

Chicago, Baltimore, Cleveland, Minneapolis...

Democrats Are the Bosses of the Racist Killer Cops

If 2014 was the Year of Mass Protest Against Racist Cop Terror, 2015 was the Year of More Racist Cop Terror. After drawing up the annual balance sheet of official murder in the United States, the bottom line is 1,202 killed by the police, according to the tally of killedbypolice.net. In 2014 the body count was 1,108. And 2016? Still more racist cop terror, count on it.

Well over a thousand people a year, torn from family and friends, their lives cruelly snuffed out, their futures stolen by a lawless armed force that kills with impunity: the police. And those deaths are only the ones reported in the media. They don't even include the name of Sandra Bland, found hanged in a Texas jail cell last July, because a county coroner ruled it a suicide. We say *Sandra Bland was lynched*, as so many others have been as well, by a *system* of racist police terror. The name of that system is American capitalism, founded on chattel slavery and resting today on wage slavery. Racial oppression is in its DNA.

2015 also underscored how the entire capitalist "justice system," from top to bottom, works seamlessly to protect the killers. As the year drew to a close there was a drumbeat of legal decisions in which cops were not charged or not found guilty in the deaths of their unarmed black victims. On **December 16**, a mistrial was declared in the case of one of the Baltimore police officers in the van where Freddie Gray was killed last May. On **December 21**, a grand jury hand-picked by a local judge and the district attorney in Waller County, Texas failed to indict anyone for Sandra Bland's death. And on **December 28** a grand jury in Cleveland, led by the nose by a DA who drip-fed the media with leaks favorable to the cop, brought no charges against the trigger-happy officer who gunned down 12-year-old Tamir Rice in November 2014.

Although the outcomes produced consternation and outrage, they were no surprise, since the ruling class depends on its badge-toting hired guns as capitalism's first line of defense. And the police murder machine grinds on, at a rate of over three victims a day. So despite constant protests since the release of the dashcam video of Chicago police killing Laquan McDonald over a year ago, on December 26 Chicago cops shot Quintonio LeGrier, 19, and Bettie Jones, 54, a grandmother, as she opened the front door to let the police in.

In the face of mass protests of tens of thousands who marched night after night in 2014 over the police murders of Eric Garner in New York and Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the cops were never

charged. And while there has been an uptick in prosecutions since then, with 24 last year compared to less than five a year over the previous decade (*New York Times*, 30 December 2015), killer cops are almost never convicted. While thousands of civilians were killed by police from 2005 to 2014, only eleven cops were convicted of anything, according to the *Washington Post* (11 April 2015).

The slaughter has become so notorious that there are now multiple lists of victims, updated daily. In addition to killedbypolice.net, the second and most detailed accounting is The Counted, a project of the London *Guardian*, which showed 1,138 killed by police in 2015. A third compilation, at mappingpoliceviolence.org, gave a total of 1,152, while a fourth, by the *Washington Post* (with the apparent intent of whitewashing the cops), showed a death toll of "only" 986. African

can Americans make up one-third of those killed by the police, and together with Latinos, Asians or Native American victims,

fully half the victims are racial/ethnic minorities. Compare that to Britain, where

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Mobilize Labor-Black-Immigrant Power – Only Workers Revolution Can Bring Justice!



Demonstrators in New York City on December 28, the night it was announced that the Cleveland cop who murdered 12-year-old Tamir Rice would not be indicted for anything.

Ellen Moynihan / Gothamist

Drive U.S./NATO Imperialists Out of the Middle East!

Democrat Sanders Aboard the "War on Terror" Bandwagon

Following the November 13 Paris attack and the December 2 rampage in San Bernardino, California, both claimed by the Islamic State (I.S., also known as ISIS), the Western world seems engulfed in an anti-terrorist frenzy. France's "Socialist" president François Hollande declares a perpetual state of emergency as police kick in doors in immigrant neighborhoods while the fascist National Front surges ahead in regional elections. In the United States, the presidential election campaign has become an orgy of xenophobia and militarism. As Donald Trump calls to ban all Muslim immigrants, his Republican rivals and governors present soft-core ver-

sions of the same ("no Syrian refugees in my state," they say). Meanwhile, Democrats debate how to escalate U.S. imperialist war in the Middle East, whether "no fly zones," U.S. troops or outsourcing the ground war to "moderate" *jihadis* in Syria and the Saudi and other Arabian monarchists who have bankrolled and armed *all* the Islamist gangs.

Amid the "security" hysteria, the "mainstream" (i.e., big business) media are beginning the process of writing off Democratic contender Bernard Sanders as an "outlier." For quite a while, the Vermont senator, who describes himself as a "democratic socialist," enjoyed good press in order

to keep interest alive in the Democratic Party "contest." Hillary Clinton had that sewn up long ago in the real primaries, the fundraising race, where she far outpaces Sanders, mainly due to big money, the heavy hitters on Wall Street and in Hollywood. Now it's time to send a message to the voters, so the populist challenger is portrayed as "soft on terrorism." In an article on the latest Democratic debate, the *New York Times* (20 December) wrote of Sanders:

"His progressive political message, so popular with liberals for much of 2015, now seems lost in a fog of fear. Americans are more anxious about terrorism than in

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come inequality. They want the government to target the Islamic State more than Wall Street executives and health insurers. All of this plays to Mrs. Clinton's strengths – not only as a hawkish former secretary of state but also as a savvy politician who follows the public mood."

But for all the pundits' supposed expertise on what "Americans" think, based on polls which reflect media-manufactured "public opinion," Sanders is fully on board the imperialist "war on terror" bandwagon.

Hillary Clinton is indeed a certified war hawk, her hands dripping with blood, from Iraq to Libya and Syria. She is certainly the candidate most likely to escalate the U.S. war in the Middle East to a region-wide and even world war, far more dangerous than a Donald Trump. Sanders' supposed "antiwar" credentials, however, are solely based on voting against the U.S. war on Iraq as a "blunder," akin to Obama's opposition to George W. Bush's "dumb war" (which hasn't stopped him from launching "dumb and dumber" wars once in office). In fact, Sanders has a long history of supporting U.S. imperialist wars, and Zionist Israel's invasion of Gaza.¹ As Hillary Clinton pointed out in the December 19 debate, this self-proclaimed "democratic socialist" voted for the U.S. war in Afghanistan, and despite his criticism of Clinton's predilection as secretary of state for "regime change," notably in Libya, he also voted for military action to oust Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi.

In a November 19 policy speech on "Democratic Socialism and Foreign Policy" at Georgetown University, Sanders emphatically declared that "the United States must pursue policies to destroy the brutal and barbaric ISIS regime" and to "prevent fanatical extremist ideologies from flourishing." He cited as a model the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), supposedly founded "in response to the fear of Soviet aggression," as a "collective defense against a common enemy." He said, "We must create a new organization like NATO" to "combat the global threat of terror." But NATO was in fact the spearhead of the anti-Soviet Cold War, and by "we" he means U.S. imperialism, which is far and away the most brutal, barbaric, murderous terrorist regime on the face of the planet. Sanders has been Cold Warrior since his student days in the virulently anti-Communist Young People's Socialist League (YPSL). As internationalist com-

¹ See "If Donkeys Could Fly: Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left," *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015.



Trade unionists march in 2010 against Obama's drone strikes that have killed thousands in Pakistan. Bernie Sanders says he will continue to use drones.

munists we fight to *smash imperialism by international socialist revolution.*

Sanders supports Obama's policies in the Middle East. He won't rule out using drones. Like Clinton, he wants to oust Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, just later. He calls for an international coalition against the Islamic State, but with the fighting done "primarily by Muslim nations," including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE and his favorite, King Abdullah of Jordan. Yet Abdullah is a puppet of the Israelis to keep the Palestinians caged, and the oil-rich Arabian monarchies are extreme Islamist regimes which along with Erdoğan's supposedly "moderate" Islamist government in Turkey have been financing and arming all of the *jihadi* gangs in Syria, including the I.S. Unlike the capitalist Democrat Sanders, who uses slightly social-democratic rhetoric to disguise his imperialist politics, genuine socialists would seek to overthrow *all* these Sunni autocrats who lord it over a population of downtrodden Shiites and foreign-born workers without rights, to eradicate the sectarian militias they back in Syria, and to drive their imperialist overlords from the region.

"Welfare State" Capitalism in Denmark, "New Deal" Liberalism in the U.S.

