle, historically militant sectors which the corporatist *charro* “unions” have not been able to completely regiment, can play a key role, provided that they escape the corporatist manacles. We have documented how sections 65 (Cananea), 271 (Lázaro Cárdenas), 288 (Monclova), 201 (Sombrerete) and 17 (Taxco) of the SNTMMSRM have repeatedly been forced to fight against their own “union” which has supported the company against its own members. The same goes for Section 22 of the teachers of Oaxaca and other sections affiliated with the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE) vis-à-vis the corporatist National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), whose gunmen have murdered over 150 of their members. From the so-called democratic insurgency in the electrical workers organizations in the ‘70s, the refusal to break out of the shell of the corporatist “unions” has condemned their struggles to defeat.

We insist that *the workers must clean their own house*. If the capitalist state persecutes a Napoleón Gómez Urrutia for corruption or some other accusation, whether the charges are true or not, it is because the ruling class wants to exploit the workers even more harshly. Today, in the epoch of “globalization” following the destruction of the Soviet Union, along with its bureaucratic Stalinist leadership, even the *charro*

corporatist apparatuses that provided a few crumbs for the workers, as well as programs like Social Security, represent an unprofitable expense for the bosses eager to extract the maximum surplus value from “their” wage slaves.

To win this struggle – which is nothing less than the miners’ fight for their very lives – requires carrying out a sharp class struggle. The miners can’t bank on a victory in the labor tribunals or arbitration boards. They need to mobilize their social power. This is what they are doing now, and they have halted production in three important mines, resulting in a 60 percent reduction in copper production. Their struggle must not remain isolated: it must be part of a powerful proletarian answer to the capitalist assault that has raised the price of tortillas 80 percent in the last year alongside drastic increases in the prices of almost all staple goods culminating in the *gasolinazo*, the “gasoline shock” scheduled for January. This goes along with the elimination of tariffs on grain imports, which will result in the destruction of what remains of Mexican agriculture. To impose this anti-worker, anti-peasant program, the rapacious national bourgeoisie is militarizing the country to suffocate outbreaks of social unrest.

In this panorama, the semi-corporatist leaders of the National Union of Workers (UNT) and the “independent” unionists of the Mexican Labor Front (FSM) headed by the powerful electrical workers’ union (SME) have been notable for their lack of solidarity with the embattled miners. We call on the “independent” unions in particular to call a national workers mobilization in defense of the strikers of Cananea, Sombrerete and Taxco and to provide them with the necessary economic support to keep up their movement. The bosses have various ways of controlling working-class discontent. Be it through the corporatist regimentation of labor, or through the subordination of workers’ struggles to the agenda of a popular front headed by a bourgeois party like Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s PRD, or through the formation of company unions that sell sweetheart contracts in the style of the PAN, the bourgeoisie tries to keep all eruptions of working-class anger under their control.

The key to victory in this struggle is for the workers to refuse to play by the rules of the game dictated by the bosses, and to *politically* break with the bourgeoisie. Despite the PRD’s populist rhetoric, it was the prosecutor from the PRD government of the Federal District (Mexico City) who ordered the arrest of Gómez Urrutia’s subordinate, Gregorio Pérez Romo, in 2006. The PAN, PRI and PRD, the three main bosses’ parties, unite their forces to better crush the struggles of the workers (like they did in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán, Atenco and Oaxaca in 2006, and as they are doing today against the teachers college students of Ayotzinapa in Guerrero state). For this reason, the working class needs its own political vehicle, its own party, to wage a genuinely revolutionary struggle, which is essential to winning the current strikes and social struggles. Raising up once more the banner of the Bolsheviks Lenin and Trotsky, the Grupo Internacionalista, section of the League for the Fourth International, fights to forge the indispensable party of the workers’ vanguard. ■

## From the Great Miners' Strike of 1906 to Today: Revolutionary Leadership Is Key

# Cananea: A Century of Internationalist Class Struggle



Fondo de Cultura Económica

**Cananea miners gathered in front of the police station as boss Greene fruitlessly tries to convince them to return to work. Strike was joint effort of Mexican and U.S. workers.**

June 1, 2006 marked the centenary of the copper mine strike at Cananea, in the northern Mexican state of Sonora (about 50 miles southwest of Douglas, Arizona). The conglomerate that now operates the mines, Grupo México, decided to celebrate the event in its usual way: it tried to prevent the commemoration by ordering the workers to carry out their usual tasks. Against this flagrant attack – a blatant violation of the collective contract, which designates the anniversary as a holiday – the militant miners of Latin America’s largest copper mine went on strike. For almost 50 days, the miners of Cananea fought shoulder to shoulder with their fellow Sonoran workers in the mines of La Caridad, in Nacozari (roughly 55 miles southeast of Cananea) and La Calera in Agua Prieta, Douglas’ neighbor just across the U.S.-Mexico border, and with the steel workers at the SICARTSA-Las Truchas mill in Lázaro Cárdenas, on the Pacific coast of Michoacán state. There two strikers were cut down by enemy fire in a pitched battle that threw back a military/police attempt to break the workers’ occupation of the biggest steel works in Mexico.

The SICARTSA steelworkers won a resounding victory, with an 8 percent wage increase with back pay, and withdrawal of all charges against the strikers. The Cananea miners, on the

other hand, abandoned by their national “union,” had to return to work empty-handed. The very same National Union of Miners, Metalworkers and Allied Trades of the Mexican Republic (SNTMMSRM, by its Spanish initials), even though it was under government attack, stood by the laws of Mexico’s corporatist labor system. The SNTMMSRM threw in the towel when the Federal Arbitration and Mediation Board (JFCyA) rescinded its contract with Grupo México. The battle-hardened miners were forced to take down their red and black strike banners (the traditional symbol for a strike in Mexico) for one simple reason: *the lack of a revolutionary class-struggle leadership*. But today, in 2007, once again the militant miners of Section 65 have not buckled after more than 130 days on strike.

After the death of 65 coal miners, buried alive at Pasta de Conchos in the state of Coahuila, about 110 miles north-west of Laredo, Texas in February 2006, there was an avalanche of comparisons between the current conditions in the mines and those that prevailed 100 years ago in Cananea (see “Asesinato capitalista en Pasta de Conchos”, *El Internacionalista*/Edición México No. 2, August 2006). A century later, the bosses’ abuse of the workers is as brutal as ever. At the dawn of the 20th century, the dishonest official statistics indicated mining as the

riskiest job in Mexico. Today it remains the most dangerous of the 121 official industrial classifications. The miners of Pasta de Conchos were victims of criminal neglect of the most elemental safety standards by the management (the same Grupo México) and by the state and federal governments, who relied on the complicity of the mine workers' "union."

It's not just the terrible working conditions in the mines that continue to claim workers' lives. As they have for the past century, the ruling class opts for the "peace of the grave." While in 2006 the government of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Oaxaca attacked striking teachers, accusing them of endangering the education of the children, resulting in the murder of over 20 supporters of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), at the same time the PRI governor of Sonora, Eduardo Bours, closed Cananea's schools in an attempt to pressure the miners by denying their children schooling.

Much has been written about the saga of the Cananea miners in 1906. Along with the textile workers strike at Río Blanco of 1907, it has been incorporated into the liturgy of the rebellion against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz<sup>1</sup>. The schoolbooks describe these struggles as precursors of the Mexican revolution of 1910-1917. Esteban Baca Calderón and Manuel Diéguez, whom the official history has raised up as the heroes of the miners' cause, have taken their places in the iconography of the Revolution. The battle cry, "Five pesos and eight hours of work, ¡viva México!" that was hurled at the offices of the U.S. company that owned the mine at the time has become famous as the succinct expression of the revolution's democratic nationalist program. However, the miners of Cananea marched under *red* banners, and contrary to their petty-bourgeois ostensible spokesmen Baca Calderón and Diéguez, the true leaders of the mine workers were *revolutionary syndicalists from the U.S. and Mexico* who fought for international workers revolution.

### Origin and Development of the 1906 Strike

As the historian Javier Torres Parés notes in his book *La revolución sin frontera* (UNAM, 1990), "As it developed, the workers movement in Mexico established many links with the U.S. proletariat." So much that "in the border areas ... they managed to build a single zone of workers mobilization." At the beginning of the 20th century, about half a mil-



**José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz, the dictator who launched industrialization and opened Mexico to foreign capital. Cananea strike was one of key events that led to his overthrow in 1910, after almost 40 years in power.**

lion Mexicans lived in the U.S. southwest, where they made up the bulk of the railroad maintenance workers, coal and copper miners, and agricultural laborers. Torres Parés highlights the influence that the socialists, anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the U.S. had on the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM). The principal leaders of this party, the brothers Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón, were in exile in the United States, and maintained contact from St. Louis particularly with the leaders of the PLM in Cananea. In the mines, workers from the U.S., many of whom sympathized with the IWW, made up a third of the 7,500 employees of the Cananea Central Copper Company (CCCC). Already in 1902, '03 and '04, skilled workers from the U.S. had launched a number of strikes in Cananea.

Various liberal and "progressive" journalists have noted certain similarities between the events of 1906 and the miners' struggles today. On the day after the massacre at SICARTSA, Luis Hernández Navarro published an article, "Cananea, once again" (*La Jornada*, 21 April 2006). The columnist Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa, for his part, wrote: "The poor working conditions in the Cananea, Sonora copper mine produced, on 1 June 1906, a strike that was put down by fire and sword. Today the union struggle there challenges the government over trade-union autonomy" (*Reforma*, 1 June 2006). Granados Chapa recalls the discrimination against Mexican miners, their exclusion from the better paying jobs, and how they were paid in Mexican pesos when almost all their expenses were in dollars, since Cananea depended on goods imported from Naco, Arizona. These facts led various radicals to perceive the "revolutionary potential of the miners' unionism," as Granados Chapa puts it, which is why the PLM led the brothers Flores Magón and "various U.S. radical groups" sent delegates to the region.

Among the miners there was a particularly deep resentment of the arbitrary discipline they endured from the supervisors, which reflected the paternalist regime of the company's owner, "Colonel" William C. Greene, a small-time Wall Street stock manipulator who made himself into a "copper baron" and who ruled the mining town as his personal fiefdom. Greene had built a Yankee enclave in the Sonoran desert: in seven years he not only acquired the mining rights, but took hold of the local economy with his company stores and the refining plant that he built, as well as the rail lines he controlled linking Cananea with Naco and Nogales in Arizona.

The traditional nationalist interpretation of the Cananea

<sup>1</sup> A Liberal (anti-clerical) military officer, and later president of Mexico (officially, by repeated reelection, or through puppets) from 1876 until he was forced to resign and flee to France in 1911.



**Miners march on company offices to present list of demands on 1 June 1906.**

strike is based, in large part, on the memoir of Esteban Barca Calderón, *Study of the Yaqui War and Genesis of the Strike at Cananea* (1980)<sup>2</sup>. He especially denounces the “racial hegemony throughout the company, on our own native soil, at the cost of our national interests, to the detriment of the Mexican worker and national pride and of the most elementary principles of justice and national rights.”

The justified hatred of the racist treatment of and systematic discrimination against Mexican workers by the U.S. owner did play an important part in the strike. However, there were other factors that fed the revolt, such as the fear of losing their jobs as a result of mining concessions to independent contractors, and opposition to the Díaz dictatorship. Barca Calderón, who would later become an officer in Francisco Madero’s anti-re-electionist army<sup>3</sup> and ended his life as a PRI senator, was a petty-bourgeois intellectual who had recently arrived in the area. There he met up with Manuel Diéguez, a local merchant. This pair petitioned to local authorities against the CCCC’s trampling on “free trade.” The workers had other concerns, and although the bosses and their men treated all Mexicans like peons, the Mexican miners did not see all U.S.-born employees of the company as identical. Their class hatred for the abusive foremen mixed with their resentment over their national oppression. Nevertheless, they found strong allies among the U.S. miners with whom they worked in crews.

There are many sources on the outbreak of the strike. Adolfo Gilly, in his book *The Mexican Revolution* (The New Press, 2006), relates how the miners “went out on strike demanding the removal of an overseer, a minimum wage of

<sup>2</sup> For a quarter century beginning in the 1880s the Díaz dictatorship waged a war to put down independence struggles of the Yaqui native people who inhabited the Sonoran desert.

<sup>3</sup> Francisco Madero, who won the 1910 election, became president of Mexico when Díaz fell to the revolution. He led the moderate bourgeois Anti-Reelectionist Party, whose Plan of St. Louis called for modest land redistribution (on idle lands) and democratic reforms. Once in power, Madero unleashed the “Constitutionalist” army inherited from Díaz against radical peasant armies led by Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata.

five *pesos* for eight hours work, respectful treatment, and that all positions be filled, given equal abilities, by 75 percent Mexicans and 25 percent foreigners. They put forward their demands in a manifesto in which they attacked the dictatorial government as an ally of the foreign bosses.” The development of the strike itself and the repression that followed is well known in its broad outlines. The anthology edited by Eugenia Meyer, *La lucha obrera en Cananea 1906* (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1980) gives a detailed exposition of the

official version of the events.

According to this version, the struggle was set off by the announcement on 31 May 1906 in the Oversight mine that the workforce would be cut and the workload for each miner increased. On the early morning hours of June 1, the workers gathered in front of the mine offices and declared their strike over these issues. They sent for Diéguez and Baca Calderón to be their spokesmen to the company. Two thousand miners marched through the mines, workshops, foundry and refinery, joining the movement en masse. During the afternoon of June 1, the miners’ protest passed by the offices of the CCCC and commercial emporium, and proceeded to march behind a Mexican flag and a number of red flags on the lumber yard. There they were repelled by high pressure fire hoses and rifle shots, which killed one worker. Infuriated, the strikers set fire to the lumber yard, where two North American supervisors died.

When protesters returned to the city hall, boss Greene tried to convince them to return to work, but they paid him no heed. Company men, particularly the Americans, opened fire on the crowd. From the roof of a hotel, marksmen shot indiscriminately at the miners, killing several. According to reports in the *Tucson Citizen* and the *Douglas Daily Dispatch*, “One of the leaders, who, according to all eyewitness accounts, carried a red flag, continued to incite the Mexicans.... [S]ome of the more excited Americans opened fire and a general fusillade resulted. The flag-waving leader was hit by at least fifteen bullets” (from Herbert O. Brayer, “The Cananea Incident,” *New Mexico Historical Review*, October 1938). Gunfire continued through the evening and all night, resulting in over 20 Mexican workers dead.