In the first Democratic debate in October, when questioned about calling himself a "democratic socialist," Sanders responded that the U.S. "should look to countries like Denmark, like Sweden and Norway" as an example. In particular, he is taken with Denmark, inviting the Danish ambassador to a speaking tour of Vermont and writing an article extolling the virtues of its free health care and education, guaranteed income, pa-

rental leave and high trade-union membership. Sanders' praise drew a complaint from Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen of Denmark's Liberal Party that his country is "far from a socialist planned economy" but rather a "market economy." In fact, the governing "center-right" coalition rests on the support of the virulently anti-immigrant Danish People's Party (DFP). The so-called Nordic "welfare state" (or "social state"), erected under social-democratic governments, is nothing but capitalism with some more social programs, many of them now being whittled down.

In the Danish case in particular, this is combined with aggressive imperialist military policies abroad. Danish tanks participated in the 1994 war against Bosnian Serbs, Danish F-16s bombed Serbia in the 1999 U.S./NATO war, hundreds of Danish troops participated in the invasion and occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2007, Danish warplanes played an outsize role in the NATO assault on Libya in 2011, and former Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen was head of NATO from 2009 to 2014. Denmark was part of the U.S./NATO occupation of Afghanistan from start to finish, from late 2001 until it was formally ended in December 2014. A documentary film, *Armadillo* (2011), shows hostile Afghan villagers, children chanting "Go home!" at Danish soldiers on patrol and Danish soldiers executing wounded Taliban prisoners. In September 2014, the Social Democratic-led Danish government sent a squadron of jets and 250 military personnel to participate in the war against the I.S. in Iraq.

In Denmark itself the welfare state for citizens has been accompanied by harsh restrictions on immigration, and the rise of anti-immigrant racism. In 2006, the furor over anti-Muslim cartoons in a Danish provincial paper sent shock waves around the Middle East.² Earlier this year, the Social Democratic government tried to cut back on refugees from Syria by limiting residence for those fleeing wars to one year. The anti-immigrant backlash brought a right-wing coalition into office that has slashed social benefits for refugees by 50 percent and im-

² We wrote at the time: "The League for the Fourth International condemns the anti-Muslim cartoons as a racist provocation against immigrants and an attempt to whip up war frenzy, while at the same time we oppose any censorship by the bourgeois state." See "Racist Anti-Muslim Provocations Trigger Storm of Islamic Reaction," in *The Internationalist* No. 23, April-May 2006.

posed a year's wait for family reunification. The government even placed ads in Lebanese papers saying how bad it was to immigrants. When that wasn't enough, it stopped trains at the German border to pull refugees off. Now the Danish parliament is debating a bill to seize refugees' cash and valuables, including jewelry (only excepting wedding rings!). No wonder "Refugees are fleeing Denmark, a Scandinavian 'wonderland,' en masse" (*Washington Post*, 11 September).

So we have rampant anti-immigrant racism, aggressive imperialist militarism and "welfare state" capitalism governed by right-wing parties in a small country that (like Sanders' Vermont) is largely ethnically homogeneous – hardly a "democratic socialist" model for the U.S. What Bernie Sanders is campaigning for in 2016 has even less to do with any notion of socialism, however devalued. We're not the only ones who've noticed. In an October 25 PBS interview with Charlie Rose, challenged about what was "socialist" about his program, Sanders responded:

"We got a really strong socialist senior program, it's called Social Security, how's that? Social Security has come a long way to lowering poverty among seniors since Roosevelt introduced it. We got well over 50 million people who are on Social Security. Lyndon Johnson introduced a very strong socialist-type program in the '60s, it's called Medicare. We have a beautiful national park system owned by the people of the United States. We have a postal service owned by the people. If you go to your local library, if you call up the fire department, it is owned by the people. So we have many socialist programs in the United States."

Only in the fevered imaginations of Tea Party reactionaries, Ayn Rand fanatics and Wall Street moguls does any of this have anything to do with socialism. When Sanders went on to rebuilding the crumbling infrastructure, roads, rivers, etc., Rose responded, "That doesn't require you to be a socialist" and said "I'm the first person trying to argue you away from the idea that you're a socialist." Later Sanders told another talk show host, Stephen Colbert, that he prefers the label "progressive."

In his Georgetown University speech Sanders ran through a list of the programs ascribed to Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s – social security, unemployment insurance, abolition of child labor, collective bargaining, banking regulation, jobs programs, and concluded saying, "Almost everything he proposed, almost every program, every idea he introduced was called socialist." Whereupon he winks, and the audience applauds. With a wink and a nod, "democratic socialist" Sanders is a New Deal Democrat. To disappointed liberals who lament the rightward drift of the Democratic Party that might sound like a "political revolution," but Roosevelt's entire program was intended to save capitalism from revolution ... and to co-opt the left. While labor struggles spread, the social-democratic and Stalinist reformists quickly fell into line with FDR liberalism. Did that end poverty, provide security and "economic freedom" for the masses and put people back to work? It did not. It was the imperialist World War II that finally ended the Depression.

Any supporter of Bernie Sanders who seriously thinks he could win the nomination has a deep misunderstanding of the

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The League of Pre-Squeezed Lemons

Yesterday's "Obama Socialists," Today's Bernie Boosters

Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!

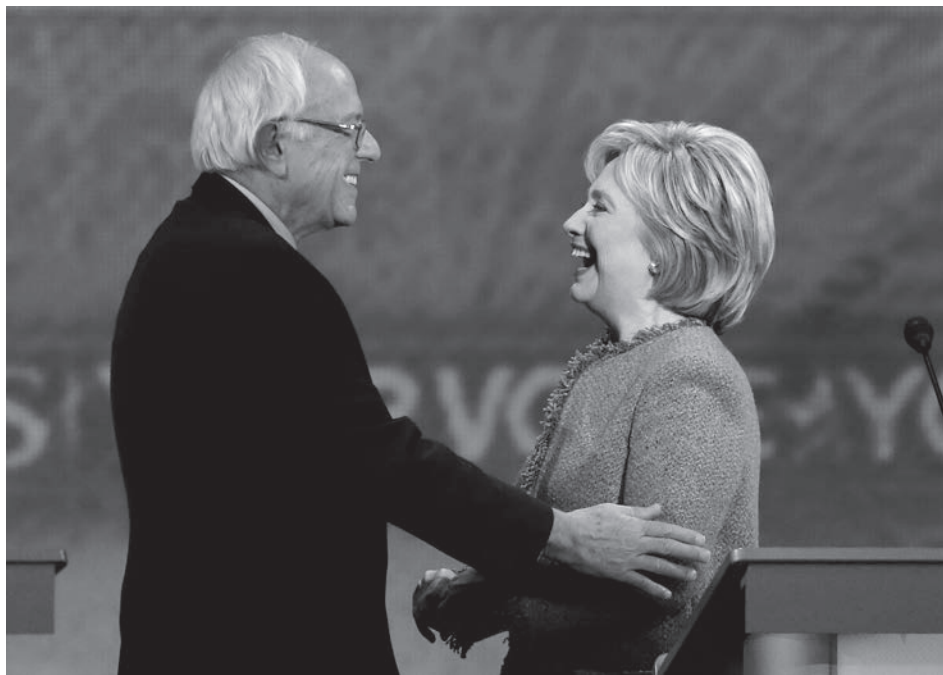
Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign has nothing to do with winning people to socialism. It's all about getting disaffected "progressives" and youth to vote Democratic in 2016, and at most to nudge this pillar of American capitalism in a slightly more liberal direction. Sanders is well aware of his role. In 2008, Barack Obama won by feigning an antiwar stance in a country sick of the Iraq War, and by exciting large numbers of youth and African Americans with the prospect of the first black president of this country founded on slavery. Today after eight years of Obama's administration, governing on behalf of Wall Street while continuing and escalating the U.S.' endless war in the Middle East, that brand is well past its sell-by date. Sanders has noted that Republicans win when there is low voter turnout, and in 2014 midterm elections 80% of youth didn't vote. So he seeks to "reinvigorate democracy" by pushing a liberal populist program spiced up with some "socialist" rhetoric and talk of a "political revolution" to attract them.

Some of Sanders' earliest backers are leftovers from the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement, with its populist jibes at "the 1%." (He goes them one better, attacking "the 1/10th of 1%.") This includes the hip Marxoid *Jacobin* Magazine, whose initiators came out of Cold War social democracy. On the other hand, the Vermont senator's "color-blind" economic populism has *not* attracted the tens and hundreds of thousands of young people and others who marched against racist police terror in 2014.¹ What Sanders *has* done is place much of the socialist left in a quandary, as reformists and opportunists dream of having an audience in big-time bourgeois politics. Some still want to maintain a pretense of independence from the Democratic Par-

¹ See "Capitalism's Racist Electoral Circus Is Back," *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.

nature of the Democratic Party. It's not that Sanders is in any way a threat to American capitalism. On the contrary, he is doing his very best to keep social discontent, of which there is plenty, corralled within the bourgeois electoral arena and under the thumb of this party beholden to Wall Street and a pillar of U.S. imperialist domination of the world. His job is to lure the disaffected back into the Democratic fold, to "sheepdog for the Democrats" rounding up strays. Vote for "Bernie" and you will get "Hillary" and the "Global War on Terror" (GWOT), which he also supports. Revolutionary socialists, communists and class-conscious working people must oppose Democrats, Republicans and all capitalist parties in order to defeat imperialist aggression in the Middle East, and to build a revolutionary workers party to lead international socialist revolution. ■

January-February 2016



Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton yuk it up at December 19 Democratic candidates debate. Opportunist leftists snuggle up to self-described democratic socialist Sanders. Buyer beware: vote "progressive" Bernie and you'll get war-monger Hillary. But then, Sanders also supports imperialist "war on terror."

ty of war, poverty and racism. Others want to go all the way with "Bernie," hoping to pick up disappointed Sanderistas when he endorses "Hillary" after the charade of primary elections. Genuine revolutionary Marxists and communists, in contrast, warn against the Sanders swindle.

The pseudo-socialists have had some practice at this con game already. Almost all of today's Bernie Boosters were, in one way or another, "Obama Socialists" in 2008. In the "all-in for Bernie" corner we have the Communist (in name only) Party (CPUSA) and the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America (DSA). These star-spangled social patriots almost always back the Democratic presidential nominee no matter who it is. The CPUSA, which in 2008 proclaimed "A New Era Begins" over Obama's election, now headlines: "Feeling the Bern: Bernie Sanders is hot in Los Angeles" (*People's World*, 11 August). In turn, a DSA vice chairman was quoted in a front-page article in the *Wall Street Journal* (11 December) hailing Sanders, who has spoken at DSA conventions, as "a gift from the gods." The organ of finance capital quoted Sanders saying in an interview that he supports "the strong entrepreneurial spirit that we have in this country," that he is *not* for government ownership of the means of production, and only wants "to make certain that the wealth is much more equitably distributed than is currently the case."

Of the social democrats who simulate a degree of separation from the Democratic Party (the DSA doesn't even pretend), the most prominent are the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative (SAlt). The DSA is a continuator of the "State Department socialists" whose chief ideologist was Max Shachtman, who split from Trotskyism refusing to defend the Soviet Union in World War II claiming it was "bureaucratic collectivist" (and who later became a propagandist for U.S. imperialism). The ISO is an heir of Tony Cliff, who broke with Trotskyism refus-

ing to defend the USSR in the post-WWII Cold War, labeling it "state capitalist." SAlt is an offshoot of the Militant tendency of Ted Grant, who along with Cliffites and Shachtmanites (and most of the left) condemned Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In contrast, authentic Trotskyists *hailed* the Soviet army in Afghanistan and, while calling for political revolution to oust the sellout Kremlin bureaucracy, intransigently defended the USSR and Soviet bloc deformed workers states against imperialism and counterrevolution.

We have already commented on the pseudo-debate between SAlt and the ISO over how to sidle up to the populist Democratic candidate ("Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left," *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015). While SAlt has plunged ever deeper into the Sanders campaign, the ISO continues to piously wish that Sanders, the long-serving imperialist bourgeois politician, were "independent." This hasn't stopped these Cliffite social democrats from gushing with enthusiasm over his campaign, with article after article praising Sanders as a "breath of fresh air," "a welcome departure from the mainstream," saying everyone "should welcome Sanders' praise for 'democratic socialism' and his frequent appeals to the virtues of Scandinavian social democracy," that "Bernie Sanders' call for political revolution is welcome," etc. We've seen this "breath of fresh air" stuff before from the ISO ... over Barack Obama.

When Obama, then a senator from Illinois, started making waves with his high-flown liberal rhetoric and denunciation of Bush's "dumb war" in Iraq, the ISO quickly sensed an opportunity. It showed up at a February 2007 Obama rally in Chicago with a banner reading "Obama: Stand Up! Cut the funding!" As past masters in opportunism, they were soon repeating the Democratic candidate's campaign slogans, plastering "Yes We Can" and "The Politics of Change or Politics as Usual" (along with

a flattering photo of Obama) on the cover of its magazine, the *International Socialist Review* (see "The 'Obama Socialists,'" *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009). Then, after Obama took office and presented his first federal budget the ISO proclaimed: "After 30 years of Republican ascendance in Washington and the retreat of liberalism at every turn, Obama's willingness to draw the line and promise a fight for his priorities is a welcome blast of fresh air." Obama's priorities included the biggest U.S. military budget since World War II.

Socialist Alternative likewise hailed Obama's war budget as "a sharp break from political policies during the last 30 years" (*Justice*, March-April 2009). Nowadays, SAlt is all Bernie, all the time. Its other, implicitly pro-Democratic Party campaigns like \$15 Now which proposed to win a \$15/hr. minimum wage by legislative and ballot initiatives, have fallen by the wayside as it pushes the populist Democrat. After an initial pro-forma call to "persuade" Sanders to run for president as an independent, which he had already rejected, and saying it was a "mistake" for him to run in the Democratic primaries, SAlt dropped any pretended scruples and has been busily participating in "People for Bernie," "Labor for Bernie" and similar efforts, while mounting the Million Student March as a pro-Sanders event. Now, in time-honored opportunist fashion, it has formed a new front group for the campaign. If the DSA has #WeNeedBernie, SAlt has set up #Movement4Bernie as its own wholly owned subsidiary to recruit out of.

A statement on the website of #M4B calls to "Join the political revolution against the billionaire class," in order to "help Bernie win in 2016, stop the right-wing Republicans and counter the Wall Street dominated Democratic Party establishment." Similarly, it calls to "Challenge Clinton" but "Stop the Republican Right." It even has a shout-out to "Many people [who] are excited about the prospect of having our first woman President." So just as Sanders carefully avoids labeling Clinton the candidate of Wall Street, although she practically invited it in the first Democratic debate, Socialist "Alternative" goes out of its way to *not* attack the Democratic Party as such, and certainly not to denounce it or call to break from this capitalist party. With its deliberate silences and weasly formulations about "countering" and "challenging" the Democratic "establishment," SAlt is participating in Sanders' campaign in the Democratic primaries while cynically slithering around to avoid saying so openly.

If anyone had any doubt on that score, the first initiative of this new "movement" was to publicize a letter from SAlt's "socialist" Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant defending Sanders in a flap inside the Democratic Party over his campaign sneaking a look at a Hillary Clinton campaign voter database. The #Movement4Bernie is a get-rich-quick scheme, and SAlt has to move in a hurry, to make headway among Sanders' supporters before the Ber-

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Baltimore, Cleveland: “The System Is Rigged”

When a Baltimore judge declared a hung jury in the proceedings against William Porter, the first of the police officers to go on trial for the death of Freddie Gray last April, hundreds of demonstrators gathered, many questioning why there was no conviction. “We want justice and we’re just not going to get it,” said a protester with a banner reading “It Stops With Cops.” He added, “This just sets the stage for all the other trials” of the five cops also charged in the case (*Baltimore Sun*, 17 December). In fact, many “legal observers” expected Porter to be acquitted since he faced the least serious charges and is black. Due to the mistrial, he may now be offered immunity or a plea bargain to get his testimony against the others. Or not.

Porter was charged with failing to call for medical help when Gray asked for it, and with not securing him with a seat belt, which meant that his body was bounced around in the van that prosecutors said caused his death (although witnesses reported Freddie was already screaming in pain when cops tossed him in the van handcuffed). Porter’s “defense” was that he thought Gray was faking his injuries and that prisoners were rarely belted, even though that is required and police brass had been on a campaign demanding it because of the high cost of court suits resulting from the notorious “rough rides” given to those arrested. The prosecution didn’t rebut this naked assertion of police power in setting their own rules.

And the minute the trial was over, the police began asserting that power on the street. With a few dozen protesters gathered outside the courthouse, they immediately arrested activist leaders Kwame Rose and pastor Westley West for blocking the sidewalk, and slammed a 16-year-old against a glass door, with cops piling on top of him (supposedly for using a bullhorn, although he wasn’t, and even if he were, that’s no crime). The city has spent millions on new police equipment since last spring, and during the trial it brought in state troopers and riot police from all over the area along with Bearcats and other military vehicles, holding them at the ready in Druid Hill Park to strike at a moment’s notice in case of unrest.

Meanwhile, Baltimore paid \$6.4 million to the family of Freddie Gray to settle civil claims. To the extent that loss of black lives matters to city rulers, it is mainly the price they pay to settle legal issues, which they dismiss as a cost of doing business, much as giant corporations routinely violate environmental and safety laws and regulations and write off fines as a business expense. In this case the money is supposed to come from millions in anticipated awards, including a class action against Wall Street banks. But the bankers are beginning to worry about the “soaring” cost of police misconduct cases, which for the ten cities with the largest police departments went from \$168 million in 2010 to \$249 million in 2014 (*Wall Street Journal*, 16 July 2015).