Meanwhile, boss Greene telegraphed the state governor, Rafael Izábal, requesting that he come to Cananea himself and send troops. Since the troops could not arrive for two days due to lack of a direct route, Greene also asked Washington and the state of Arizona for help. Some 275 Arizona Rangers were dispatched from the mining center of Bisbee, crossing the border at Naco early on June 2, where the Sonoran governor Izábal swore them in as “volunteers.” Their commander, Captain Rynning, was given the same rank as an

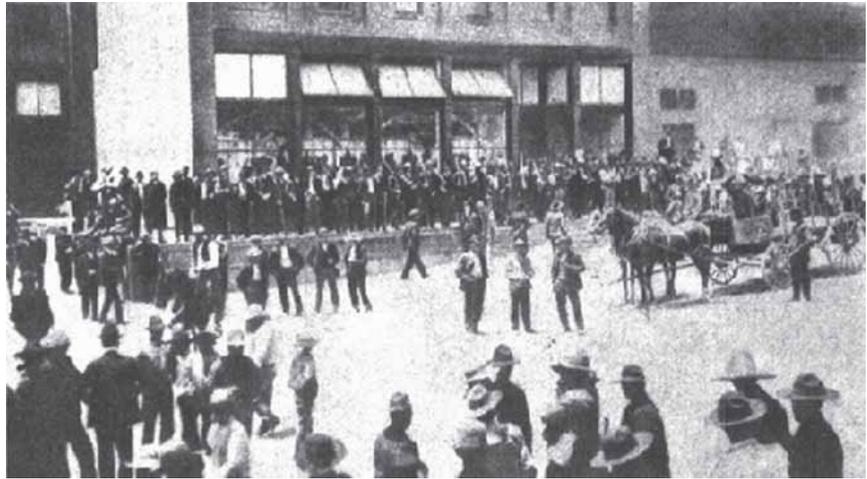
officer in the Mexican army.

The American militia arrived in Cananea by train later that morning, where Izábal harangued the rebellious miners, rejecting a wage increase and equal pay for Mexican and U.S. workers. Among his arguments, he mentioned that American prostitutes cost more than their Mexican counterparts. In fact, the government of Porfirio Díaz had decreed a *maximum* wage law. At the same time, Governor Izábal threatened to send all recalcitrant strikers to fight in the genocidal war he was waging against the Yaqui Indians. When speakers for the workers responded, they were imprisoned on the spot together with the strike leaders. That afternoon the paramilitary rural police, the *rurales*, arrived and the Rangers withdrew. The next day a platoon of 100 Mexican Army soldiers arrived. The town was placed under military occupation.

At one point there were up to 100 miners in the Cananea jail. A number of the leaders were prosecuted by Izábal's odious government and sentenced to 15 years in prison at the notorious island fortress of San Juan de Ulúa in Veracruz harbor. They were only released in 1911 after the fall of the Díaz regime. These events were intimately linked with the fate of Díaz's regime, the development of international capitalism and the first imperialist world war. One month later, on 1 July 1906, the Liberal Party launched its platform, written by Ricardo Flores Magón, in which he called for an eight-hour working day, a wage increase to cover the necessities of life and an end to racial discrimination, demands which clearly reflected the struggle in Cananea. In 1907, the mine was temporarily closed due to the financial crash on Wall Street and the recession that followed in the U.S. Despite regaining his control over Cananea with the suppression of the previous year's strike, Greene lost the mines to the great Anaconda Copper Company. Also in 1907 revolutionary workers struggles broke out in Río Blanco and Orizaba, Veracruz, led by militant supporters of the PLM, and in 1910 the Mexican Revolution began.

### Who Led the Strike at Cananea?

In the literature on the Cananea strike, while reproducing the same nationalist version of events, various authors do reveal a certain awareness of the presence of different political currents that influenced the struggle. Thus the historians' collective at the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) remarks about the two PLM clubs in the area: "Although their leaders ... did not



Armed Americans protect Cananea Copper Company offices, June 1906.

come from the working class but were small businessmen, intellectuals and white collar workers, they were recognized as leaders of the workers when the strike broke out" (*La lucha obrera en Cananea 1906*). However, their account leaves aside the considerable *international* influence of anarcho-syndicalism on the struggle. In fact, the formation of a second nucleus of the PLM in Cananea was due to certain differences between the local partisans of magonismo. While the Union of Liberal Humanity (Unión Liberal Humanidad) led by Baca Calderón and Diéguez set itself the task of organizing a Miners Union of the United States of Mexico, they only managed to unite a few of the better-paid workers in Cananea. On the other hand, the Cananea Liberal Club (Club Liberal de Cananea) spread its influence in the mines of El Ronquillo and Mesa Grande.



Ricardo Flores Magón

This second club was led by the lawyer Lázaro Gutiérrez de Lara and by Enrique Bermúdez, who served as the link with the PLM in St. Louis, Missouri and with the Western Federation of Miners in Douglas, Arizona. At that time the WFM followed a revolutionary-syndicalist political line. Bermúdez had come to the area in November 1905 as a representative of the newspaper *Regeneración* and got in touch with Baca Calderón and Diéguez. After the celebration of Cinco de Mayo organized by the *magonistas*, at which Gutiérrez Lara was the principal speaker, agitation among the workers increased to the point that "a good number of the U.S. workers, besides sympathizing with the WFM, also agreed with the ideas of the *magonista* militants" as Salvador Hernández notes in his chapter, "Libertarian Times. Magonismo in Mexico: Cananea, Río Blanco and Baja California" in Volume 6 of the series edited by Pablo Gómez Casanova, *La clase obrera en la historia de México* (Siglo XXI Editores, 1980). Police surveillance of Gutiérrez and Bermúdez was also stepped up.

Agustin Victor Casasola



Some of the Cananea miners arrested for participating in 1906 strike.

From the reports of the police spies it is clear that the principal leaders of the workers' struggle in Cananea were Gutiérrez Lara and Bermúdez, and that the two had gone about preparing for the strike at meetings "on Wednesday and Friday evenings" throughout the entire month of May. Two days before the strike broke out, the manager of the mine got in touch with the colonel in command of the treasury police to warn about "the intention to 'organize' the company's Mexican workers for the purpose of calling a strike for the same wages as the U.S. workers" and also with the political goal of "gaining control of the government." According to Greene, he was given timely information by a fink that "that a socialist club had held three meetings at midnight on May 30 at midnight, at which a large jumber of agitators of socialistic tendencies were present; that agitators of the Western Federation had been through the mines inciting the Mexicans and they had been furnishing money for the socialistic club at Cananea. He also gave us a couple of copies of the revolutionary circulars that had been widely distributed" (cited by Brayer in "The Cananea Incident").

These facts alone refute the validity of Baca Calderón's version, according to which the movement had been "spontaneous." So, asks Salvador Hernández, "Why this distortion of the facts, if Baca Calderón really was one of the workers' leaders present at the meeting" that decided on the strike? It turns out that the decision taken at that meeting "caused a deep division among the members of the two main workers organizations in Cananea, over the methods of struggle to be followed throughout the strike." The group around Baca Calderón and Diéguez, the Union of Liberal Humanity, looked toward negotiation with the company and the government, which the others roundly rejected. Moreover, Diéguez "was visibly upset, condemning the movement." On the morning the strike began, when the workers went to wake him, he didn't want to go to management on behalf of the strikers. When Greene's refusal to raise wages was received, "He told [the workers] that nothing had been gained. Having done this, Diéguez and Calderón disassociated themselves from the movement and withdrew to their homes."

"For their part, the group led by Gutiérrez de Lara,

Enrique Bermúdez and a few activists from the Western Federation of Miners had opted for the road of direct action", writes the historian Hernández. He cites an array of newspapers from the U.S. border towns that put the "blame" for the strike on the revolutionary agitators. "The problem that started the riot was prepared ... by incendiary speeches given by members of Mexican socialist organizations," wrote the *Tucson Citizen* of 2 June 1902, adding that "American socialist agitators

had come to Cananea months in advance in order to propagate their doctrines among the Mexicans and spur them to the formation of miners' unions."\* The *Douglas Daily Dispatch* of 7 June 1902 reported, "With the arrival in Cananea some months back of Lara and Bermúdez, the current conflict began. These two men, by means of revolutionary-spirited newspapers, began propounding the need to bring down Díaz's government... and quietly began to organize revolutionary workers' clubs."\*

It is notable that in the internal correspondence of the CCCC (cited in the book of Manuel González Ramírez, *La huelga de Cananea* [Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1956]), in a list of "agitators," who went about the mines creating disturbances, nine Mexican workers are named and five North Americans (named Cunneham, Moore, Walsh, Woods and Kelley). In the repression that followed the defeat of the strike, both Gutiérrez de Lara and Bermúdez managed to escape to the U.S., where they were protected by their comrades of the IWW and the WFM. For their part, Diéguez and Baca Calderón, in spite of their decision to stay at home, and even though they thought "the strike was doomed to fail," were sent to prison and later erroneously praised as the principal leaders of the strike. Calderón himself wrote that the protagonists of the action were "revolutionary groups that pursued ends of a general, national character" (*Génesis de la huelga de Cananea*).

For the revolutionaries who in fact organized the strike, one cannot simply say that the strike was a disaster, despite its violent suppression. Ricardo Flores Magón considered the strike at Cananea an integral part of his plans for a social revolution, which were expressed in the program of the PLM, promulgated one month after the events of Cananea. However, the PLM was very far from being a party of the working class, much less of the proletarian vanguard. While the Flores Magón brothers did evolve toward anarchism, the roots of their party are to be found in Benito Juárez and his 1857 Constitution, not in Marx or Bakunin. As Manuel González Ramírez wrote in his introductory note to the compilation of materials *La huelga de Cananea*: "In their struggle, the liberal opponents of General Díaz saw themselves as heirs to 19th century Mexican liberalism. They continuously put for-

\* Retranslated from Spanish to English.

ward the paradigms of Benito Juárez<sup>4</sup>, Ignacio Ramírez<sup>5</sup>, Melchor Ocampo<sup>6</sup> and Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada<sup>7</sup>.”

Revolutionary syndicalists on both sides of the border were inspired by the Cananea uprising, along with a whole series of struggles led by the IWW “wobblies” and the WFM miners in those years. In 1911 and afterwards, as Torres Parés notes, they gave rise to a “mobilization with a clearly anti-imperialist tint that the workers of both countries waged against U.S. government intervention in Mexico.” The 1906 strike at Cananea was also a precursor of the copper miners’ strike of 1917 in Bisbee, Arizona, that ended with the arrest and deportation of hundreds of Mexican miners (see “Bisbee, Arizona Deportation of 1917: ‘Reds’ and Immigrants,” *The Internationalist* No. 2, April-May 1997). Nevertheless, the strikes of both Cananea and Bisbee demonstrated the inability of the doctrines of revolutionary syndicalism to complete the longed-for workers revolution.

To bring down the rule of capital requires much more than for the workers to stop working. It demands that the most advanced elements of the working class place themselves at the head of all the oppressed, including the poor peasants and indigenous peoples, to prepare a general uprising that affects the bourgeois army, the backbone of the capitalist state. The active seizure of power must be prepared in order to build a workers state that can crush bourgeois reaction and open the way to socialism. The definitive act of a revolution is an insurrection, not a general strike. And for this a key element was missing, in 1906 as in 1910-1917: the existence of a communist party of the working class vanguard, capable of carrying out the necessary preparations for victory that the militant miners of Mexico and the U.S. lacked. Without such a party, the Mexican working class will continue to be, in the famous phrase of José Revueltas, “a headless proletariat.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Benito Juárez, a liberal jurist and Zapoteco Indian, was the first indigenous head of state in the Western hemisphere, holding office from 1858 to 1872. He helped write and implemented the laws known as La Reforma, curtailing the power of the Catholic church and the military, which led to war against clerical reactionaries (1858-61) and the Emperor Maximilian (1862-67), imposed by a French invasion at the invitation of Mexican conservatives.

<sup>5</sup> Ignacio Ramírez, author of the book *There Is No God*, was minister of justice and public education under Juárez during the War of La Reforma against clerical domination.

<sup>6</sup> Melchor Ocampo was a liberal intellectual who as minister of the interior under Juárez authored the Reform Laws separating church and state.

<sup>7</sup> Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada was foreign minister under Juárez and president of Mexico from Juárez’ death in 1872 until 1876, when he was overthrown by Porfirio Díaz.

<sup>8</sup> José Revueltas, the Mexican author and film writer, was expelled from the Communist Party after 15 years membership, went on to found the Liga Leninista Espartaco and later showed sympathies for Trotskyism. His *Ensayo sobre un proletariado sin cabeza* (written in 1960-61) is an indictment of the failure of the Stalinized Communist Party to act as the vanguard of the Mexican working class.

## A Century of Workers Struggle in the Sonora Desert

The workers struggle in Cananea did not end at the beginning of the 20th century. Far from it. As the largest copper mine in Latin America and one of the ten largest in the world, the first industrial union was organized at Cananea in the 1930s, the Grand Workers Union of the Martyrs of 1906, which later became Section 65 of the SNTMMSRM. In 1971, the Mexican government bought up the majority of the shares of the Anaconda Copper Company and completed the nationalization of the mine in 1982. With the investment of some \$900 million to modernize its physical plant, Cananea greatly increased its output and became one of the most important companies in the country. Nevertheless, when the government of Carlos Salinas de Gotari decreed the privatization of over 1,000 state-owned enterprises, the Cananea mine was given to the Nafinsa development bank for reorganization (that is, reducing its workforce) to make it “more attractive” to buyers. In the summer of 1989, the management announced plans for closing two departments, spinning off other divisions to create new firms with new (and worse) labor contracts, and the firing of hundreds of the 4,000 workers.

The new companies were to work 365 days per year, overriding the contracts that gave workers Sundays and holidays off. Section 65 went on strike. A week before the strike began, the mine was declared insolvent due to inability to pay its debts. But around 80 percent of these were fictitious charges supposedly owed to Nafinsa. On the same day, thousands of Mexican army soldiers arrived in Cananea, who proceeded to pull 600 workers off the night shift, and barred 1,000 day shift workers from entering. Helicopters hovered over the city and troops patrolled the streets. The head of the SNTMMSRM, the corporatist “union” that was part of the PRI-government apparatus, asked for an audience with president Salinas to negotiate the matter.

But a rebellion was brewing among the miners of Cananea. A resolution of Section 65 demanded the withdrawal of troops and the Federal Judicial Police, who were investigating the union “over the false impression that we had an arsenal and guerrilla groups. We don’t believe in the government or the PRI,” declared the motion. A U.S. expert on Mexican trade unions, Dan La Botz writes in his book, *Mask of Democracy: Labor Suppression in México Today* (South End Press, 1992):

“Gómez Sada declared that the workers were not responsible for the bankruptcy of the company, but took no action to defend union members except to demand that they be severed as provided by the contract and the labor law.”

Gómez Sada wasn’t alone in abandoning the members of his own “union.” Neither the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) nor the Congress of Labor (CT), the principal corporatist labor confederations, did a thing for them. The boss of the CTM and the CT, Fidel Velásquez, later said that he did not show any support for the strike because the SNTMMSRM opposed it (Andrea Becerril, “Impide Gómez Sada el apoyo del CT a obreros de Cananea”, *La Jornada*, 7

September 1989, cited in La Botz). The Mexican workers were dumbfounded by the utter capitulation of “their” unions.