Back in Freddie Gray’s neighborhood, journalist John Eligon tweeted about the response to the mistrial, “People in Sandtown

told me they didn’t expect justice in Freddie Gray’s death. They expected disappointment. Passions, anger and yearning for change that Ferguson sparked are still real and strong. But not many were surprised at the mistrial.... I saw that same sense of resigned defeat before and after the grand jury announcement in Ferguson. Even as activism has grown over [the] past year, many here and there have no faith in the justice system’s treatment of blacks” (*New York Times*, 17 December).

“When are we going to get justice?” asked a young woman at the Gilmore Homes public housing project where Freddie was arrested. Baltimore and its then police commissioner, Anthony Batts, have been hailed by the *Interim Report of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing* (March 2015), appointed by Obama in response to the Mike Brown and Eric Garner protests. Baltimore was the model of “promotion of community trust” and overcoming “the role of policing in past and present injustice and discrimination.” Yet one month after that report came out there was the Baltimore upheaval over the police murder of Freddie Gray. Every one of the bogus “reforms” recommended by liberals has been tried in Baltimore, and changed nothing.

- Black mayor? Baltimore has it, and a majority black city council.
- Black police chief? Baltimore had it, for years.
- Black police? Almost half the police force is black.
- Civilian review board? Baltimore has it.

Now we had a trial with a black prosecutor, a black judge, and a jury with seven black jurors out of 12. And the result? Zero. Why? Certainly “because the system

is rigged” (D. Watkins, in *City Paper* [Baltimore], 22 December). There’s the “blue wall of silence” from this uniformed mafia, and rules negotiated with the Fraternal Order of Police blocking questioning of cops after an incident. There’s the “qualified immunity” of police from civil lawsuits, even for negligence and gross negligence resulting in death.¹ There is the grand jury system controlled by prosecutors elected or appointed according to the will of the FOP. There are the decisions of the Supreme Court permitting searches without warrants, trespassing, entrapment and other abuses.

While leftists leading protests against police murder have popularized the chant, “Indict, convict, send the killer cops to jail,” that almost never occurs. And for a very simple reason: the job of the police is to “serve and protect” capital. The killers in blue are there to defend the interests of the exploiters against the exploited, and all those who have good reason to revolt. Their targets are first and foremost African American, Latino and other oppressed sec-

¹ See “Killer Cops, White Supremacists: Racist Terror Stalks Black America,” *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015.



Workers revolution will avenge Mike Brown (Ferguson), Freddie Gray (Baltimore), Tamir Rice (Cleveland), Palestinians in Gaza and kidnapped and Ayotzinapa students in Mexico.

tors, and the working class which produces the fabulous wealth of the ruling class.

The main left group active in Baltimore, Workers World Party (through its Peoples Power Assembly), which has made “indict, convict” its trademark slogan, has lately taken a more leftist tack, with an article on “Racist police violence & the need for socialist revolution” (*Workers World*, 14 January). The article quotes Marx, Engels and Lenin, and says quite accurately that “the real aim of the police is not to protect and serve but to terrorize and oppress the workers and oppressed as a class. And just as the police cannot be reformed, neither can the capitalist system.” But this comes right after, and flatly contradicts, the WWP’s call for “disarming the police, which is part and parcel of the overall demand for community control of the police.”

The idea that the capitalists and their politicians would permit “the community” of working, poor and oppressed people to control the cops – the hard core of the capitalist state apparatus – goes utterly against the Marxist analysis of that state. Calling for it, as the WWP and other pseudo-socialist groups do, is promoting a deadly reformist illusion. The same goes for the notion of “disarming the police” – much less in a country of 330 million people with some 310 million non-military firearms!

Cleveland: Killer Cop Murders Tamir Rice, 12, and Walks

Next up in the parade of racist injustice was Cleveland. For months, even as a grand jury was deliberating in secret, Cuyahoga County district attorney Timothy McGinty had been leaking material to the press seeking to exonerate Timothy Loehmann, the cop who gunned down 12-year-old Tamir Rice in November 2014. Lawyers for Tamir’s mother complained, “We have never seen a prosecutor try so hard to lose a case” (*New York Times*, 24 December). Sure enough, when the grand jury returned its verdict on December 28 it was not to indict killer cop Loehmann, or his partner. Cleveland pastor Rev. Jawaanza Colvin noted, “The fact that we are not



So determined were Baltimore’s rulers to isolate protesters against police murder that they had Orioles play April 28 game before empty stadium.

Gail Burton/AP

DOSSIER: THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND RACIST KILLER COPS

surprised is in and of itself an indictment of the culture of the criminal justice system.”

The decision provoked a wave of repudiation. Millions had seen the surveillance video which showed the patrol car pulling up right next to Tamir, the officer stepping out with gun drawn and immediately shooting (“less than 2 seconds”). There was no time to make three verbal warnings (as the police claimed), and if the cops really thought they faced a deadly threat they would never have gotten so close to Tamir. They then left their victim bleeding on the ground for over ten minutes as the life drained out of him. When Tamir’s sister ran to her brother they tackled her, handcuffed her and threw her in the back of the police cruiser. His mother was also prevented from coming to her child’s aid.

In justifying the decision, which he spoon-fed to the jury, D.A. McGinty argued that this was a “perfect storm of human error, mistakes and miscommunications.” The fact that the initial caller said that the gun was “probably fake” and the person waving it was “probably a juvenile” and that the responding police were

not informed of this goes way beyond “miscommunication.” The cops radioed in that the black male was “maybe 20” years old, rather than 12. An assistant prosecutor said Rice “was big for his age and easily could have been mistaken for someone much older” (AP, 28 December). But he was 5’7,” which even the coroner said was normal for a young adolescent. And since when does being big for your age justify getting shot?

It was a “perfect storm,” all right, not of “human error,” but of ingrained racism, outright lies and a system set up to guarantee that the murderous police would go free. You had an unstable cop who had been forced out of another police department for a “dangerous loss of composure” during firearms training. You have a police department notorious for the use of “excessive force,” capable of shooting a child at point-blank range. You have a racist prosecutor’s office that will cover for this heinous crime. And you have a legal doctrine that permits it.

Since that doctrine is applied universally throughout the United States, and is

used to justify the large majority of the more than 1,000 civilians killed by cops every year, it is worth going into briefly.

McGinty released a 74-page “final report” on the killing of Tamir Rice, half of which is dedicated to arguing that “Police officers may not be criminally charged in deadly force incidents unless their conduct violates the Fourth Amendment” against unreasonable search and seizure; that “[u]nder the Fourth Amendment, the tactics used by the officers prior to the use of deadly force cannot be the basis for finding the use of deadly force itself unreasonable”; and that “[t]he incident conforms to the Cleveland Police Department Active Shooter policy,” which “calls for the first officers responding to a scene to quickly engage and attempt to neutralize active shooters” in order to “prevent death or serious harm to innocent persons.”

Yet there was *no one* anywhere around where Tamir was *sitting*, threatening no one. The Cleveland PD policy amounts to a directive to “shoot to kill first, ask questions later.” And the reference to the Fourth Amendment encapsulates “police privi-

lege” in the use of deadly force. According to the U.S. Supreme Court (*Tennessee v. Garner*), a search or seizure by police (including killing) is “reasonable,” if based on “probable cause” of a “significant threat of death or serious physical injury.” So, unlike the general population, a cop just has to claim he felt he was “probably” threatened and he can get away with murder. Literally. As killer cop Loehmann did.

The system *is* rigged, deliberately. As we have noted previously, this has been true of all class societies since the appearance of the state, that apparatus of “special bodies of armed men” (the military and police, together with courts and prisons), as “an organization for the protection of the possessing class against the non-possessing class” (Friedrich Engels in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1885). As Engels noted, the police are everywhere protected by “special decrees, which invest them with a peculiar sanctity and inviolability.” Result: *there is no justice for the oppressed in the capitalist courts*, here or anywhere else. It will take a socialist revolution to get it. ■

Minneapolis: “Cops and Klan Go Hand in Hand”

In the early hours of Sunday, November 15, an unarmed black man, Jamar Clark, 24, was shot in the head by police in north Minneapolis, Minnesota just a couple blocks from the 4th Precinct station. A crowd gathered at the scene screaming at the cops. According to witnesses, Jamar was in handcuffs when he was shot. Police at first denied he was cuffed, but the Minneapolis Bureau of Criminal Apprehensions later said it was “still examining” the issue. Handcuffed or not, whatever the circumstances of what authorities are calling his “altercation” with the police, Jamar Clark is one more victim of murderous, racist U.S. capitalist rule. Even in “progressive” Minneapolis, police murder unarmed black men in plain view on the street.

The next day protests led by Minneapolis Black Lives Matter marched through the city. Family members reported that Jamar had been shot point-blank, right above the eye “execution-style.” An official of the local NAACP told the press that they had been saying for some time that “Minneapolis is just one bullet away from Ferguson. That bullet was fired last night.” The city has a history of police killings, 29 since 2000, 18 of them of black people. Two-thirds of those arrested are African Americans, although they are only 20% of the population. Minneapolis was already one of six cities nationwide in a Justice Department “pilot project” to “improve community relations.” Feeling the heat, the mayor immediately called for a federal investigation.

When Jamar died in the hospital two days later after being taken off life support, enraged protesters besieged the police station demanding that video footage from the shooting be released. Meanwhile, hundreds streamed onto the nearby I-94 freeway and shut it down for several hours; 51 were arrested. As people returned to the spot where Jamar was shot, they set up an encampment saying they wouldn’t let the issue go away. The police crackdown only escalated tension. Protest spread to the la-

bor movement, as AFSCME Local 3800, which represents clerical workers at the University of Minnesota, and the SEIU Minnesota State Council passed resolutions of solidarity with Black Lives Matter demonstrators and repudiating police attacks.

That Saturday, November 21, over 200 union members from around the Twin Cities gathered at the 4th Precinct campsite where labor officials from the state Nurses Association, Letter Carriers, and others including the vice president of SEIU Healthcare MN and the president of the St. Paul Federation of Teachers, spoke out. “It is our union’s duty to fight for our freedom ... we have nothing to lose but our chains,” said CWA Local 7250 activist Alanna Galloway to cheers and applause. But as protests continued, the police built a concrete barrier in front of the precinct. When racists began showing up, cops made “disparaging comments to those at the protests instead of taking the threat seriously,” a BLM organizer said.

Then late on November 23, four masked fascists who had previously harassed the protests appeared and began filming the camp. When a safety committee escorted them away after they refused to remove the masks, the white supremacist infiltrators began firing, shooting five protesters, all black men. A relative of Jamar Clark told the *New York Times* (25 November) that the police just “sat here and watched.” When protesters asked why they didn’t do anything, the police responded, “This is what you all wanted, right?” As the would-be assassins fled, police *attacked the encampment* with pepper spray. Here was proof positive: from the days of Jim Crow to today, “cops and Klan go hand in hand.”



Black residents of North Minneapolis demand answers from police at 4th Precinct on November 15 after Jamar Clark was shot by cops.

The murderous attack did not deter people waging a determined fight against racist injustice. The next day, November 24, protests swelled as thousands marched on City Hall. Students and campus workers came from the UofM. Hundreds of high school students walked out at Southwest and Washburn high schools to join the downtown march, defying the previous day’s fascist attackers and drawing attention to the *de facto* segregation of Minneapolis public schools. By the end of the day, three of the white supremacist attackers were arrested. They had bragged in an on-line video that they were headed to the protest, flashing a pistol and spewing racist insults, saying they were going to “make the fire rise” and to “stay white.”

Outrageously, and typically, the response of various politicians to the deadly attack was to *smear the protesters* and increase pressure to shut down the protest camp. Mayor Betsy Hodges held a press

conference with U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison denouncing “near-daily threats to burn the precinct, kill our officers and to hurt people.” The *Star Tribune* (1 December) reported, “Hodges described the scene as one with protesters’ warming fires polluting the air, makeshift barricades blocking ambulances and snowplows, and outside agitators committing violence with guns.” Finally, at 4 a.m. on December 3, the city brought in police and dump trucks and gave the Black Lives Matter protesters 15 minutes to pack up and get out or be arrested (eight were).

Significantly, all of the politicians involved are from the Democratic Farmer-Labor Party (DFL), including Mayor Hodges, Rep. Ellison, Governor Mark Dayton (of the Dayton/Target department store dynasty, married to a Rockefeller heiress) and the rest. Although Minnesota has turned to the right in recent decades, the DFL (a merger of the Democrats and

Jeff Wheeler/Star Tribune

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the Farmer Labor Party), from which Hubert Humphrey purged the Communists in 1948, has a reputation of being on the liberal wing of the Democratic Party nationally. Yet here are the liberal Democrats lining up to defame anti-racist demonstrators, defend the cops and then order police to remove the protesters, all the while claiming to respect First Amendment rights to free speech and assembly!

Having maintained the protest camp for 18 days in the face of freezing temperatures, fascist attack, and police threats and arrests, Black Lives Matter demonstrators refused to be intimidated. On December 23, hundreds of BLM protesters converged on the Mall of America in suburban Bloomington, the largest mall in the country, to protest on one of the biggest shopping days of the year. While a judge refused to enjoin protesters from coming, the mall owners brought in an army of rent-a-cops and state police in riot gear to enforce their “right as private property owners to prohibit demonstrations on our property.” The evicted protesters then proceeded to the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, where they faced a combined force of suburban police, managing to shut down access to Terminal 1 and temporarily block the highway.

Behind a liberal façade, Minneapolis has long had festering racism, and not just in the police. * Longtime Northside residents remember Nelson Tycel, 17, shot in the back six times in 1990 while fleeing from the police. Terrance Franklin, 22, was shot ten times in the back and back of the head in 2013 because police said someone said he looked like someone involved in a burglary a week earlier. There were demonstrations then, too, and demands that police practices change, but nothing did. Then there was Dominic Felder, suffering from mental health issues, who in 2006 was shot seven times in front of

* Recently the local Fox TV posted a casting call on its Facebook page for a “Caucasian Female co-host For Luxury Product Placement... no visible tattoos, 5’8” or taller” on a weekly TV show titled *Minnesota Nice* – until they got a flood of critical comments, and took the post down (*CityPages*, 5 January)!



Members of CUNY Internationalist Clubs joined hundreds who marched in NYC on November 24 in solidarity with Minneapolis protest over cop murder of Jamar Clark which was attacked by white supremacists

family members who had called 911 for help. The current police chief, Chief Janee Harteau, says she fired officers who made racist remarks in Green Bay. But Fraternal Order of Police head Bob Kroll belches out this filth almost daily.

Democrats and Republicans will not and cannot put a stop to racist police terror because they depend on the guard dogs of capital to maintain “law and order.” Some of these politicians feign support to protests like Black Lives Matter in order to make sure they don’t get “out of control” (i.e., threaten the domination of United Healthcare, Target, Best Buy, 3M, U.S. Bancorp, General Mills and other giant corporations). And if protesters can’t be assuaged by “I feel your pain” bromides, the liberals call in the cops. It is important that hundreds of trade unionists have come out to protest the murder of Jamar Clark. In another promising effort, young members of the United Electrical Workers in Burlington, Vermont organized a workers defense guard to counter the Ku Klux Klan. But much more is needed.

It is necessary to *mobilize the workers movement* to shut down the profit system. And that requires, first of all, a fight to break with the DFL and all bourgeois parties and politicians.

Several leftist groups have been involved in the Minneapolis protests, including Socialist Alternative (SAIt, whose candidate, Ty Moore, endorsed by the Green Party, narrowly lost a 2013 election for city council), Freedom Road Socialist Organization, Socialist Action and Workers International League. All criticize the Democrats, but fighting inside the unions to break the chokehold of this party of big business over labor is another matter. SAIt, in particular, limits itself to attacking the “Democratic Party establishment,” since it is now feverishly campaigning for Bernie Sanders as he runs in the Democratic primary. These social democrats consider cops to be “workers in uniform” and call for “community control of the police,” an illusion that flatly contradicts the Marxist understanding of the class nature of the state.

Instead of forlornly appealing for Democrat Obama’s federal government to “investigate” the police – which everyone from Black Lives Matter organizers to union leaders to the mayor did, and which will at most produce only cosmetic changes – the unions must move beyond gestures and bring out the economic and social power of their tens of thousands of members to *shut down the Twin Cities* and protect the protests. As an example, last May 1 International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 *shut down San Francisco Bay Area docks* and marched on Oakland City Hall at the head of thousands demanding “Stop Police Terror.”¹

On the same day, inspired by the Bay Area action, Class Struggle Workers – Portland, Oregon organized a multi-union

¹ See “May Day Oakland Port Shutdown Against Racist Cop Terror,” in *The Internationalist* No. 39, April-May 2015.



Union members came out to protest police murder of Jamal Clark, November 21. Labor must use its power to shut down the Twin Cities over racist cop terror.

contingent in the May Day 2015 protests marching under the banner, “Labor Against Racist Police Murder.” (The CSWP is a tendency in Portland-area unions that is politically supported by the Internationalist Group.) These are small examples of what needs to be done, but they point in the right direction. The idea that justice could be obtained by pressuring the courts and capitalist politicians to investigate, “reform” or prosecute the racist police on which capital depends is a dangerous illusion. We must look to using our own class power to put an end to the bloody lynch law system that has

taken so many of our brothers and sisters from us.