After four days, the army withdrew from the city. Even then, Gómez Sada insisted that nothing could be done, because everything had been done in accord with the labor law in force. The executive boards of Union Federation of Government Service Workers (FSTSE) and the Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Peasants (CROC), an alternative corporatist labor federation, expressed their “understanding” for the government’s actions. Despite the corporatist bureaucracy’s refusal to take up the least action in its defense, the miners of Section 65 went ahead with their strike plans. On 28 August 1989 they walked out, and on September 1 independent unions demonstrated in the capitol in support of the workers of Cananea. The Labor Department proposed to withdraw the bankruptcy judgment in exchange for eliminating 115 clauses of the contract and amending 143 others, definitive proof of the spurious nature of the “bankruptcy.” A few days later, the JFCyA approved the company’s petition to void the contract in its entirety.

Already at that time, the differences between Section 65 and the national miners’ “union” had come to light, as well as the division in Cananea itself between the section’s executive committee, which followed the directives of Gómez Sada, and the strike committee. The corporatist bureaucrats declared their readiness to accept voluntary resignations by the workers along with the severance pay proposed by the government. Nevertheless, the strike continued under the direction of the strike committee. Miners blockaded the federal highway and occupied the local offices of the JFCyA. Finally, the SNTMMSRM “negotiated” a new contract that eliminated more than 150 clauses, reducing the number of job descriptions to three, laying off 400 workers and refusing to rehire over 700 more – altogether a third of the mine’s workforce – and a payment to the union in exchange for the layoffs. It is this payment, the famous \$50 million, for which the government is now going after the son and heir of Gómez Sada, Napoleón Gómez Urrutia.

The reality is that from the beginning, the government considered these funds not as a benefit for the laid-off workers, but as a bribe to the union for undermining the struggle of the Cananea miners. But like all bribes, this payoff to the corporatist “union” leaders for their complicity expired the moment that they demonstrated the slightest failure to cooperate with the regime. Thus, when Gómez Urrutia opposed the failed “Abascal Law” for labor reform, and then charac-



El Porvenir

**Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, leader of SNTMMSRM, fell afoul of PAN governments, whereupon he was removed and criminal charges brought. Class-conscious workers demand all charges be dropped while fighting in corporatist “unions” to form workers committees free of any state control.**

In 1990 the mine was sold to Grupo México, headed by Jorge Larrea, a buddy of president Salinas. Despite the heavy defeat they suffered in 1989, the workers of Cananea slowly recovered their strength. In November of 1998 a new strike broke out, against the company’s plans to lay off 700 of its 2,100 employees. The following January, the government declared the strike “nonexistent,” and threatened to annul the union’s legal charter. The company threatened to reopen the mine with scab labor. The leaders of the corporatist SNTMMSRM announced that they had signed an agreement to return to work, putting pressure on the local strike leadership. But when the government representatives went back on their offer of an increased severance pay, the miners occupied the mine, where they awaited the onslaught of four Army convoys and over 300 paramilitary cops of the Sonora Judicial Police. Faced with the possibility of a deadly attack, they finally decided to abandon their occupation. Nevertheless, when they returned to work they found that 120 of their comrades who had been most active in the strike had been fired, and many others were given temporary contracts that expired every 28 days.

One of the most significant aspects of the 1999 strike was the contribution from unions and copper miners north of the border. Shortly after the strike broke out, the strikers sent a delegation to Tuscon, Arizona. There, they received a warm welcome from the organizing office of the AFL-CIO. Although

terized the mine workers’ deaths in Pasta de Conchos as “industrial homicide” (a declaration made to escape the wrath of families of the miners who considered the the “union” and the company “are one and the same”), the Fox government withdrew its support from Gómez Urrutia, accusing him of misappropriation of funds, and sought to impose another chief, Elías Morales Hernández. As we explained in our article “Asesinato capitalista en Pasta de Conchos”:

“When the regime turns on the ‘misbehaving child’ Gómez Urrutia to replace him with his old rival Elías Morales (who was second in command under Napoleón Gómez I), it does so in order to tighten the screws of its machinery and guarantee stricter control over the workers movement. Thus, it is vital for the workers to mobilize against this government attack and simultaneously take concrete measures to free themselves from all state tutelage. The workers themselves must be the ones to smash the corporatist apparatus by which they are tied to the capitalist state....

“In the corporatist ‘unions’ workers committees must be formed to fight irreconcilably for the elimination of all state control, to break with the CT and organize genuine workers’ unions.”

in the past the U.S. labor federation has followed a *protectionist* program, blaming Mexican workers for “stealing American jobs,” when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect in 1994, the job losses were so great that the AFL-CIO bureaucrats occasionally have decided to help Mexican workers fight for better conditions. Another factor in this case were the many miners in Arizona with relatives working in the Sonora mines. Nevertheless, U.S. unionists could see that “the leaders of the Mexican miners union” were “more loyal to the government and the PRI than to their own striking members” (David Bacon, “Miners’ Strike Broken in Cananea”, *Z Magazine*, May 1999).

The miners of Cananea were betrayed time and again by “their” union leaders, who in reality are functionaries and representatives of the capitalist state. In August 2006, after the bitter experience of that year’s strike, they demanded that the national “union” not participate in their wage negotiations with Grupo México. Today, with the corporatist system in deep decay, thus opening a crack in the state’s retaining wall of corporatist unions that are integrated into the PRI and the state apparatus, the objective conditions are present for a successful struggle for trade-union independence from the control of the bourgeois state and the bosses. But as Leon Trotsky pointed out in his work, “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay,” the fight for union independence and union democracy is inseparable from the struggle for a revolutionary leadership.

Despite their combative spirit displayed in their strikes of 1989, 1999 and again in 2006, the miners have not had a leadership equal to their needs, able to simultaneously confront the bosses, the capitalist state and its labor cops in the corporatist unions. Only a class-struggle leadership, united in a communist party composed of professional revolutionary cadres, would be able to take on this task. This decisive element was the contribution of the Russian Bolsheviks under V.I. Lenin, who together with Leon Trotsky led the October revolution of 1917, a few months after the Bisbee strike. And it is exactly the recognition of the urgency need to forge a revolutionary leadership that is the foremost lesson of a century of internationalist class struggle in Cananea. ■

## Defend Mexican Miners...

*continued from page 46*

ricades,” accusing the miners of being “guerrillas” and using “military tactics.”

The population of Cananea has persevered under tremendous pressure. On April 20, some 300 children marched through the town under the slogan “Don’t touch the miners!” The 1,200 miners were receiving 1,100 pesos (then about 100 dollars) a week in strike benefits. But after the government froze the SNTMMSRM’s funds, this was reduced to 500 pesos, and meanwhile the peso has lost 40 percent of its dollar value. For more than 730 days of struggle, the Cananea miners and their families have stood strong. Today it is urgent for the rest of the working class to come to their aid.

The Grupo Internacionalista has called since the beginning of the strike for a national mine strike to win the battle

of Cananea. Our supporters in the Comité de Lucha Proletaria (Committee of Proletarian Struggle) initiated a solidarity delegation from the SITUAM university workers union that visited Cananea in December 2007. But the SNTMMSRM leadership, even when it is on the outs with the PAN government, refuses to go beyond what is permitted under Mexico’s corporatist labor laws.

From the outset, the miners’ strike has been more than a narrow industrial dispute but a major test of strength between the bosses’ government and the working class. The liberal bourgeois daily *La Jornada* (31 July) commented that “in the conflict in Cananea and the other mines on strike...the labor rights of the miners and all Mexican workers are at stake....” But it poses this as a struggle “to uphold the laws that have systematically broken by the bosses” and by the legal authorities. But those laws themselves – including such devices as declaring strikes “non-existent” and the “*toma de nota*” (taking note) by which union officers are recognized (or not recognized) by the state – are stacked against the working class.

To win the Mexican mine strike it is necessary to mobilize the strength of the most powerful sectors of the working class. In corporatist “unions” like the Mine Workers and Oil Workers, it is necessary to form independent workers committees to fight for unions free of government control and subordination to any bourgeois party. Combative sectors such as the Sicartsa steel workers (Section 271 of the SNTMMSRM) could start a chain reaction by shutting down operations in defense of the miners. The miners’ could be a spark that finally breaks the corporatist stranglehold on the Mexican proletariat.

In addition, telephone workers of the STRM, electrical workers in the SME, Volkswagen workers, dissident teachers in the CNTE have the power to wreak havoc to key sectors of the economy. University unions could join with students in support of the miners cause. They could all announce their intentions by taking the struggle to the capitalist dens of iniquity, besieging the Senate or the Stock Market, to checkmate those who are running the antiworker offensive.

But though these “independent” unions have formally broken with the corporatist labor control apparatus, they are politically beholden to the bourgeois opposition led by the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and its ex-presidential candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). The fight for effective solidarity action will necessarily be a fight against the this “popular front” which ties the workers to a sector of the bosses. Thus it must be combined with a fight to forge a revolutionary workers party to lead the class struggle to victory.

Internationally, U.S. and Canadian unions have declared their support for the Mexican miners with declarations and delegations. Steelworkers unionists in Arizona have come to Cananea more than once. Now is the time for real international solidarity action, stretching hands cross the border and recalling the heritage of a century of internationalist workers struggle at Cananea. Again, this requires a political struggle against the capitalist rulers of North America, against their Free Trade Area for the bosses and the brutal repression against immigrant workers, and for a truly internationalist workers party. ■

PRI, PAN and PRD Ratify Calderón's Giveback to Imperialism

# Mexico: The Plundering of Pemex

**Against Privatization, Impose Workers Control!**

**Break with the Popular Front –  
Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

–The following is translated and abbreviated from *El Internacionalista* No. 7, May 2009. The full translation is available at our web site, [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org).

The article below was distributed as a supplement to *El Internacionalista* at the 2008 May Day march, a few weeks before the Mexican President Felipe Calderón, of the rightist National Action Party (PAN) was to announce his package of “reforms” with which he intended to deepen the privatization of *Petróleos Mexicanos* (Pemex). Since 18 March 2008, the anniversary of the oil nationalization of 1938, there have been a series of enormous protest rallies in Mexico City’s Constitution Square, the *Zócalo* – notably 13 April, 29 June and 28 September 2008. The mobilizations were called by the National Movement in Defense of Oil, led by the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) and the Broad Progressive Front (FAP).

On 28 October 2008, the oil industry “counter-reform” law was finally passed. After the Senate held a series of debates with “specialists,” the parliamentary fractions of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the PAN and more than half of the PRD senators “debated” and voted for the bill in under four hours, in a secret session held in an “alternate” location hoping to hide from angry protesters. The bill got the same fast track treatment in the House of Deputies. Faced with the massive popular rejection that the legislation encountered, both president Calderón and the PRD legislators who voted with him pretended that the law did not imply “privatization” of the petroleum sector. In reality, it opened a breach for the exploitation of the country’s hydrocarbon wealth by private enterprise, above all the giant imperialist cartels.

While the majority of the PRD parliamentary fraction signed on to the privatization initiative, the position of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (widely known by his initials AMLO), leader of the FAP and former PRD presidential candidate, and of his followers (among them, the *El Militante* group, which calls itself the “Marxist” current of this bourgeois party), was not much different. They only wanted to add a “twelve word” amendment that would prohibit the granting of oil concessions or entire zones. Everything else (con-



Ronaldo Schmidt/AFP

March “in defense of oil” in Mexico City, 29 September 2008.

tracts for drilling, construction, maintenance and export) would be permitted. Either way, it amounted to a law to prepare the step-by-step privatization of Pemex.

After boasting in April 2008 that his mobilization had prevented an *albazo* (sneak attack) by the PAN and PRI, the final result was to demoralize the hundreds of thousands who took part in López Obrador’s protest marches. In fact, the principal role of the popular front built around AMLO and

the PRD, which goes by various names – FAP, National Democratic Convention (CND), etc. – is to serve as a dike to prevent the force of the working class from spilling over the limits of bourgeois politics. From the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s to Chile in the '70s, the popular front, a class collaborationist coalition that chains the proletariat to sectors of the bourgeoisie, has always led the way to defeat.

We Marxists defend the nationalization of the oil industry as an elementary democratic measure against imperialist domination. At the same time, we emphasize that a real defense of the nationalized oil industry *in the interests of the working class and the oppressed* would have to transcend the bounds of capitalism and bourgeois nationalism. Seventy years since the nationalization of oil in Mexico, its benefits have gone toward the strengthening of the national bourgeoisie at the expense of the workers. What needs to be done is to break with all the capitalist parties and politicians and fight for a *revolutionary, proletarian* program.

1 MAY 2008 – On April 7, president Felipe Calderón presented his legislative program to open up oil production to private capital, a measure which he announced as the fundamental achievement of his six-year term in office. When it is approved by Congress – where it has the support of both his rightist PAN and the former ruling state party, the PRI – the “reform” will achieve two objectives: first, it will legalize the creeping privatization that has been spreading silently over the past decade through various sectors formerly reserved for Pemex, such as refining, transport, storage and distribution of petroleum and petrochemicals. Second, it prepares the way for the full and unrestricted privatization of the entire energy sector.

With his bill, Calderón wants to extend the reach of the “multi-service contracts” benefiting the giant private corporations that participate in the “open” sectors. In this way, he intends to turn Pemex into a paper company in the service of the private sector. The bill also calls for the sale of Pemex debt bonds, which would constitute a first step towards its securitization. But even if this “reform” is not passed, the government of Calderón is ready to proceed full speed ahead with the privatization process. On April 9, just two days after the bill was presented to the legislature, the director-general of Pemex, Jesús Reyes Heróles, announced that two new refineries would begin operating in 2015 with various private firms taking part in their construction and operation.

Calderón’s counter-reform in the energy sector proposes to dismantle the oil nationalization of 1938, one of the most sweeping nationalist measures implemented by the government of General Lázaro Cárdenas, in response to the great mobilizations and strikes of the rail and oil workers that were shaking the country. As such, the counter-reform is part of the program of the latter-day *cristeros*<sup>1</sup> of the PAN who would like to get rid of the entire legacy of the Mexican Revolution. Yet the response cannot be a replay of the failed nationalist

<sup>1</sup> A counterrevolutionary Catholic movement that in the mid-late 1920s launched a civil war against the bourgeois secular Mexican Revolution of 1910-17.

peasant uprising of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa, but lead to international workers revolution.

The “opening” of the energy sector to private investment represents the beginning of a takeover of a key sector of the Mexican economy by the Yankee and European imperialists. As in the case of the banking sector (Banamex/Citibank, Bancomer/Banco Bilbao Vizcaya, Grupo Santander), in the absence of a powerful workers opposition, the petroleum industry will fall into the hands of the U.S., Spanish, French and other conglomerates. Due to the massive amounts of capital investment required, only the biggest “transnational” corporations can compete in the oil “market.” This is already evident with the revelations of juicy contracts that Pemex has signed with Halliburton (the firm that controls the “reconstruction” – i.e., destruction – of Iraq), Schlumberger, etc.

At whatever pace it proceeds, the privatization of oil (and of electricity) is essentially an attack on the working class and the oppressed. Its immediate effects will be massive layoffs and stratospheric price increases in every area of production and transport. This, in turn, will mean starvation-producing price hikes for basic necessities. Thus while Calderón’s “reform” generates huge profits for the imperialists, it will only mean more misery for the workers.

So far, the enormous demonstrations against Calderón’s privatization initiative have been organized by the FAP, headed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his PRD. That is, since they began the protests have been under banner of a popular front that “unites” the exploited with a sector of their exploiters. As the history of the past century has shown again and again, is a recipe for defeat. If the popular front wins, it will only benefit the “national” capitalists like Carlos Slim, a long-time ally of AMLO [and the third richest man in the world, as a result of buying up the privatized telephone monopoly, Telmex]. The workers must mobilize with full independence from all sectors of the bourgeoisie, to carry out their own class demands. Thus, they must not only break with the PAN government and its PRI associates, but likewise with the “alternative” bourgeoisie represented by the PRD. There’s nothing anti-imperialist or anti-capitalist about AMLO and his FAP: this is neo-liberalism with a “human face.”

Calderón’s offensive represents an attack by the Mexican *bourgeoisie* and its imperialist masters against the working class and the oppressed. The “reform” launched by the Calderón government at the insistence of the big international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, can only be defeated if the anger of the workers and oppressed is led by a revolutionary class program. While the nationalization of oil and railroads was a democratic measure in defense of national independence, in opposing their privatization Trotskyists stress the need for proletarian opposition to imperialism. Far from being a struggle “in defense of the nation” wrapped in Mexico’s tricolor flag, this must be a struggle for socialist revolution under the red banner of international socialist revolution.

Against the bosses’ offensive we must insist that what’s required is a powerful workers mobilization, and not simply

demonstrations of “civil resistance” in front of Congress begging the bourgeois parliamentarians not to vote for Calderón’s bill. What we need now is a powerful nationwide strike centered on the oil and electrical workers, with the perspective of extending the strike to other sectors. Only in this way can we bury Calderón’s proposal and stop the escalating repression throughout the country. In the context of the powerful struggles of the steelworkers at Sicartsa, of the townspeople of Atenco, of the teachers and indigenous peoples of Oaxaca and, currently, of miners in Cananea, energy sector workers must *take control* of production and distribution in their various sectors to put a halt to the bosses’ sabotage.

The realization of this elementary task would produce a situation of dual power at the industrial level, opening the way to *socialist revolution*, or to bloody capitalist counter-revolution. It would highlight that the workers can take their futures into their hands and rule on their own behalf. At the same time, an oil workers strike included plant occupations would immediately cut the supply of Mexican oil to the United States, causing considerable difficulties for the war and imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. This, together with the “human bridge” formed by millions of Mexican workers in the United States, would also point in the direction of the extension of workers revolution beyond the border. The key as always is to break with the bourgeoisie and all its parties, and to *forge a revolutionary workers party*.

### Calderón’s Fraud: The Supposed “Bankruptcy” of Pemex

Calderón presented his plan to modify the regulatory framework for Pemex after mounting a grotesque media fraud. For months, news programs on the major media have begun talking with increasing urgency about the terrible crisis Pemex is experiencing. A flood of figures and statistics purported to show that the state-owned company was on the brink of financial collapse. Moreover, it was claimed that the petroleum reserves on which the country’s economy depends will dry up within the decade.

In fact, between 2001 and February 2008, the period of the PAN governments which saw an increase in the price of oil and its derivatives worldwide, Mexico has earned a net profit of US\$132 billion on net oil exports alone. To put this number in perspective, it is *double* the size of Mexico’s foreign debt.

With these formidable profits, however, it is a fact that Pemex’s debt has enormously increased. According to official data from the government’s “diagnosis” announced by Energy Secretary Georgina Kessel, Pemex debt increased to over US\$46 billion in 2007. In other words, the state-owned company receives a vast quantity of dollars from the sale of crude oil, yet seems to be on the brink of fiscal collapse. How can this be?

Part of the reason is that Pemex invests only a tiny portion of its earnings in exploration for new reserves. Another factor that is often cited is the corruption that prevails in the state-owned company. However, these two factors alone can’t explain the situation in all its magnitude: what’s happening is that Pemex is being systematically looted and decapitalized in order to finance the regular expenses of the government.



Jorge Dan Lopez/Reuters

**The popular front in action: a protest march against Calderón’s law with AMLO’s portrait and the slogan “Hold on Obrador, the people are rising up.”**

The supposed “financial crisis” in Pemex is fictitious: the “bankruptcy” is purely invented.

It turns out that *six of every seven dollars* that Pemex takes in are paid out as taxes (“Treasury Devours 85% of Pemex Profits,” *El Economista* 24 April 2008). The bosses’ government treats Pemex like an ATM while seeking to impose a sales tax on food and medicine, a measure that will hit workers and low-income families hardest. Meanwhile, the big capitalists are able to avoid paying taxes on their income and profits almost entirely.

We should also point out that the domestic bourgeoisie has used Pemex to subsidize its own growth as a class. For decades, it has provided cheap oil to capitalist industry in Mexico. This phenomenon is quite common in countries of belated capitalist development such as Mexico. Industrial growth depends on imperialist credit on one hand, and on the other, given the absence of individual capitalists strong enough to take on large-scale projects such as electrification or oil production on their own, on massive government investment. The weak bourgeoisie of the semi-colonial country uses the state as an instrument to augment its competitiveness.

The nationalization of oil in Mexico was the result of historic workers struggles against American and British conglomerates that until then had controlled the key sector of the country’s economy. But the nationalization was carried out by Cárdenas in order to prevent a potentially revolutionary explosion, at the same time as reinforced the national bourgeoisie. Access to cheap energy has been crucial for the growth of the Mexican bourgeoisie over the last 50 years. It is the

same sectors of the bourgeoisie who benefited from energy subsidies from their state who today seek access to even greater profits by direct participation in the oil industry.

They have already come half-way. The “silent” privatization of Pemex began over 15 years ago. The results are visible today. Every week there is news of Pemex subcontracting something else to private firms. What this means was revealed, for example, in the “accident” on the Usumacinta oil platform in Campeche Bay that was reported in October 2007: 23 workers died when the platform caught fire and they could not save themselves due to the terribly deteriorated condition of the safety and rescue equipment. Shortly afterward it came out that Usumancita was operated by a private contractor, Perforadora Central, owned by the sons of Marta Sahagún<sup>2</sup>. Many of the dead workers were not even employees of Pemex, which is why the most elementary work safety regulations did not apply to them.

Just as in many other cases, the privatization process has been accompanied by the intensive use of non-union subcontracted labor. Many of the miners who died in the underground explosion at Pasta de Conchos in the state of Coahuila [in February 2006] were likewise employed by subcontractors and had no protection whatsoever. The mining and petrochemical “unions” have not only allowed this but their leaders openly encourage it. The response of the oil “union” chief (and bourgeois PRI politician) Carlos Romero Deschamps to the “accident” on the Usmancita platform was blunt: “The mishap? ... These things happen” (*La Jornada*, 27 October 2007). Nothing about “industrial homicide,” as miners chief Napoleón Gomez Urrutia put it responding to the cries of the relatives of the dead at Pasta de Conchos, drawing the ire of his patron Vicente Fox. Romero Deschamps spoke with the arrogance of a boss. Together with the owners, the corporatist “union” leaders have assigned work to unorganized workers with wages far below those contractually allowed. The criminal effects of this policy are plain for all to see.

### For Workers Control of Production in Pemex!

Contrary to what the bourgeois populists and their followers in the reformist left say, Pemex never belonged to “all Mexicans.” From the beginning it has always been a capitalist company at the service of the Mexican bourgeoisie and its imperialist masters. Throughout the “golden age” of the state-owned company, Pemex administrations have shown a profound disdain for the lives of working people. In 1984 in San Juanico, north of the capital, a series of giant butane tanks exploded one after the other, with a death toll of over 400 workers and 2,000 homes destroyed (see Carlos Monsivais, *Entrada Libre* [1987]). Again in 1992, there was a terrible explosion of a Pemex pipeline in Guadalajara, which killed at least 212 people. This could again tomorrow, anywhere in the country.

Indeed, for the directors of Pemex, among them Romero Deschamps, these “mishaps” are “things that happen.” For the working class to defend itself against the attack of privatization, it cannot stop at a nationalized Pemex in the framework of the

capitalist state. It must go beyond this. Against the bankruptcy brought upon Pemex by its administrators, it is essential to implement a series of transitional measures. The first is dictated by the present circumstances: *open the books* of Pemex. Against the company’s “inexplicable” bankruptcy, the real figures for production and distribution of hydrocarbons must be identified *now*. This would also make it possible to accurately determine the level of reserves and correctly evaluate perspectives for new exploration.

But opening the books of Pemex is not enough. Obviously, it will become clear that throughout its history, the federal governments of both the PRI and the PAN have systematically plundered Pemex for the benefit of the capitalists they serve. (It would be the same with the PRD if it got into office at the federal level, as shown by the first-ever private contract for electric power, signed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas when he was head of the Federal District government in 1998.) Thus, it will be necessary to impose *workers control*. Unlike capitalist management and the phony “co-management” schemes under which the workers “participate” in their own exploitation, workers must impose their own administration to prevent the bosses’ conscious sabotage of the productive apparatus, as has occurred in Venezuela. This elementary measure would obviously be unacceptable to the *entire* Mexican bourgeoisie, including those sectors represented by the PRD.

The bourgeoisie would not passively stand aside if the workers took control of Pemex, and would employ any means necessary to recapture its apparatus. It would no more tolerate dual power at the factory level as it would at the geographical level. Since it would represent an advance for the workers, the ruling class would react even more furiously against it than it did against those who rose up in Oaxaca. This it would be of utmost importance to form *workers defense guards*, the embryo of a future workers state.

The primary obstacle in the way of the workers implementing these elementary defense measures is the corporatist “union” apparatus that binds the oil workers directly to the capitalist state. Under the rule of Romero Deschamps and his clique, the Oil Workers Union of the Mexican Republic (STPRM) has aligned itself with the Calderón government and *accepts the terms of the counter-reform*. The *charros*<sup>3</sup> (corporatist labor bosses) just want to take their commission on the sale of Pemex.

That such “union leaders” do this should surprise no one. Since their complete integration into the capitalist state at the end of the 1940s, the corporatist “unions” ceased to be organizations of the working class and became police agencies to control the workers at the direct service of the bourgeois state. The total integration of the CTM, the Congress of Labor, other federations like the CROC and the CROM, and large “unions” like the STPRM into the corporatist state lasted for decades,

<sup>3</sup> *Charro* (literally, cowboy) refers to the state-imposed leaders of the corporatist “unions,” named after the government flunkey who was installed by the PRI-government at the head of the railroad workers union in the late 1940s, nicknamed *El Charro* because of his fondness for dressing up in Mexican cowboy costume.

<sup>2</sup> The wife of former Mexican president Vicente Fox.



La jornada



Notimex

**The circles of power: (left) Elba Esther Gordillo, leader of the corporatist teachers “union” SNTE, proclaims Felipe Calderón Hinojosa winner of the 2006 presidential election in the presidential palace of Los Pinos, 26 July 2006. Carlos Romero Deschamps (right) leader of the corporatist STPRM and PRI senator greets Calderón on 18 March 2008, the 70th anniversary of oil expropriation. The charro leaders and the new president have worked together to impose privatization of education and oil.**

constituting the “workers sector” of the state party, the PRI, just as the CNC and other rural leagues formed the “peasant sector.” The rise to power of the PAN (at the national level, while the absolute PRI rule persists in some states) has increased the marked erosion of these bodies of control, which have lost much of their power, but in cases like the STPRM this has not changed their submission to the state’s command and oversight.

The government of Lázaro Cárdenas, in the midst of the inter-imperialist rivalry leading up to the Second World War, made use of the working class mobilization to grab a few more crumbs for the Mexican bourgeoisie. Leon Trotsky characterized the Cárdenas regime as bonapartism *sui generis* (of its own particular type):

“In the industrially backward countries foreign capital plays a decisive role. Hence the relative weakness of the *national* bourgeoisie in relation to the *national* proletariat. This creates special conditions of state power. The government veers between foreign and domestic capital, between the weak national bourgeoisie and the relatively powerful proletariat. This gives the government a Bonapartist character *sui generis*. It raises itself, so to speak, above classes. Actually, it can govern either by making itself the instrument of foreign capitalism and holding the proletariat in the chains of a police dictatorship, or by maneuvering with the proletariat and even going so far as to make concessions to it, thus gaining the possibility of a certain freedom from the foreign capitalists. The present policy [of the Mexican government] is in the second stage....”

– “Nationalized Industry and Workers Control” [May 1939]

Cardenas’s concessions to the workers always had their limits. In fact, his government *repressed* struggles by the STPRM after the nationalization. The governments of Manuel Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán continued in this vein, continuing the integration of the workers’ unions into the state apparatus of the PRI, until the quantitative change became qualitative. In the case of the STPRM, its corporatization culminated in the

period between 1946 and 1949. On 20 December 1946, the army broke a strike that the oil workers had launched the day before. The government of Miguel Alemán threatened the strikers with prison. But this was only the beginning.

In 1949, the STPRM went out on strike for an improvement to its contract. The general secretary of the union at this time was Eulalio Ibáñez, a member of the Stalinized Communist Party, who had played an important role in the post-war mobilizations (after having assiduously suppressed workers mobilizations during the war in the name of the “anti-fascist alliance” with “democratic” imperialists). At the union’s convention on 1 December 1949, the government “recognized” only those delegates allied to it. By means of a provocation staged by pro-government elements, the convention was shut down the next day by the army and riot police. On the government’s orders and under its guns, Gustavo Roldán Vargas, also known as “El Charro” like Jesús de León, his counterpart in the rail workers union, was installed in the leadership of the STPRM.

Ever since the *charrazo* (charro coup) of 1949, the STPRM has been under the strict control of the government. In fact, it has not undertaken *a single extensive work stoppage in nearly 60 years – and certainly not one strike in the oil industry*. Even though labor laws require that unions serve notice that it could call a strike in order to initiate any changes to the wages or labor contracts, the STPRM has refused to do this, owing to its “excellent” relations with management, of which it is a part.

This is no coincidence. In fact, over the decades the oil workers leaders have used the pervasive corruption to set up their own service companies, which are then subcontracted by Pemex. A whole range of companies for the transport of crude oil and oil workers, for maintenance, security, etc., belong to prominent “union” leaders. In a detailed study of the situation that prevailed in the early ’80s, Rosalía Pérez Linares comments:

“If there were any doubt as to the class character of the [cor-

poratist] union bureaucracy, the case of the oil workers union would put this out of the question. These figures show precisely the metamorphosis of the union leaders into bosses, not only in their political and ideological posture as bosses, but in their own relationship to exploitation.”

– “Vigencia y formas del charrismo en el STPRM”, in *Los Sindicatos Nacionales*, Vol. I (1986)

In fact, the union itself acts as a contractor, that is, like a capitalist boss. Max Ortega, a researcher at the Autonomous Metropolitan University (UAM), shows that in 1989, 40 percent of drilling and construction contracts with Pemex went to companies owned by the STPRM (*Neoliberalismo y Lucha Sindical, 1982-1992*, 1995).