We need to oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and build a revolutionary workers party as a champion of the oppressed, a party in which African American, Latino, Asian, Native American and immigrant workers play a leading role. The task of this party is to finally sweep away the racist terrorists, in and out of uniform, and finish the Civil War, by achieving the revolutionary emancipation of today’s wage slaves from the tyranny of capital. ■

Killer Cops...

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3 people were killed by police in 2015, 1 in 2014, 0 in 2013; or Germany, where 2 were killed in 2015, 1 in 2014, 2 in 2013. *Like the death penalty, the massive racist killing by U.S. police goes back to the very foundation of American capitalism on the basis of slave labor. That bloody heritage continues to this day.*

According to the *Washington Post* (26 December), “the kind of incidents that have ignited protests in many U.S. communities — most often, white police officers killing unarmed black men — represent less than 4 percent of fatal police shootings.” Instead, “the great majority of people who died at the hands of the police fit at least one of three categories: they were wielding weapons, they were suicidal or mentally troubled, or they ran when officers told them to halt.” But contrary to the Fraternal Order of the Police (FOP), running from the cops, as Mike Brown did in Ferguson, is not a crime: he might have (rightly) feared for his life. Nor is mental illness. As for “wielding a weapon,” by the *Post*’s criteria the pocket knife in the hand of Laquan McDonald and toy guns like that held by Tamir Rice count as “weapons.”

The fact is that the police consider a badge a license to kill with impunity, and the statistics bear them out. Since the killing goes on and on – and despite all the cellphone videos, surveillance cameras videos, dashcam and now bodycam recordings, the killers are almost never punished – liberals now talk of better police “training.” But the police are doing exactly what they are trained to do: shoot to kill. Virulent racism is well-nigh universal in police

forces – a reflection of the fact that black and brown men in particular are targeted as “suspects.” Even where this is proven in great detail, for example in the Department of Justice investigation of Ferguson, nothing changes. What is hardly ever mentioned, however, is that the police have bosses, namely mayors and city councils, which in cities across the U.S. are *almost all Democrats*. The federal government, which supplies local cops with huge arsenals of heavy weapons, and controls the FBI, ICE and other police agencies, is also run by Democrats.

From mayors Rahm Emanuel in Chicago, Frank Jackson in Cleveland, Stephanie Rawlings-Blake in Baltimore and Bill de Blasio in New York City to Barack Obama in the White House and his attorney general Loretta Lynch, the political leaders who preside over the murderous police forces, and thus are responsible for the racist killing spree, are almost all Democrats. Obama, meanwhile, is running an international Murder, Inc., personally signing off on drone strikes that have killed thousands of civilians in Muslim countries. It is the Democratic Party of racist repression and imperialist war that is running the country on behalf of Wall Street. But since the Democrats’ partners in crime, the Republicans, like to play hard cop, especially in this election year, much of the anti-racist protest is directed at them. Racist state terror has been a cornerstone of U.S. capitalism throughout, and it is this system that must be shut down, by workers and the oppressed mobilizing our class power, leading to socialist revolution.

As the Internationalist Group has insisted from the start, *only revolution can bring justice!* ■

Overwhelming Vote Gains Union Recognition V-I-C-T-O-R-Y! B&H Workers in Big Win for Labor and Immigrant Rights

Hundreds of immigrant warehouse workers in Brooklyn, New York, won a historic victory on November 4 when their year-long organizing campaign brought a landslide unionization vote at the nationally known B&H Photo Video professional supply firm. On October 11, 18 and November 1, they had held spirited demonstrations outside the store on 34th Street in Manhattan. Now the decisive day had arrived. Well before sunrise on the 4th, workers gathered near the company's warehouses at the Navy Yards and Evergreen Avenue.

"Hoy vamos a ganar – we're going to win today," workers kept saying with a mixture of determination and jubilation as they had coffee and pastries brought by supporters and made sure everyone was showing up for the union certification election, held inside each of the two workplaces. As the polls opened at 6:30 a.m., the workers marched in detachments to the voting sites, chanting "*¿Qué queremos? ¡Unión! ¿Cuándo? ¡Ahora!*" (What do we want? Union! When do we want it? Now!) For activists in the workers movement and supporters of immigrant rights, it was a morning to remember.

"We're going to get 200 votes," vowed organizer Mahoma López of the Laundry Workers Center (LWC), reflecting the intensive, systematic nature of the organizing campaign. López is the leader of the Hot and Crusty bakery workers, whose successful 2012 unionization campaign inspired the B&H Photo warehouse workers' drive, which has been spearheaded by the LWC together with the United Steelworkers (USW).¹

Shortly after noon, as organizers and supporters waited impatiently nearby for the count, the news came – the vote in

¹ See "Victory to the B&H Photo Warehouse Workers' Struggle!", 19 October, at www.internationalist.org/victorybhworkers1015.html.



Some 250 warehouse workers fighting for a union and their supporters demonstrated in front of B&H Photo store in Manhattan, October 18. Referring to solidarity action three days earlier when management threatened mass firings, they chanted: "What happened Thursday shows that we are not afraid." On November 4, the B&H workers won union recognition by an overwhelming vote of 200 to 88.

favor of the union had won by an overwhelming 200 to 88, with approximately 80% participation. Inside, workers spread the word from department to department. Managers were downcast – "their heads were hanging," several workers reported – while some "congratulated" the workers on their victory, in a mocking tone but also recognizing the indisputable fact.

As they gathered after work that evening, workers expressed pride at standing up successfully to a company that used every trick in the anti-labor manual to try to intimidate, silence and wear them down. Two days before the vote, the company held a raffle and announced a party for the workers, but so few came that it was can-

celed. "We showed it can be done" workers said. Above all, there was determination to maintain their solid organization and unity, which won the union recognition vote, in the next battle: to win a union contract. Arturo Archila, lead organizer for the USW, told the workers, "This is your day, your victory. Now you will determine the demands for the contract struggle."

Two nights later, hundreds of workers, their families, together with organizers and supporters, packed a Brooklyn social hall in a spirited celebration of this victory. Workers' children chased balloons, strobe lights flashed, the dance floor was filled. T-shirts were silkscreened with the slogans "*Arriba trabajador, abajo explota-*

dor" (Up with the workers, down with the exploiters), and "*Unión, fuerza, solidaridad*" (Union, power, solidarity), frequently chanted in the demonstrations.

The formal program of the evening began with a recognition of the group of elected area leaders that was a key factor in the victory. Workers expressed appreciation for the role of the LWC in orienting the struggle, as well as to the dedicated team of lawyers, who played a key role in blocking one company dirty trick after another, and to groups that supported the struggle. The fact that the United Steelworkers threw its support behind the workers struggle, becoming their collective bargaining rep-

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Workers at the Evergreen Ave. warehouse of B&H Photo in Brooklyn held solidarity demonstration October 15 immediately upon hearing that workers at Navy Yard warehouse were threatened with mass firing.



On November 6, hundreds of B&H workers, their families and supporters jammed into a Brooklyn social hall to celebrate winning a union. This historic victory holds great promise for hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers.

Labor and All Defenders of Democratic and Women's Rights: After Colorado Attack: DEFEND ABORTION CLINICS!

On November 27, a gunman laid siege to a Planned Parenthood abortion clinic opposite a shopping mall in Colorado Springs, Colorado, killing three people including a police officer and wounding nine. At this point, authorities have released little information about the killer other than his name, and nothing about his ideology or affiliations. But it is clear that this is a domestic terror attack that is part of the right-wing assault on abortion rights that has been raging across the country for months. This is the terrorist wing of the virulent campaign to defund Planned Parenthood in action, the latest attempt to sabotage women's most basic rights.

Whether a fascist, a crazed religious fanatic, a deranged individual or whatever, the shooter targeted and entered the clinic, where abortion providers have been heroically providing vital medical services for women despite daily harassment by anti-abortion bigots. According to reports, there are at least a dozen people a day outside the facility seeking to intimidate women as they arrive for appointments, with the mobs sometimes swelling to 200-300 people. The attack underscores the need

for the workers movement and defenders of women's rights to **organize mass mobilization to defend the clinics**, not just in Colorado but everywhere.

Since the uproar this summer funded by ultra-rightist lobbies over Planned Parenthood's provision of fetal material for scientific research, there have been at least four cases of arson against Planned Parenthood clinics in the last four months, in Washington, California, Illinois and New Orleans. There are bills in at least eleven states to restrict the PP from providing health care to women, including contraception, ultrasounds, cancer screening and abortions. While Republicans have been leading the latest attacks, federal funding of abortion services was banned as early as 1978 under Democratic president Jimmy Carter.