So it is no accident that from the time of Joaquín Hernández Galicia (“La Quina,” who fell from the regime’s graces when he flirted with the candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1988) to the current leadership under Carlos Romero Deschamps, the principal obstacle to an independent mobilization of the oil workers is their “own” union. Various leftists have called on the government to remove Romero. However, this perspective is completely wrong. When the government eliminates one “union leadership” (even a *charro*), it doesn’t do this to establish any kind of workers democracy, but to guarantee the exact opposite: an even more rigid subjugation of the working class.

Instead of calling on the government to replace one of its agents with another, revolutionaries oppose all state intervention into affairs that solely concern the workers. Thus, when the government of Carlos Salinas took La Quina prisoner in a military operation, Trotskyists insisted that the “bazooka attack” was directed against the working class as a whole. We energetically denounced Salinas’s attack, defended Hernández Galicia (in contrast to many leftists) and called on the working class to rise up against the government assault, which included the military occupation of Pemex facilities across the country.

More recently, when the PAN government of Vicente Fox put Carlos Romero Deschamps and his associates on trial for corruption (accusing them of handing funds from Pemex to the PRI election campaign), his “crime” was doing what corporatist union chiefs have done for decades. Such schemes can’t really be considered corruption since Pemex, the STPRM and the



Elisa Medina/La Jornada

**Joaquín Hernández Galicia, “La Quina” (center), boss of the STPRM, with arms seized during his arrest on 10 January 1989, for having supported Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the presidential elections of 1988.**

PRI were all one apparatus during the rule of the PRI. Trotskyists oppose all efforts by the capitalist government to dictate what any union can or cannot do in the political field, and the oil workers should oppose all state intervention in their affairs. Interestingly, now that Romero has made his peace with Calderón, the case against him has vanished from the political scene.

Thus the workers themselves must throw off the straitjacket of state labor control, mobilizing with total independence to build authentic workers unions.

### The AMLO Popular Front, Roadblock to Workers Mobilization

In recent weeks there have been a series of mass mobilizations protesting Calderón’s privatization initiative. (Interestingly, since the oil workers chiefs did not allow it, the members of this corporatist “union” did *not* participate.) Under the slogan of “defense of the nation” against “traitors to the fatherland,” the protests are politically in the framework of bourgeois nationalism. Hundreds of thousands of people, the great majority

of plebian origins, have taken part in these mobilizations. They believe that under the leadership of Andrés Manuel López Obrador the bourgeois offensive can be stopped. This however, is not so, nor can it be.

As many political commentators have noted, AMLO is not opposed in principle to private capital investment in petroleum production. One need only consider that as governor of the Federal District (Mexico City), he privatized the water agency, handing it over to big French consortiums (Vivendi, Suez) and U.S. firms (Enron!) (See “Mexico: Bourgeois Elections and Workers’ Blood”, *The Internationalist* No. 24, Summer 2006). In his book published in 2004, *Un Proyecto Alternativo de Nación* [An Alternative Plan for the Nation], López Obrador says:

“The oil industry must remain a good business that benefits all Mexicans, well-managed and rationally exploited. But we shouldn’t rule out that Mexican investors, through transparent mechanisms of association between the public and private sectors, could take part in the expansion and modernization of the energy sector or related activities, so long as the constitutional norms permit this.”

For AMLO, private capitalists can take part in Pemex as long as they are *Mexican capitalists*. This was always the program of his predecessor as PRD standard-bearer, and now his rival, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. The Calderón crew is intimately

tied up with imperialist banks and oil companies: they take bribes, like the late Secretary of the Interior Juan Camilo Mouriño; they are front men for phony “Mexican” firms: they have preferential lines of credit, etc. López Obrador and Cárdenas, on the other hand, defend the interests of a sector of the Mexican bourgeoisie that would like to maintain the state control of the petroleum industry for a while longer to subsidize their companies, thereby preparing to take advantage of its privatization later.

Trotskyists struggle within the “independent” unions to break them from the FAP and the PRD, and in the corporatist labor groups to break the chains of state control and build class-struggle unions. In the battle over the oil industry that is already underway, *workers* intervention is urgently needed, free of all tutelage by any sector of the bourgeoisie. Faced with Calderón’s pro-imperialist privatization assault, we don’t fight for “love of the Fatherland and the humanist vocation to love thy neighbor,” as AMLO preached in the *Zócalo* on 27 April 2008, but for a workers strike against privatization and for the oil and electrical workers to take control of the plants to guard against their sale or sabotage. This will only be possible in the context of an upsurge of potentially revolutionary class struggle, and the key to this is to forge a Leninist vanguard of the working class based on the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution.

### Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!

The FAP is the very embodiment of class collaboration. As such, the López Obrador popular front subordinates the “independent” unions that have broken away from their corporatist moorings to a sector of the bourgeoisie in order to neutralize their struggles. Since the end of the 1980s under the figure of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, a popular front has formed around the PRD that channels the enormous discontent of the working masses into the sterile halls of bourgeois parliamentary debate. Every time that the workers have had to take up an important struggle, the PRD has placed itself at their head in order to keep them within the boundaries of capitalist politics. The examples abound and one thing is obvious: in its two decades of existence, the PRD *has not won a single one of the fights it has lead*. This is not an accident: it is intentional.

To put an end to the starvation policies and repressive attacks launched by the bourgeoisie, the exploited and oppressed must fight with a revolutionary program. The days when capitalism was capable of genuine reforms in favor of the workers are long gone. Now, the capitalists would like to eliminate all the workers’ gains and drive down the price of labor to the absolute minimum. Thus today one cannot simply fight for reforms within the bounds of the capitalist system. Instead, even the most elementary struggles must be linked with the indispensable fight for socialist revolution.

This is not, however, the perspective of the bulk of the ostensibly revolutionary Marxist groups. An typical example that borders on the ridiculous is *El Militante*. The perspective of these so-called Marxists who are *members of the PRD, a capitalist party*, is to ask AMLO to adopt a socialist pro-

gram, as if that were possible! Instead of fighting for the working class and the oppressed to *break with all sectors of the bourgeoisie*, *El Militante* sows potentially deadly illusions in capitalist politics.

A step to the left of *El Militante* is the Workers League for Socialism (LTS), Mexican section of the Trotskyist Fraction, which originated in the Liga Internacional del los Trabajadores (LIT – International Workers League), followers of the pseudo-Trotskyist *caudillo* Nahuel Moreno at the end of the 1980s. The LTS calls for a “national strike against the sell-off of Pemex.” The most telling point about their statement on Pemex is that they *do not call to break with the bourgeois PRD or with AMLO* but, at most, to place “no confidence” in them. They never say that the PRD itself represents a sector of the Mexican bourgeoisie, even though they criticize the “New Left” current in the PRD for being “particularly” capitulationist.

For the LTS, the task today reduces to elementary reformist demands, but not the struggle for socialist revolution. Its posture is summed up in an article of 23 April 2008: “No to the sell-out of PEMEX and energy resources! Down with ‘Free Trade’ agreements! Down with ‘reforms’ against health care and education; down with labor law reform and the attacks on workers! No to the payment of foreign debt! Imperialism and transnational corporations out of Mexico and Latin America!”

In the absence of any reference to the need for a socialist revolution, the program set out above is essentially *democratic*. In another article the LTS writes that “the plan of action drawn up by the National Democratic Convention has progressive aspects that call for mobilization” against Calderón’s privatizing initiative.

In this the LTS is not alone. Following close on its heels is the Grupo Espartaquista de México (GEM), which lately has consciously decided not to fight against the popular front that it had denounced since the GEM was formed in the late 1980s. These days their favorite thesis for debate outside of the class struggle is that the corporatist “unions” are genuine workers organizations ... try telling that to the hundreds of worker militants assassinated over the decades by the pistol-toting *charro* thugs, or the thousands of employees of STPRM subsidiaries who have no union rights whatsoever!

Now the GEM has intensified its efforts to ingratiate itself with the masses of AMLO supporters, raising timid criticisms of AMLO and the PRD *without calling on the workers to break with their bourgeois program of class collaboration*. In a leaflet announcing a recent conference on the oil question, the GEM sums up its slogans: “Against the privatizing assault of the PRI and the PAN: *Defend the nationalized energy industry!* No illusions in AMLO and the bourgeois PRD!” Concerning this capitalist party and its principal leader, they only recommend no confidence... Clearly, one can follow the program of López Obrador and his PRD without placing any confidence in them. In contrast, the Grupo Internacionalista fights for the exploited and oppressed to *break* with the popular front of class collaboration set up around AMLO and the PRD.

It’s also noteworthy that in 2007, the GEM did not dare

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## “Theoretical” Justification for Abstentionism, and Tailing After the PRD

# Flim Flam from the GEM on Workers Control

—Translated from *El Internacionalista* No. 7, May 2009.

We’ve grown accustomed of late to receiving barbs from the Grupo Espartaquista de México (GEM) consisting of scholastic arguments of the purest water, adorned with amalgams and sophistry, all in order to justify its opportunist and tailist policies. A case in point is its curious “polemic” under the title, “Menshevik Symptomology” which appeared in *Espartaco* (Winter 2008-09). What they seek to do is to put an equal sign between the policies of groups like the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (LTS – Socialist Workers League) and the Grupo de Acción Revolucionaria (GAR – Revolutionary Action Group) – whose political strategy consists of pressuring the Broad Progressive Front (FAP), the National Democratic Convention (CND) and other bourgeois formations led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (popularly known by his initials, AMLO) – and the Grupo Internacionalista which consistently fights against the *popular front* which has been built up around AMLO and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

The GEM itself fought for a decade against the Cárdenas popular front. But just as the PRD under Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was on the verge of winning the elections to the government of the Federal District [Mexico City], it abandoned what had been its most distinctive policy in Mexico. At that moment they suddenly “discovered that there was not, there had not been nor could there be any popular front in Mexico. Its “theoretical” justification: that a popular front requires a mass workers party, which would rule out popular-frontism in the vast majority of semi-colonial countries. As we have repeatedly pointed out, this criteria was never raised by Leon Trotsky, whose heritage the GEM erroneously claims. We responded, “To Fight the Popular Front, You Have to Recognize That It Exists” (see *The Internationalist* No. 3, September-October 1997). We noted that real purpose of this new “theoretical discovery” of the GEM was to no longer fight for the unions to break with the PRD-led popular front. Thus even as the GEM says it has no confidence in AMLO and the PRD, it simultaneously adopts policies which in the concrete *copy* the PRD and López Obrador.

Take a look at its recent article: AMLO says he is defending Pemex, Mexico’s nationalized oil company, against the privatizing offensive of the imposed president Felipe Calderón, period. The policy of the GEM is summed up in the slogan, “Down with the privatizing reform of Pemex!” period. Did the GEM put forward the demand to open the books of Pemex, in order to demonstrate the fraud of the supposed bankruptcy of the state

oil company, the main argument used to justify its privatization? No. Did it call for any labor action to block the Calderón counterreform? No. In fact, they polemicize against our call for a *national strike* to block this pro-imperialist measure. Here’s how the operation is carried out: first, they replace the call for a national strike with a *general strike*, which they identify with the definitive struggle for proletarian power, which would be doomed to failure because of the absence of a Leninist-Trotskyist party, in order to then argue that such a strike is “mutually exclusive” of our call for workers control. “For workers control of production to exist, there must obviously be production,” they write sagely. Elementary my dear Watson. This line of reasoning is so labyrinthian and schematic that we don’t know if it should be called jesuitical or talmudic. In any case it is *anti-dialectical* to the hilt.

These would-be theoreticians are utterly at a loss to comprehend that a national strike could lead to the imposition of workers control in various sectors, or that plant takeovers imposing workers control could be part of an upsurge of struggles resulting in a national strike. They do not see this because they are incapable of understanding the dynamic of the class struggle. For the latter-day Spartacists, whose tendency continues to mistakenly call itself the International Communist League (ICL), these are purely abstract categories which they play with in order to elaborate their formalist arguments. It is also worth pointing out that their renunciation of the demand for workers control is only the most recent of a series of revisions in which they are abandoning step by step the revolutionary Trotskyist program which they defended for three decades.

The GEM complains: “Our call [for a strike for price subsidies for tortillas] didn’t seem sufficiently r-r-radical to the GI, which counterposed to it ‘workers control of the whole chain of tortilla production and distribution,’”<sup>1</sup> as well as calling to ‘impose workers control!’ in Pemex.” The core of the GEM’s argument is that workers control can only be achieved in a revolutionary situation. “Workers control of production means dual power at the point of production,” they write. As a result, they argue, “This slogan is only appropriate in the context of a level of class struggle qualitatively distinct from and more climactic than that which exists today.” They go on to cite a text by Trotsky: “the regime of workers’ control, a provisional transitional regime by its very essence, can

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<sup>1</sup> See “Mexico’s Tortilla Crisis, Product of Capitalism,” in *The Internationalist* No. 26, July 2007

# Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

## Bring Out Workers Power to Stop Migra Raids and Deportations!

**Begging the Democrats Is a Dead-End  
Build a Class-Struggle Workers Party!**

The following IG leaflet was distributed in English and Spanish at May Day marches in New York and San Francisco.

This May 1, once again hundreds of thousands will be marching for immigrants' rights in cities around the U.S. The huge demonstrations in 2006 that brought out millions of immigrant workers reestablished May Day as the international workers day in the United States. Those marches were driven by fear of xenophobic legislation that threatened mass deportations and hope that the politicians in Washington would pass immigration reforms that would provide a "path to citizenship." The hopes soon proved groundless, as liberal Democrats folded in the face of racist reaction. *Only a class-conscious working class will defend immigrants.*

Meanwhile, the Bush administration launched an offensive of raids by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) police. Kicking in doors in early morning raids, surrounding factories with black-uniformed riot cops, tearing immigrant parents from their U.S.-born children, sending tens of thousands of immigrants to a network of concentration camps (dubbed "detention centers"), deporting thousands more without any legal proceedings: today these Gestapo-like practices are directed mainly against undocumented immigrants. But imperialist war abroad means racist police-state repression on the "home front." We must fight to *defeat* the U.S. war on Iraq and Afghanistan, and the bosses' war on working people here.

Many immigrants rights groups have placed their hopes in President Barack Obama's talk of launching immigration reform. Yet his spokesmen are saying he will only "start the debate" in his first year in office. Now there is a wave of hysteria against Mexican immigrants over swine flu. Though the Democrats' rhetoric may differ from immigrant-bashing Republicans, the push to militarize the borders began under Democrat Bill Clinton. Clinton also signed into law the 1996 "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act," which the Bush administration used to pick up thousands of immigrants after 11 September 2001.

Obama's administration is calling for "policy reform that controls immigration and makes it an orderly system." There is no mention of *rights* for the estimated 12-15 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, the large majority of them workers. Recently, the AFL-CIO and Change to Win union federations have issued a joint statement for "comprehensive immigration reform." This surprised the bourgeois media, who expect labor to buy the lie that immi-



Internationalist photo

**Internationalist Group contingent in May Day 2007 NYC immigration rights march.**

grant workers "steal American jobs."