Democrat Barack Obama says he is personally opposed to abortion, Hillary Clinton says she wants to make it "rare." Now Obama says Colorado Springs attack showed the need for more gun control. Wrong! What the deadly assault on the clinic made excruciatingly clear – as did the attack by white supremacists who shot five people two days earlier in Minneapolis, Minnesota at a protest camp demanding justice for Jamal Clark, another black youth gunned down by the police – is the need for defenders of women and all oppressed groups to have adequate means of protecting themselves, exercising their right to **organized armed self-defense**, and for **mass clinic defense to sweep away the anti-abortion thugs**.

While Democratic politicians join the attack on women's rights, even liberal women's rights groups refused to frontally oppose the rightist assault, refusing to pronounce the "A-word" (abortion) for fear of irking some reactionary constituency.

spokesman Antonio told the crowd at the November 6 celebration. "This is an example for all immigrants, as well as U.S.-born workers," he said. There are "half a million undocumented immigrants in New York City," he noted. At least 150,000 Mexicans live here, overwhelmingly workers, together with "Ecuadorans, Guatemalans and Dominicans, as well as Africans, Haitians, Chinese, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and so many others of us who share a life of exploitation with the black, Latin, Asian and white workers born in this county."

"We have to prepare for this example to spread," he continued, and for the next phase of this fight. Winning a union is a crucial first step. In the fight for a contract, it will be essential to mobilize the independent power of the workers as a class, with active support from the rest of NYC labor (transport, communications, construction, education and other unionists) and defend-

Free Abortion On Demand!



Internationalist photo

Internationalist protesters at November 28 emergency demo in New York City following the murders at Colorado Springs abortion clinic.

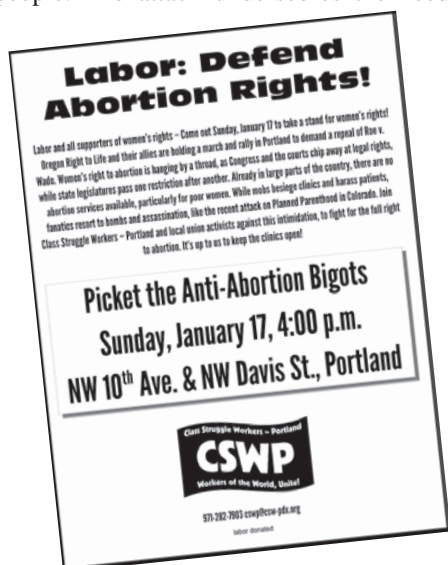
Thus the former National Abortion Rights League is now just NARAL, Inc. and many only call for women's "right to choose." Against the frenzied "god squads" of anti-abortion bullies, "right-to-life" killers and their politician accomplices who carry out their dirty work in the legislatures and courts, the Internationalist Group calls for **free abortion on demand!** It is up to the woman and her medical provider to make this decision, *and no one else*.

Tens of thousands of women die each year because of unsafe, botched abortions. The right to abortion contained in the There have been hundreds of attacks on abortion clinics over the years. Women's access to abortion services has been severely cut back, due to violent intimidation and rightist efforts to get state legislatures to enact impossible restrictions. Today there are twice as many fake abortion "counseling centers" that try to scare women into having an unwanted child as there are actual abortion clinics. As we wrote in 2006, and again at the time of the last murder of an

abortion provider, Dr. George Tiller in Wichita, Kansas in June 2006:

"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. See also "War on Abortion Rights Escalates," *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009. ■



Class Struggle Workers – Portland is organizing unionists to protest a rally of anti-abortion bigots.

B&H Workers...

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representative, was cited as a key part of the campaign. A high point of the evening was the reading of a poem in Spanish by warehouse worker Jorge Lora, who said in part: "More than a year ago, on a date I don't recall, a group of workers decided an empire had to fall. Subjected to mistreatment, disrespect and discrimination, this group was made up of workers who come from many nations.... It brought great satisfaction to see the union win... now the fight to win a contract is about to begin.... This struggle will continue."

We noted previously how the victorious struggle at the Hot and Crusty bakery in Manhattan inspired the one at B&H. Now the victory at B&H will inspire others among the heavily immigrant working class of New York, Internationalist Group

ers of immigrant rights. So, too, is remembering the lesson of struggles like Hot and Crusty, that "*Jugar con reglas del patrón es segura perdición*" (Playing by the boss' rules means you're sure to lose). To win, the workers must rely on their own class power, not on the institutions, media and politicians of the capitalist system.

"¡Unión, fuerza, solidaridad!"

A high-profile and lucrative business known throughout the photo and video industry, behind the scenes B&H's operation brings to mind the sweatshop labor and callous disregard for workers' safety that led to the "uprising of the 20,000" garment workers – mainly Jewish and Italian immigrant women and girls – in New York City, two years before the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire of 1911.

Facing a hard-line opponent in B&H management, LWC organizer Rosanna Ro-

dríguez emphasized, the workers' victory required courage and hard work, "a year of organizing, and a lot of sacrifice." This preparation, together with lessons the workers drew from attempts over the years to resist the employers' abuses, paid off big time. "The B&H workers have shown a level of organization, discipline and determination that I have rarely seen over many decades in the workers movement," a veteran labor activist told *The Internationalist*.

Three weeks before the vote to unionize the B&H warehouses, the workers showed the power of their solidarity and determination when managers and anti-union "consultants" threatened workers with mass firing at the Navy Yards location in retaliation for refusing to sign anti-union documents. On hearing of the employers' provocation, workers at the Evergreen Avenue warehouse immediately stopped work in a solidarity protest that knocked

The Internationalist

Mobilize Union Power Against “Right-To-Work” Union-Busters

As we go to press, the U.S. Supreme Court is hearing a case, *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, threatening to eliminate the “agency shop” in public sector unions, where non-members pay a fee to the union which represents them in negotiations with the employer. This represents a dire threat to many unions, whose bureaucratic leadership is incapable of defying the capitalist state (and is politically chained to the Democratic Party).

In Oregon, class-struggle unionists have defiantly confronted the union-haters, defeating a threat of jail for protesting a right-wing 2013 “right to work” meeting.¹ This past October, they presented a motion to the 2015 Oregon AFL-CIO convention calling to mobilize union power against this existential threat. The resolution had been adopted by IUPAT Local 10 and IATSE Local 28 in Portland.

Although the bureaucrats nixed it, preferring their non-strategy of lobbying legislators, the resolution points to the only way to bust the union-busters, through sharp class struggle. The text of the resolution is printed below.

WHEREAS, unions are required by law to represent all employees in a bargaining unit, whether they are union members or not; and

WHEREAS, at least two “right-to-work” initiatives, allowing workers in unionized public sector jobs to avoid paying for their representation, are in the

¹ See “Defend Wyatt McMinn, Defeat ‘Right to Slave!’” in *The Internationalist* No. 13, January-February 2014; and “Wyatt McMinn Not Guilty!” (June 2014) at www.internationalist.org.

process of becoming ballot measures in Oregon; and

WHEREAS, the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, a main sponsor of misnamed “right-to-work” initiatives in the Pacific Northwest, financed by union-bashers such as the Koch Brothers and Wal-Mart, is pushing lawsuit against SEIU Local 503 which represents over 20,000 home care workers in Oregon; and

WHEREAS, the unionization of the largely minority home health care workers in the state has raised their wages by more than two-thirds, as well as providing medical and health coverage; and

WHEREAS, unionization has boosted the wages and job security of all workers and particularly of African American, Latino, Native American and immigrant workers; and

WHEREAS, the anti-labor ballot measures are designed to undermine and financially ruin public sector unions which are vital to the welfare and living standards of all workers; and

WHEREAS, ballot measures in Oregon are part of a national campaign by corporations and their political supporters to destroy unions and wipe out the gains won by organized labor; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Supreme Court last July agreed to hear a case that could eliminate “fair-share” fees paid to public sector unions, in effect creating a national “right-to-work” law by judicial fiat; and

WHEREAS, Wisconsin governor Scott Walker, after eliminating collective bargaining rights for public sector workers in 2011 and now ramming through a state “right-to-work” law, is campaigning for such a law nationally; and

WHEREAS, the same forces backing these union-busting laws such as Illinois governor Bruce Rauner want to eliminate the minimum wage entirely rather than raising it to a living wage; and

WHEREAS, support for these measures in Oregon comes from big lumber, including Freres Lumber Co. and Stimson Lumber Co. and right-wing politicians such as Washington County Attorney, Jill Gibson; and