Yet the union tops' immigration reform plan accepts the "framework" of the capitalist Democratic Party, calling for "rational operational control of the border" and "adjustment of the status for the current undocumented population." Meaning what, exactly? The bureaucrats' talk of "adjustment" and Democrats' talk of a "path to citizenship" are empty phrases designed to head off militant protest. Calls for "amnesty" perpetuate the lie that immigrants are criminals. Internationalist workers demand "**Full citizenship for all immigrants!**"

The current pause in large-scale ICE raids is only temporary. Although he talks of focusing on "drugs and guns" rather than picking up window-washers, don't forget that Obama is commander-in-chief of Yankee imperialism. *The Internationalist Group calls on the workers movement mobilize in the streets to block the raids.* If the next time the ICE cops stage a raid in a big city they are surrounded by hundreds of workers, it will send shock waves around the country. And when racist vigilantes of the Minuteman ilk show their faces, they should be sent packing by worker-immigrant defense squads.

The lesson of decades of shattered hopes for immigration "reform" underscore that above all, the struggle for immigrants' rights requires a break from all the capitalist parties and a fight to **build a class-struggle, internationalist workers party!** The French Revolution of 1789, the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 proclaimed citizenship rights for all workers, regardless of their national origin. So too will a socialist revolution in the United States, in which immigrant workers will play a leading role. ■

## Internationalist Group Statement

# At Stella D'oro, the Struggle Continues



Librado Romero/New York Times

## Mobilize NYC Labor to Stop the Plant Closing – No Concessions!

JULY 11 – On July 7, after 325 days on strike, workers at the Stella D'oro bakery in the Bronx went back to work under the contract that the company management had ripped up. The scabs who had replaced them were gone. Yet while workers were glad to be back on the job, the owners viciously announced they would shut the plant for good. With their steadfastness, the strikers beat back one attack. Now they face a new assault that is just as serious. For Stella D'oro workers and all New York labor, *la lucha continúa* – the struggle continues!

For working people throughout the area, the battle of 135 mainly immigrant workers has become a symbol of struggle for the most basic rights of labor. Faced with outrageous takeaway demands from the private equity firm (Brynwood Partners) that bought the plant in 2006, the workers refused to buckle under. Instead, they went on strike – and as the strike continued for eleven hard months, not a single one crossed the picket line. The strikers' solidarity and determination inspired labor, student and community activists, and drew considerable media attention. At the same time, the strike was a challenge to NYC labor to move from words of solidarity to militant mass action, to decisively *win* this fight.

On June 30, an administrative law judge for the National Labor Relations Board ruled in favor of a complaint against the company brought by the strikers' union, Local 50 of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers. Yet the vindictive company immediately appealed the ruling, and filed a formal announcement under the federal WARN (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification) Act that it will *close the plant down* in October. The whole system is stacked against the working class.

*It is crucial to the future of workers in New York that labor's power be unleashed to stop Brynwood's plan to shut down the Stella D'oro plant.* The entire workers movement, immigrant rights and community groups must mobilize and prepare for whatever it takes to win this fight. This will require hard and determined struggle.

As Juan Gonzalez noted in his *Daily News* (8 July) column, "in a town that prides itself as the heart of organized labor, the other unions were AWOL" during the strike. Staking everything on the bosses' legal system and the Democratic Party, labor bureaucrats let the Stella strike twist in the wind. The "only consistent support" on the picket lines, Gonzalez noted, came from teachers, City University (CUNY) faculty and staff,



**IG and Class Struggle Education Workers at May 30 Stella D'oro strike support march.**

hospital workers, and some others. The Central Labor Council turned a deaf ear to repeated appeals to mobilize real backing. *Now more than ever, the stakes are too high to allow a play-by-the-bosses'-rules, wait-and-see response.*

Appealing to "Mobilize New York Unions' Power to Win the Stella D'oro Strike!" (30 May), Internationalist Group supporters were able to make some impact in helping organize efforts to get the scab products off the shelves and track down the supplies flowing into the plant – some from unionized companies. UFCW-represented supermarket workers in particular, as well as some Teamster activists, expressed eagerness to help the strikers. Brynwood got rid of Stella's Teamster drivers in 2006 – paving the way for its assault on the bakers and packers two years later. Yet due to the narrow business-union outlook typical of the labor tops, Local 50 had crossed the drivers' lines during the 2003 Teamster strike at the plant. As Stella workers have seen, *picket lines mean don't cross.*

In a difficult struggle, it is crucial to have clarity about who are your friends and who are your enemies. Illusions in the capitalist state are among the key obstacles that must be overcome. One striker said realistically: "We got out of one hole, but we got in a bigger one now. We didn't win anything yet." In contrast, some leftists rushed to proclaim the judge's ruling a flat-out "victory." Thus *Workers World* (8 July) hailed the "major victory" won through the NLRB. Progressive Labor Party (whose supporters have, to their credit, been very active in strike-support activities) put out a leaflet proclaiming "Stella D'oro workers win the battle – but the war against capitalism continues!" But while the war against capitalism certainly continues, the battle of Stella D'oro workers is far from won.

As Juan Gonzalez reported, Brynwood first told the union: "Because we're a hedge fund, our investors expect a higher rate of return, and your members should expect a wage cut." Now the arrogant bosses use their "right" as private-property owners to decree the plant's closing, while workers who have toiled there for decades are supposed to have no

say in the matter and be dumped into the street. Workers aren't buying it. After returning to the plant (where the bosses installed 20 new cameras to spy on them), many vowed to resist Brynwood's vengeful retaliation, to "find ways to beat them" and "keep the plant open." This means "no messing around," another said.

A number of leftists are now looking to the White House, or even billionaire NYC mayor Bloomberg to aid the workers. An International Socialist Organization spokeswoman talked of "the importance of pressuring politicians." We say: workers must rely on their own strength. "*Fire the boss!*" became the slogan of workers in Latin America taking over factories to stop mass layoffs. Last December, Republic Windows and Doors workers in Chicago electrified labor with their bold sit-down strike – and workers in Britain,

Ireland, Canada and elsewhere have recently done the same.

In New York City, working and poor people, immigrants, oppressed communities, students and even members of the hard-pressed middle class are angry at Wall Street rip-off artists – and private equity buyout firms like Brynwood. As the economy spirals downwards, Democrat Obama and Congress "bail out" billionaires with trillions in taxpayer dollars. In order to defeat the bosses, militant action to save Stella D'oro workers' jobs, such as a plant occupation, could win wide support. But this would require systematic, careful preparation, and the active mobilization of hundreds and thousands of workers in the streets.

The Stella D'oro workers are justly proud of the solidarity and determination they've shown in their struggle. Their steadfastness set an inspiring example for the rest of labor. *We need to win this one! It's high time for labor to step up and make it happen: No plant closing! No concessions! Victory to the Stella D'oro workers!* ■



**United Electrical Workers at Republic Windows and Doors in Chicago occupied the plant when boss shut it down, December 2007.**





defeated by playing nice and being “reasonable” according to established rules. ***The whole strategy of the Stella D’oro bosses is geared to destroy the union.***

The Bakery Workers have brought a complaint against the employer to the National Labor Relations Board for refusal to bargain in good faith, and have gotten a preliminary ruling favorable to the union. Some strike supporters are fantasizing that with Democrat Barack Obama in the White House, they could even get the NLRB to prohibit the company from hiring “permanent replacement workers” (scabs). But even if the NLRB were to decide against Brynwood, the company would simply appeal it to death in the capitalist courts, dragging the case out for years while workers are without a job. ***Legal action will not stop these cutthroat labor haters.***

***The bottom line is: you can’t win by playing by the bosses’ rules. Labor must play hardball to win!***

Much effort has gone into building a boycott urging consumers to support the strike by refusing to buy Stella D’oro cookies. This can be a useful way to build support for a popular and hard-fought strike. But all too often, the union bureaucrats have resorted to consumer boycotts in order to avoid the kind of class-struggle action that is crucial to winning. In some cases, like the Hormel P-9 strike in 1986, consumer boycotts have masked the abandonment of a strike. ***Using the organized power of the unions is key.***

For starters, ***NYC labor should use its muscle to stop the delivery of Stella D’oro products to the stores, and get the scab cookies off store shelves NOW!*** Union truckers and railroad workers ***should refuse to deliver ingredients and supplies to the struck plant!*** We have made concrete proposals for an open letter to New York City unionists urging labor, particularly grocery and retail workers unions, to declare that ***scab products are “too hot to handle” and make sure no one touches them.***

***To win this strike, it is necessary to shut down the scab operation.*** One way to do that is by a plant occupation, which cannot be done without careful and systematic preparation. Workers from the Republic Windows and Doors plant in Chicago, who occupied their plant last December, have visited the Stella D’oro picket lines. The

Republic workers’ example electrified labor across the U.S. And in any case, NYC labor should organize ***repeated mass mobilizations to build picket lines so large and militant that no one dares cross.***

Long ago, this was a family owned business. But at the end of the 1980s it was bought out by Nabisco, and in 2000 it was taken over by Kraft Foods. The current owners are notorious takeover artists, but the previous corporate bosses set the stage for this battle by driving out the Teamster delivery truck drivers after a 2003 strike. So instead of leaving the Stella D’oro strikers isolated, thousands of New York City unionists should ***march on the plant to stop the scab occupation and win the strike, making it clear that there will be hell to pay if Stella D’oro workers don’t win.***

Impossible? Not at all. As recently as 2005, the 35,000 transit workers shut down the city with their powerful strike. Despite the bosses’ propaganda blitz, the strike enjoyed the support of working people throughout the city. And in 1998, tens of thousands of construction workers turned out to picket the Metropolitan Transportation Authority headquarters for hiring a non-union construction firm, Roy Kay Inc.. The workers marched through Midtown shutting down construction sites and blocking traffic. The NYPD mobilized 1,000 cops, but couldn’t stop them. ***For Stella D’Oro workers to win, we need to “do a Roy Kay” on a mass scale.***

The Stella D’oro strike is not an isolated local event. From the auto industry to government jobs, the bosses are using the economic crisis of their capitalist system to grind down the workers and take back what few benefits that unions have won. To defeat this onslaught, it is necessary to fight politically. Many unionists look to Obama and the Democratic Party.

Yet the Obama White House and Democratic-controlled Congress are ripping up the auto industry, sacrificing tens of thousands of auto workers’ jobs, slashing health care and wages, while channeling tens of billions to the auto bosses and trillions of dollars to bail out the Wall Street banks.

Workers need to break with the Democratic Party and forge our own, class-struggle workers party that fights for a workers government. ■



## Film Flam ...

*continued from page 67*

correspond only to the period of the con-  
vulsing of the bourgeois state, the prole-  
tarian offensive, and the failing back of the  
bourgeoisie, that is, to the period of the pro-  
letarian revolution in the fullest sense of  
the word.”

“This has nothing to do with the  
present situation in Mexico,” decrees the  
GEM. Although they allow as “while Mexi-  
can society has proved to be highly explo-  
sive in recent years,” they dismiss this be-  
cause “the outbreaks of proletarian class  
struggles have been sparse, and fundamen-  
tally defensive, and the proletariat is firmly  
tied ideologically to the bourgeoisie, above  
all by bourgeois nationalism.” In its opin-  
ion, the takeover of the steel plant in Lázaro  
Cárdenas in April 2006, when the workers  
chased off the state and federal police as  
well as the Marines; the occupation of the  
city of Oaxaca and much of that state by tens of thousands of  
militant teachers, backed by government workers and Indian  
groups, mounting hundreds of barricades and keeping the  
police out of the capital for six months in June-November of  
2006; and the miners strike in Cananea<sup>2</sup>, which has lasted  
almost two years, represent “sparse” outbreaks, or are insuf-  
ficiently proletarian for their tastes. It won’t be until Mexi-  
can workers throw off the burden of bourgeois nationalism,  
they claim, that one can call on them to undertake radical  
action. “All quiet on the Western front,” conclude these learned  
observers.

What is striking is that the text by Trotsky which they cite  
to uphold their theoretical revision (“Workers Control of Pro-  
duction” [August 1931]) has the opposite intent than that which  
the GEM ascribes to it. In this article, the founder of the Fourth  
International is polemicizing against the Stalinists in Germany  
who at the time were defending the very same position as the  
GEM holds today, namely, that only in a revolutionary situa-  
tion can one raise the call for workers control. Immediately  
after the passage cited by our opponents, Trotsky adds:

“This correspondence, however, should not be understood  
mechanically, that is, not as meaning that dual power in the  
enterprises and dual power in the state are born on one and  
the same day. An advanced regime of dual power, as one of  
the highly probable stages of the proletarian revolution in  
every country, can develop in different countries in different  
ways, from differing elements. Thus, for example, in certain  
circumstances (a deep and persevering economic crisis, a  
strong state of organization of the workers in the enterprises,  
a relatively weak revolutionary party, a relatively strong state  
keeping a vigorous fascism in reserve, etc.) workers’ control

<sup>2</sup> See “Mexican Miners Strike for Safety, Against Anti-Worker At-  
tacks,” on page 47 in this issue.



**Workers at Sicartsa steel plant in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán occupied their plant for five months during 2006 strike, driving back an assault of hundreds of Marines, federal and state police (above). But the GEM says class struggle isn’t hot enough for workers control.**

of production can come considerably ahead of developed po-  
litical dual power in a country.”

In reality, the German workers’ struggles at the time were  
essentially defensive, against the ravages of the economic  
crisis and the advance of the fascists. Nevertheless, instead of  
insisting as does the GEM that workers control can only arise  
in a revolutionary situation, what Trotsky argues is that “dual  
power in the country can develop precisely from workers’  
control as its main source.”

By all indications, the threadbare “polemic” of the GEM  
was written for internal purposes, in order to provide a couple  
of quotes to shore up their refusal to raise one of the main de-  
mands of Trotsky’s Transitional Program. They’re certainly not  
going to convince anyone who has not been trained in their  
school of scholastic distortion, selective quotes and empty for-  
mulas. For any member of the GEM who wants to take the  
question seriously, we suggest that they read Trotsky’s article *in  
its entirety*, which for their convenience can be found on our  
site on the Internet (under Marxist Readings at  
[www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org)). Here we would like to point out that  
this new revision is part of a whole political reorientation of the  
Spartacist tendency following the counterrevolutionary destruc-  
tion of the Soviet Union. Arguing that this historic defeat for  
the proletariat has produced a qualitative regression in work-  
ers’ consciousness (whereas in Mexico, for example, the politi-  
cal consciousness of the workers has been dominated by bour-  
geois nationalism both before and after 1991-92), they conclude  
that the crisis of humanity is no longer reduced the crisis of  
proletarian leadership, as Trotsky held, but instead the problem  
is with the proletariat itself. Basing themselves on this, the ICL  
and the GEM *renounce in theory and in practice the found-  
ing program of the Fourth International.*

It is striking that in their writings on Mexico or the acute

global crisis of the capitalist economy, when it is imperative to build a bridge between the present struggles of the working class and socialist revolution, nowhere do they present a program of transitional demands to that effect: sliding scale of wages and hours, open the books of the companies, workers self-defense groups, and, of course, workers control of production, among others. They only counsel to await better times. In the few cases where they put forward any concrete slogan, as in the case of the strike for subsidized tortilla prices, they take it over from the PRD union leaders. Their pompous, high-flown digressions explaining why this or that slogan should not be raised only serve to justify their policy of fleeing from the class struggle – leaving the workers in the hands of the pro-capitalist bureaucracies. Since the ICL and GEM don't call on the unions to break with the López Obrador popular front, their admonitions to have no illusions in AMLO or the PRD are nothing but a fig leaf to hide their own capitulation before these forces.

As far as their pusillanimous accusations that the Grupo Internacionalista supposedly has a “union-busting, pro-management” policy are concerned, an unwary reader of *Espartaco* would have no idea that the GI calls to struggle both inside and outside the corporatist “unions” – which are organically part of the bureaucratic control apparatus of the bourgeois state<sup>3</sup> – seeking to form genuine workers unions; that the GI fought for a national strike to defend the miners against the attempt by the Calderón government to impose their preferred *charro*<sup>4</sup> as union leader rather than the *charro* Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, whereas the GEM didn't call for any action other than abstractly “supporting” a strike which didn't even last a single day; and that the GI supported the Cananea miners in their strike (calling on unions in Mexico City to carry out solidarity action, as well as delivering material donations and financial aid) while the GEM has done nothing in this respect. And with its defense of the corporatist regime of the STPRM (the oil workers' “union”), it turns its back on the thousands of “temporary” workers who have been fighting for decades to be hired directly by Pemex.

But what else would one expect from these professional desk-bound “socialists” and academic apologists for corporatism, who seek above all to “pull their hands out of the boiling water”<sup>5</sup> of the class struggle? ■

<sup>3</sup> During the one-party rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which at the national level lasted from 1929 to 1999 and still persists in many states like Oaxaca, the major labor bodies were not workers unions but were incorporated into the state/party apparatus. Under this corporatist system, the “unions” of the CTM, CT, CROC, CROM and other federations were literally part of the PRI, their leaders appointed by the Mexican president or other high government functionaries. With the election of PAN presidents (Vicente Fox in 2000, Felipe Calderón in 2006) this system of state labor control has frayed but not disappeared. The oil workers “union” (STPRM) remains a thoroughly corporatist entity. For additional discussion of the corporatist “unions,” see “Mexico: Women Workers Battle Gun Thugs,” in *The Internationalist* No. 10, June 2001.

<sup>4</sup> See note page 63.

<sup>5</sup> See “The ICL Leaders' Cover Story: Smokescreen for a Betrayal,” *The Internationalist* No. 1, January-February 1997.

## Plundering of Pemex...

*continued from page 66*

to pronounce the words *workers control* in the midst of the *tortillazo* (the crisis brought on by astronomical increases in the price of tortillas). Instead they called for strikes to demand tortilla subsidies, in other words, workers actions to carry out the program of the PRD, which in bill submitted to Congress on 16 January 2007 called for the same thing: tortilla subsidies. The GEM and the PRD both call for “tortilla ration cards for all,” dreaming of the National Company for Popular Supplies (CONASUPO) of bygone times (when the PRI-government subsidized tortillas).

The Grupo Internacionalista obviously does not oppose tortilla subsidies, as the GEM shamelessly claims. We participated in the marches of January and March 2007 when the “independent” unions (subordinated to the PRD) demanded this very thing. But for Trotskyists who struggle to forge a *vanguard of the working class*, and not a *rear-guard of the popular front* as do the GEM and the rest of the opportunist left, it is necessary to go beyond this *bourgeois* program and raise a *transitional program*, such as for workers control of the entire chain of production and marketing of tortillas, which would form a bridge from the present struggles to workers revolution (see our leaflet “Mexico's Tortilla Crisis, Product of Capitalism” reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 26, July 2007).

The Mexican proletariat is a sleeping giant. Above all, as José Revueltas wrote, it is a *headless proletariat*, without the vanguard communist party that it requires. It is necessary to awaken it to break all the chains that bind it to the bourgeois parties, the *caudillos* and the state of its class enemy. For this, the fundamental task is to intervene in the current struggles with a *revolutionary program of class struggle*. The key is to resolve the contradiction between the ripeness of the objective conditions for international socialist revolution and the immaturity of the subjective conditions needed to bring about the revolution. As Trotsky pointed out in the Transitional Program, the founding document of the Fourth International, this contradiction can only be resolved through the forging, in the crucible of the class struggle, of revolutionary workers parties, sections of a “world party of socialist revolution.”

The Grupo Internacionalista and the League for the Fourth International fight to build such parties, in Mexico and internationally. Our perspective is not one of pressuring this or that sector of the bourgeoisie to maintain the decrepit system of capitalist production, which today can only perpetuate war, hunger and racism on a global scale. Fighting for complete class independence, for the workers to place themselves at the head of the rural and urban poor in the struggle to bring down capitalism, for the establishment of a workers and peasants government, under the leadership of their vanguard Leninist-Trotskyist party, which would begin the socialist revolution and extend it to the rest of Latin America and into the very heart of imperialism, we raise the banner of *permanent revolution*, of the October Revolution of 1917. Join our struggle! ■

## Mass Protests Rock Iran...

*continued from page 19*

Khomeini rejected the left's "unity" offers with disdain. The day after taking power he ordered the workers back to work, and the leaders of the oil workers union were immediately arrested as "counterrevolutionaries." The victorious Islamic rulers went on to massacre the left when the time was ripe. The factory committees which arose during the strike waves could have the basis for proletarian power, but since the left rejected the strategic perspective of socialist revolution, the committees were isolated and purged, either turned into or replaced by state organs for the Islamic regime.

At the time, genuine Trotskyists fought against both the shah and the rising Islamic clerical reaction. The international Spartacist tendency, from which the LFI originated, warned *well before Khomeini took power* that:

"The hundreds of thousands who are now marching behind the mullahs are by no means all Muslim fundamentalists. Many are primarily motivated by hostility to the real crimes of the shah. Many leftist workers have probably joined what they view as a potentially successful opposition to the hated regime. But the masses, particularly the workers, who are now supporting the Khomeinis and the Shariatmadaris can and must be won away from the present Islamic reactionary offensive in favor of a *social revolutionary* opposition to the shah."

—"Iran in Turmoil," *Workers Vanguard* No. 215, 22 September 1978

The Trotskyists warned that the alternative would be a catastrophic defeat, and raised the call: "Down With the Shah! Don't Bow to Khomeini! For Workers Revolution in Iran!"

In taking this stand, we not only went up against the Stalinists and Guevarist Fedayeen, but also against those who falsely laid claim to the mantle of Trotskyism, notably Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), whose British followers excluded Spartacists from protest demos because of our opposition to Khomeini. The various pseudo-Trotskyist currents called for an "anti-imperialist united front" with Khomeini (as did the British Workers Power group), or argued that the clerical leadership of the movement would simply disappear, or that even if the mullahs took power their regime would rapidly simply collapse (echoing the disastrous Stalinist response to the Nazis' rise in Germany, "After Hitler, us!")<sup>1</sup>

Many on the left today refer to 1978-79 as a "hijacked revolution," as if there was first a healthy revolution against the shah that was some time later subverted by the mullahs. In fact, the ayatollahs seized control from the start as the "socialist" and "anti-imperialist" left abdicated. Why? Because their reformist program dictated a political alliance with a section of the bourgeoisie as the first "stage" of the revolution. As usual, it never went beyond that, and ended in a bloodbath of the left. What these opportunists are really doing is amnestying their

own failure to oppose Islamic reaction when it could have been defeated. They bowed to their executioners.

With the outbreak of the reactionary war with Iraq, the Iranian groups affiliated with the USec (HKS and HKE) supported Iran. The HKE, aligned with the American Socialist Workers Party, even backed the mullah regime against the Mujahedeen guerrillas. British USec leader Brian Grogan traveled to Iran where he reported marching in a demonstration chanting *allahu akbar*. The American SWP grotesquely proclaimed the chador to be a symbol of "liberation." But all this didn't save their Iranian followers. Those who remained in Iran were arrested, and eventually several were executed. Today the United Secretariat is so discredited that it has no Iranian group. Meanwhile, formally codifying its left social democratic politics, its leading section, the French LCR, has now discarded any reference to Trotskyism, dissolving into a New Anticapitalist Party.

The one ostensibly Trotskyist current that maintains some semblance of activity concerning Iran is the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) founded by Ted Grant and currently led by Alan Woods, which includes a small group of Iranian supporters, the Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency. Woods' calling card is a cynical tailism that presents itself as starry-eyed objectivism, forever discovering that some bourgeois force is about to lead the revolution, from Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan to Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (the IMT's current favorite). On June 15, Woods breathlessly declared: "The masses are starting to move, and the movement will not easily be halted. We are entitled to say with confidence: the Iranian Revolution has begun!"

To explain the fact that this capitalized "Revolution" is under the leadership of a bourgeois Islamic leader, Woods blithely writes of Mousavi "he does not control events. Rather, events are controlling him." This ignores the fact that while some of the demonstrators may be more militant, the mass of protesters still had political confidence, if not in Mousavi, at least in the possibility of peacefully reforming the Islamic regime – and that slogans against the regime were in fact banned, if only in the vain hope of averting bloody repression. Woods began to dream out loud about how the "movement" would evolve into a revolutionary, socialist one under the force of circumstances.

But the IMT did not leave things totally to chance: its main Iranian spokesman, Maziar Razi, penned an Open Letter to Mousavi, dated June 18, which charged "you have submitted yourself to Ahmadinejad's government," as if the question were one of tactical militancy. Razi makes no reference to Mousavi's free market capitalist program. Neither Woods nor Razi refer to the question of women's oppression except in passing (as was the case for the opportunist left in 1978-1979), not even mentioning the hated *hijab* police. Nor have they said anything about the fact that their hero Chávez was won of the very first to congratulate Ahmadinejad on his election "victory." Opportunists often have trouble keeping straight the forces they tail after, or explaining it when they come into conflict. Ultimately for the likes of Woods & Co., they don't care – it's all just one big maneuver. But for the Iranian masses knowing who your friends are and who are your enemies matters, a lot.

<sup>1</sup> See "Iran and the Left: Why They Supported Islamic Reaction," *Workers Vanguard* No. 229, 13 April 1979, available on our web site, [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org).

In a second article, “The Iranian Revolution: what does it mean and where is it going?” (June 16), Woods trots out a false analogy used by much of the left to dismiss Khomeini, comparing Mousavi to Father Gapon, a figure from the 1905 Russian Revolution. Unlike either Mousavi or Khomeini, Gapon was genuinely incidental, a merely temporary leader. Woods keeps raising the comparison of Iran today with the 1905 Russian Revolution (“Like the Russian Revolution before 1905, the Iranian Revolution is still in its infancy. It has a long way to run...”). Interestingly, the very same argument was raised by Woods’ mentor Grant in 1979, who wrote:

“Support for Khomeini will melt away after he forms a government. The failure of his programme of a Muslim theocratic republic to solve the problems of the Iranian people will become apparent... Even in the worst resort, reaction would prepare the way for revenge on the part of the masses, at a not too distant date. It would be 1905 in Russia over again.”

—Ted Grant, “The Iranian Revolution” (9 February 1979)

Thirty years on, we can say: it didn’t exactly turn out that way, did it?

### Build a Trotskyist Party in Iran!

Among the pseudo-Trotskyists there are certain formulas that keep turning up to cover their adoption of the Stalinist program of two-stage revolution. Back under Mandel in the 1960s and ’70s, it was to declare every left-talking bourgeois government, from Nasser in Egypt to Algeria in 1961 to Burma to be a “workers and peasants government.” The Grant/Woods variant is to join bourgeois parties and “movements” on the grounds that they are leading a “1905 revolution.” The patented slogan of another pretender, Nahuel Moreno, was to label every petty-bourgeois or bourgeois nationalist uprising a “February Revolution.” In each case, what they were saying is that *they are not fighting for a new Russian 1917 October Revolution*, that is for the working class to take power at the head of the rural peasantry and urban poor.

In Iran today, revolutionary Trotskyists would seek to intervene, where and to the extent possible in repressive conditions, on a series of democratic questions, including demanding an end to enforced Islamic dress codes (*no to the veil!*); for an end to sexual segregation and for full rights for homosexuals; for an end to all censorship of the press and all media; for full freedom of speech and assembly; for the right of self-determination for national minorities, such as the Kurds, Arabs, Azeris and Baluchis, including autonomy and independence if they so desire; for the right to strike and to organize independent workers unions free from state and religious control; and to free all jailed leftists, labor activists



Leon Trotsky in 1939.

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and protesters. Be aware that a serious fight for any of these basic rights and demands would send the Islamic rulers into a murderous frenzy

A key demand is for a secular, democratically elected constituent assembly as part of a revolutionary program to bring down the Islamic dictatorship. This is a demand that is appropriate in feudal or semi-feudal countries where the most basic democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution have not yet been achieved, or under bonapartist regimes that amount to military/police dictatorships. This latter is the case of Iran under the theocratic “Islamic Republic,” as it was under the pro-imperialist monarchy of the shah.

We have noted elsewhere how many opportunist socialists have raised calls for constituent assemblies just

about everywhere, including in countries that have the trappings of bourgeois parliamentarism. In effect, they substitute this democratic demand for the goal of socialist revolution (see “Trotskyism vs. “Constituent Assembly” Mania,” *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008). But Iran today, groaning under the rule of clerical reaction, is precisely the kind of dictatorial regime where the demand for a revolutionary constituent assembly abolishing the system of *velayat-e-faqih* in which a Supreme Leader has the final say on everything, abolishing the unelected clerical councils ban any candidate deemed insufficiently Islamic, abolishing the religious police who terrorize women and youth, can mobilize masses of the oppressed fighting for the overthrow of the mullahs’ rule.

Clearly, the present rulers of Iran would fight to the death to prevent such a democratic body. The Islamic “reformers” around Mousavi would oppose it as well. It is also clear that the only force which could bring about a constituent assembly is the working class, leading impoverished peasants and slum dwellers. However, the workers must fight not just for “democracy” but for their own class rule. Thus proletarian revolutionaries in Iran would simultaneously seek to organize potential organs of workers power, from factory committees (*shuras*) to workers councils, fighting for a workers and peasants government to expropriate the capitalist class, and for a socialist federation of the entire Near East.

Above all, the Iranian masses today urgently need a genuinely communist party, capable of struggling against the reactionary social program of the mullahs and all bourgeois forces. Under the impact of the current crisis, and Iran’s convulsive history, revolutionary minded militants may be rethinking their outlook and program. The League for the Fourth International seeks to lay the basis for a Leninist vanguard party of the Iranian working class, armed with the program of revolutionary Trotskyism, that alone can point the way forward to the liberation of all the exploited and oppressed. ■

## World Socialist Web Site Alibis Ahmadinejad . . . and Itself Where Were You, David North?

One of the more prolific sources on the Internet regarding the Iran turmoil has been the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS). Although a casual reader might miss it, the WSWS is run by David North's Socialist Equality Party (SEP) which periodically claims to defend the "heritage" (while trampling on the revolutionary program) of Trotskyism. Usually posing as a kind of generic socialist alternative to "mainstream" organs of liberal U.S. imperialism such as the *New York Times* and *The Nation*, the SEP declares its "solidarity" with the "International Committee of the Fourth International" (ICFI), consisting of SEP subsidiaries in several countries. Like the WWP in the "antiwar" movement, this dual posture occasionally brings the WSWS into conflict with segments of its cyberreadership – as currently over Iran. The Northites are not as crude as the Marcyites, preferring to one-sidedly bash Mousavi rather than singing hosannas to Ahmadinejad. But in the end, North & Co. politically line up with the hard-line Islamists ... and not just today. Back in 1978-79, these "socialists" loudly defended Khomeini against the Trotskyists who warned against bowing to Islamic reaction.

The WSWS' main line of argument is that the pro-Mousavi "green wave" in Iran is another edition of the U.S.-sponsored "rose revolution" in Georgia (2003) and "orange revolution" in Ukraine (2004). As we wrote earlier, "at first glance this looks very much like a U.S.-instigated color-coded 'revolution,'" and "certainly, the imperialists are up to their usual dirty tricks" – but there are important differences. First, the U.S. government has not staked everything on "regime change," and has responded hesitantly. Then there is the scale of the demonstrations – not a few thousand or tens of thousands, as in Tbilisi and Kiev, but many hundreds of thousands. The WSWS' claim ("Iran, Imperialism and the Left," 7 July) that "the Mousavi protest movement was a middle-class protest that lacked mass support" just doesn't hold water. Certainly, just because a movement is big doesn't make it progressive: look at U.S.-backed Solidarność in Poland. What fueled that movement was anti-Soviet Polish nationalism and Catholic reaction. In Iran today, while the protests are politically dominated by a wing of the Islamic Republic's bourgeois rulers, they are fed by mass discontent over three decades of reactionary clerical dictatorship.

In order to make the claim that the Iranian protests are exclusively middle-class, the WSWS has not seen fit to mention (in 29 articles on the elections and their aftermath) the mass arrests of almost 200 labor activists in Tehran and Kurdistan this past May Day, a number of whom are still in jail. And while it belatedly cited, once, the calls for solidarity with the protests from the Tehran bus workers union and the



**Absent from World Socialist Web Site's coverage of Iran: the brutal oppression of women under the mullah regime. Above: women prisoners in the notorious Evin prison where hundreds of those arrested in the recent protests are being held.**

Iran Khodro auto workers union, and the latter's half-hour strike against the repression, it has not mentioned the brutal repression both unions have suffered as a result of striking against the Ahmadinejad government. And if Iran is analogous to Venezuela, as the WSWS suggests, where are the huge demonstrations of urban poor in Tehran defending Ahmadinejad against pro-imperialist bourgeois and petty-bourgeois protests, as has occurred in Caracas? (James Petras explained this away by saying that working youth "had little time or inclination to engage in street politics.")

There is another important component notably missing from the WSWS reports on Iran: the massive participation of women in the protests. This can be seen in countless video clips and is attested to by every account. Yet nowhere does the WSWS refer in any serious way to the brutal oppression of women in Iran – not a single mention of the veil or hijab, or the harassment by the hated Islamic morals police! This blind spot is no accident coming from David North, whose predecessor as head of the Workers League (the forerunner of the SEP) notoriously exclaimed: "the working class hates faggots, hippies and women's libbers, and so do we!"

As a fig leaf to cover up its pronounced pro-Ahmadinejad "tilt," once or twice the Northites have claimed in an aside, "WSWS is the most consistent and principled opponent of this government" ("Iran, the media and the World Socialist Web Site," 26 June). You wouldn't know it from their recent coverage of the biggest upheaval in Iran in 30 years. Earlier this year, the WSWS did a retrospective on 1978-79 in which it noted that, "ultimately, it was the oil workers' strike that broke the back of the Shah's regime," but that, for lack of a

Bolshevik party:

“Instead, what emerged from the revolution was a clerical-led bourgeois nationalist regime, an Islamic Republic, that ruthlessly suppressed the working class, restored bourgeois order, and defended capitalist property....

“The tragedy of the Iranian revolution is that the working class proved incapable of assuming a political role commensurate with its social weight in the struggle against the Shah’s dictatorship.

“For this, Stalinism is entirely responsible.”

–“The Tragedy of the Iranian Revolution,” WSWS, 11 February

Actually, there were quite a few other culprits on the left who hailed the Islamic “revolution,” including the Workers League (WL) led by North. One is prompted to ask, “Where were you, David North?” (When Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s crimes at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, a delegate in the hall reputedly called out, “And where were you, comrade Khrushchev?” – alluding to the fact that he was a loyal henchman of Stalin for decades.)

The answer is that North was among the loudest cheerleaders for the Islamic “revolution” and vile slanderers of any leftists targeted by the mullahs. In a front-page statement by the WL leadership, “Long Live the Iranian Revolution!” (*Bulletin*, 16 February 1979), North hailed Khomeini’s takeover as “a decisive turning point in the world revolution” and an “irreparable blow to U.S. and world imperialism.” A statement by the International Committee of the Fourth International led by North’s mentor Gerry Healy declared, “We pay tribute to the Ayatollah Khomeini who became the symbol of the anti-Shah revolution” (*Bulletin*, 27 February 1979). A few weeks later, the WL declared that “the Khomeini movement...represents a progressive alliance of the anti-imperialist nationalist forces” (*Bulletin*, 30 March 1979). When Khomeini’s thugs viciously attacked demonstrations on International Women’s Day (March 8) and later that were protesting the imam’s imposition of Islamic dress codes, in particular the head-to-toe veil (chador), North called the demonstrations for women’s rights “A Provocation Against the Iranian Revolution” (*Bulletin*, 13 March 1979).

In contrast, the then-revolutionary Spartacist League (SL) was virtually the only group on the left internationally that told the truth about Iran, headlining, “Mullahs Win” and calling for “Down with Khomeini! For Workers Revolution!” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 225, 16 February 1979). In “Iran and the Left: Why They Supported Islamic Reaction,” *WV* reported:

“The streets of Teheran are filled with the anguished cries of those, from middle-class liberal women to Guevarist guerrillas, who claim they were taken in by Khomeini’s revolution. Tragically, the voice of the revolutionists who warned of the reactionary clericalist aims of the mullahs was drowned in the clamor of opportunists singing the praises of the ‘anti-imperialist’ ayatollah. It is the Iranian masses who will pay the price.”

–*Workers Vanguard* No. 229, 13 April 1979 (available on our web site, see Marxist Readings at [www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org))

This sent the Workers League into paroxysms of slanderous cop-baiting. Its response was a diatribe by Alex Mitchell denouncing the SL as “Provocateurs Against Trotskyism and the Iranian Revolution” (*Bulletin*, 1 May 1979). The WL asked “what police academies” did *WV* writers come from, and wrote that “there is every reason to believe” that the SL’s “antics” were “directly orchestrated by the FBI and CIA.” *WV*’s warnings against clerical reaction were labeled “reactionary vomit,” and for good measure they added: “The news that Tehran resounds with the ‘anguished cries’ of ‘middle-class liberal women ... who claim they were taken in by Khomeini’s revolution’ is, as far as we are concerned, very good news indeed.”

As the mullah regime stepped up its bloody repression against the Kurdish minority, Arab oil workers in Khuzhistan, unveiled women, homosexuals and leftists, some of the opportunists who initially hailed the Islamic “revolution” began to get cold feet. But not the Northites. When members of the HKS (Hezb-e Kargar-e Socialist – Socialist Workers Party) active among the Arab oil workers were picked up and thrown into the regime’s dungeons (the same ones formerly used by the SAVAK), the WL hailed their arrests. After an Islamic court handed down death sentences for 12 of the 14 arrested, North’s *Bulletin* (7 September 1979) published a vile article headlined, “Defeat Imperialist Conspiracy Against Iran!” Basing itself on the ties of one of the components of the HKS to the U.S. Socialist Workers Party (SWP), against which North & Co. had been running a vicious smear campaign, the article said: “Both the origins and activities of the group in Iran strongly validate the charges made against them.”

With the barest fig leaf “urging” the Iranian government to not carry out the death sentences, the WL instead called for “deportation of the provocateurs and associates of the Socialist Workers Party.” Even this hypocritical statement was soon forgotten as North launched a sinister propaganda barrage denouncing the “SWP-CIA operation”: “Carter’s Revisionist Agents: Enemies of the Iranian Revolution” screamed the *Bulletin* (16 November 1979). “SWP-CIA Resumes Covert Operations in Iran” was the title of a three-page spread (*Bulletin*, 7 December 1979). This was followed a week later by two pages on “SWP (USA/CIA) Agents in Iran: The Ahwaz Operation Terminated” (*Bulletin*, 14 December). Using the vilest techniques of Stalinist agent-baiting, the clear import of the WL lies and slander was to get the HKS supporters killed. In fact, the pro-SWP wing of the HKS was in the process of splitting to form the HKE (Revolutionary Workers Party) in the winter of 1979/80, and repeatedly declared its support for Khomeini, over the U.S. embassy occupation diversion and again over the war with Iran.

For North & Co., the deadly smears against the Iranian socialists were only a sideshow in the years-long campaign together with Gerry Healy, dubbed “Security and the Fourth International,” in which they tried to frame SWP leader Joseph Hansen as an FBI agent. The SL responded that Hansen was an “honest revisionist” and demanded “Who Gave Healy His Security Clearance?” Even more sinister was the role North and Healy played next door in Iraq, where in 1978 they alibied the

execution of 21 Iraqi Communist Party members by the Baathist dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and turned over names and photos Iraqi dissidents in London to the Iraqi embassy, fingering them for arrest, torture and possible death. And they did this while the Healyites were receiving blood money from Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi and the Iraqi government itself. North and Healy were truly provocateurs for hire.

In an article in the *Bulletin* (16 March 1979) in the midst of the campaign denouncing any opposition to Khomeini as provocation, “The Iraq Revolution and Stalinism,” the WL declared that the Iraqi CP was part of a Moscow operation setting up cells in the Iraqi armed forces and “it must accept the consequences.” The fact that the Healyites not only hailed the execution of the Iraqi CPers but also turned over information on Iraqi militants came out later, as Healy’s ICFI imploded in the mid-1980s. The evidence of this monstrous crime was printed in an article by Healy’s long-time deputy, Cliff Slaughter, who reported:

“The practice behind it was an unprincipled financial and political dependence on the Iraqi bourgeoisie.

“Now we know more. A News Line photographer was sent to the Iraqi Embassy with pictures of opponents of the regime....”

—*News Line*, 20 November 1985, cited in “Healyism Implodes,” *Spartacist* No. 36-37, Winter 1985-86

As for the money from Arab regimes – *more than one million British pounds in total* – this was detailed in an ICFI Control Commission report which gave the following breakdown of amounts received beginning in the mid-1970s:

|                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Libya .....                         | £542,267   |
| Kuwait .....                        | 156,600    |
| Qatar .....                         | 50,000     |
| Abu Dhabi .....                     | 25,000     |
| PLO .....                           | 19,697     |
| Iraq .....                          | 19,697     |
| Unidentified or other sources ..... | 261,702    |
| Total .....                         | £1,075,163 |

—reprinted in *Workers News*, April 1988

For years the Healyites had been on the take from these bourgeois regimes as they trumpeted the virtues of the “Arab Revolution.” Shortly after writing his smear of the Spartacist League, Alex Mitchell published a hagiographic article about Qaddafi, “The Green Book – Born Out of Struggle Against Imperialism” (*Bulletin*, 16 October 1979). It was a quid pro quo, as they received payment for services rendered from the Libyan dictator, Saddam Hussein and their other paymasters. Clearly in Iran they were angling for the same sort of deal with Khomeini.

Claiming to have clean hands, David North, now the top dog in the SEP, retained leadership of some of the remnants of the International Committee. Scapegoating Healy alone for the opportunism of the ICFI, North pretends that their tendency had remained fundamentally healthy. Thus North’s international organ claimed that the ICFI had “exposed” the “class character” of the Khomeini regime – citing its 12 February 1979 declaration as proof. But take a look at what the declaration actually says:

“Khomeini’s own political doctrine is vague, contradictory and ambiguous. It combines progress and reaction, sharia law and the Constituent Assembly, oppression of women and personal liberty.”

—quoted in “How the Workers Revolutionary Party Betrayed Trotskyism 1973–1985,” *Fourth International*, Summer 1986

What kind of “opposition” is this mealy mouthed statement supposed to be?! It should be clear any “ambiguity” about Khomeini’s program of social reaction existed only in the minds of the International Committee. And while Khomeini was massacring the left, slaughtering Kurds and other non-Persian nationalities, persecuting women and suppressing the working class – Healy and North were cheering them on in the name of the “Iranian Revolution.”

As for the revelations about receiving payoffs from just about every Arab sheikh, emir and colonel in the region, the amounts reported by Healy’s lieutenants’ investigation were probably far less than the real total. Moreover, they only revealed this *after* the funds had dried up. North’s claim that the ICFI leaders “didn’t know” about this *blood money* is utterly unbelievable. That Healy’s daily paper was likely subsidized by “one or more Arab governments” was widely rumored on the British left and stated in print by Sean Matgamna’s *Socialist Organiser* in 1980.

But, then, what do you expect from a charlatan like David North, who denounces unions and justifies scabbing, while as David Green he is the president of a \$25-million-a-year *non-union* printing company, Grand River Printing & Imaging? No one should give an ounce of credence to these scab “socialists.” ■

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**Sweep Away the Coup Plotters, Generals and Capitalists!  
Fight for a Workers and Peasants Government!**

# Honduras: The First Coup of the Obama Administration

AUGUST 6 – The ouster of President Manuel Zelaya Rosales by Honduran generals at the end of June sent shudders through Latin America. Leftists and trade-unionists bitterly recalled the dark days of the 1970s and 1980s, when much of the region was ruled by military juntas, thousands were murdered, tens of thousands fled into exile and those who remained were terrorized into submission.

Even “center-left” bourgeois governments such as in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and elsewhere felt threatened, as they all have tenuous relations with their militaries. Below a thin veneer of “democracy,” the officers who carried out the “dirty wars” and ran the death squads are still there. The “moderates” looked to the new administration in Washington to solve the problem. Even Hugo Chávez in Venezuela appealed to the U.S.: “Obama, do something.” But more than a month later, the putschists are still in charge in Tegucigalpa, the death toll among the protesters is rising, and Zelaya is cooling his heels at the border.

We warned the day after the military takeover that those fighting against it should beware of U.S. intervention (rather than appeal for it), and demand “Yankee Imperialism, Hands Off!” (see page 40). We called on workers to “fight against the coup while offering no political support whatsoever to the right-wing president.” In fact, Honduran unions have played a key role in resistance to the coup. But while protesters call for Zelaya’s return with full powers, the ousted president has agreed to terms that would make him a figurehead. Either way, the coup plotters would still be in place, ready to strike again.

What’s needed is not negotiations but a mobilization of the workers and peasants to *sweep away* the military gorillas and the capitalists and bourgeois politicians behind the coup, through revolutionary struggle for a *workers and peasants government*

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**Above: Elite troops surround the home of Honduran president Manuel Zelaya on the morning of June 28.**



**Protesters march on the Honduran Congress during national work stoppage, July 31.**

Centro de Medios Independientes/Honduras