WHEREAS, workers in “right-to-work” states earn substantially lower wages, have less employer-sponsored health insurance or pensions and significantly higher workplace death rates due to weakened union protections; and

WHEREAS, the experience of Michigan, where anti-union forces pushed through “right-to-work” laws with a stealth campaign while organized labor did little to stop them, shows the danger of complacency; and

WHEREAS, backroom deals with legislators and state officials will not stop a determined employer offensive; and

WHEREAS, the union-bashing offensive that began even before the 1981 PATCO air controllers strike, which many other unions failed to support, shows that a failure to fight has disastrous results; and

WHEREAS, the powerful labor mobilization in Wisconsin in 2011 demonstrated that the public will enthusiastically back unions when they fight, despite anti-labor media campaigns; and

WHEREAS, the failure of Wisconsin unions to call a state-wide strike at the crucial moment, even after preparing for one, led to a devastating defeat while the strategy of a “recall” and voter turnout campaigns predictably failed to repeal “right-to-work”

legislation in Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS, the power of our unions rests in our ability to use our economic strength in defense of our rights as workers, and failure to use that power only emboldens the labor-haters; and

WHEREAS, we have had enough of the one-sided class war waged by profit-greedy bosses,

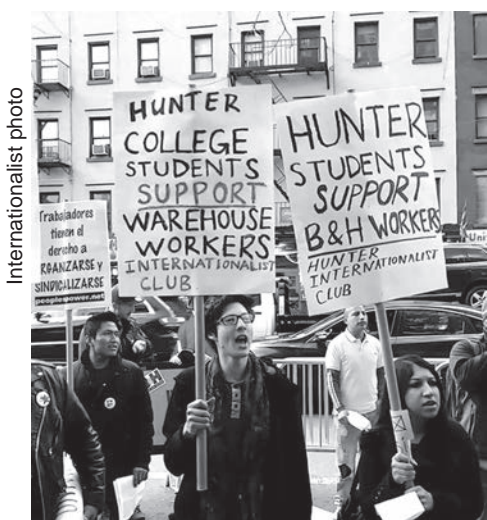
THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this body expresses the determination of Oregon workers to whatever it takes to defeat any such union-busting laws, including using our right to strike to defend the union shop; and be it further

RESOLVED, that we urge Oregon and Washington unions and their supporters to mobilize at “right-to-work” events with rallies, marches and other means to expose the drive by cutthroat employers to drive our wages to the bottom while they make billions in profits from our labor; and be it further

RESOLVED, that area unions should prepare a major region-wide stop-work action against this effort to impoverish workers by using the courts and the rest of their legal arsenal; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Oregon AFL-CIO will encourage and support any affiliated locals collecting dues from represented workers directly, in order to stymie employer attempts to cripple labor financially; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that in defending union independence from the bosses and standing together in defense of all those threatened by the employers’ assault, **WE HAVE THE POWER TO DEFEAT THE WAR ON WORKERS, BUT WE MUST USE THAT POWER OR LOSE IT. ■**



CUNY Internationalist Clubs actively supported B&H unionization struggle.

the bosses for a loop, forcing them to retract the firing threats and “apologize” for their “mistake.”

Having signed up the notorious Jackson Lewis “union-prevention” firm, the company continued to follow the anti-union playbook, but each play fell flat as the workers confirmed that organizers’ predictions of the company’s tricks were coming true one after another. Workers answered the owners’ attempt at intimidation with a large and spirited march on the company’s midtown Manhattan store three days after the mass firing threat, chanting:

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“On Thursday we showed that we are not afraid!” and “¡Unión, fuerza, solidaridad!” (Union, power, solidarity).

Workers whose voice and individuality is smothered in the daily grind of exploitation – treated “like animals” by bosses who saw them as little more than beasts of burden, as several put it – learned what they could do in the course of collective struggle “for our dignity and our rights.” The struggle brought out enormous creativity, as workers painted their slogans on boxes to carry on high at the protest marches. Workers raised and lowered boxes and signs as they chanted “Arriba trabajador, abajo explotador.”

Another heart-felt chant was “Uno, dos, tres, queremos nuestros breaks” (One, two three, we want our breaks). Many had been working 58 hours a week, or more, with only a short pause for lunch. In the November 1 rally in front of the B&H store on November 1 there was a symbolic vote. When casting his ballot, each declared his reason for voting “yes” to unionization: “safety on the job,” “no more discrimination,” “better pay,” “respect,” “dignity,” “for my children” and “I am voting for the future” were among the many responses.

In this union town, the B&H warehouse workers’ outspoken courage sparked support from many quarters. More than a thousand photographers and artists signed a petition backing their cause. For City

University of New York students brought to the protests and support activities by the CUNY Internationalist Clubs, the experience has been “an incredible learning experience,” as one young woman activist put it, “since the things we read and study about in the Marxist education circles come to life right there, and we’re part of it.”

At the November 6 celebration, a the Internationalists and others joined in singing two songs written by a comrade the night before the historic vote for unionization. One chorus went, “*Es la hora de decisiones, los obreros no somos reos, los almacenes no son prisiones*” (“It’s the decisive hour, workers are not prisoners, warehouses are not prisons”). Another mocked the bosses’ raffle, vowing “we won’t let ourselves be bought by the bosses’ tricks.”

Nationally, there has been a lot of media attention to protests and “strikes” at notorious low-wage companies, including fast-food restaurants like McDonald’s and Walmart. But in fact, very few workers in those shops actually strike, fearing they would immediately be fired, and these are run by union bureaucrats as media events, often to showcase Democratic Party politicians. A real attempt to unionize low-wage workers requires a sustained organizing effort to mobilize the rank-and-file independent of the bosses’ parties. This is what the victories at Hot and Crusty and B&H show.

Workers’ consciousness and organization will continue to be crucial in the fight to win a union contract entailing significant advances for the workers at a company where “the warehouses seem like prisons.” Continuing and deepening ongoing workers education activities will be crucial in the coming period. It will also be vital to establish a women’s committee linked to the union (due to discriminatory company hiring policies, all the warehouse workers are men), to fully integrate workers’ wives and companions into the struggle in a situation where this question can be key to victory or defeat, as shown in many class battles of the past.

Through their intensive campaign over the past year and resulting union victory, B&H workers can help spark and lead struggles of the entire working class in the New York area. New organizers are emerging in the course of the fight. The enormous potential for an offensive against intolerable inequality, discrimination and racist repression requires a class-struggle leadership equal to the task, committed to taking the struggle of the working class through to victory over this entire capitalist system of merciless exploitation. The B&H Photo workers’ victory will be an inspiration and an example to all who seek to make that happen.

¡Luchar, vencer, obreros al poder!
(Fight, win, workers to power!)

Bernie Boosters...

continued from page 3

nie bandwagon runs out of gas a few months from now, at the latest by the Democratic convention when Sanders throws his support behind Clinton. It's hardly a new tactic, but it marks the formal entry of SALT into the Democratic Party. From having its supporters participate in Sanders' campaign, it has graduated to building that campaign as an organization. Whether M4B says it in so many words or not, that fact is that the necessary first step to "help Bernie win in 2016" is getting people to vote for him in the upcoming Democratic primaries.

Socialist Alternative has class collaboration written in its DNA, it's at the heart of reformist social democracy. An outfit that considers cops to be workers, SALT is willfully blind to the class line separating the working class and the capitalist class, pitting the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. Its entry into Democratic Party politics is a fundamental betrayal of any fight for working-class independence, the cornerstone of Marxist politics. As Karl Marx underscored in his 21 September 1871 address to the International Working Men's Association, "Our politics must be working-class politics. The workers' party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy." In the Sanders campaign, SALT is going beyond its usual tailing after the capitalist Democrats to direct participation. In doing so, it is feeding and even creating illusions that the cause of "socialism," or at least its caricature of it, can be advanced through struggle within this bourgeois-imperialist party.

Various other denizens of the social-democratic swamp want a little more distance between Democrat Sanders and themselves, but despite some soft criticisms, none take him on frontally. And no wonder, since the program he is running on differs little from the reformist pabulum they routinely dish out. An article by David Freedlander on the Bloomberg Politics web site (13 October) quotes Steve Durham of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) saying of Sanders, "He isn't an anti-capitalist! He is for reforming capitalism" ("Bernie Sanders Isn't Socialist Enough for Many Socialists," 13 October). The FSP criticizes Socialist Alternative for its Berniemanism, but writes that "If he chose to, Sanders has the momentum and the numbers of supporters to break free from the Democrats and contribute toward launching a formidable anti-capitalist party" (*Freedom Socialist*, October 2015). Yet if Sanders were running as an "independent," he would still be a bourgeois politician, defending capitalism and imperialism.

The FSP proposes that various "socialist groups ... increase their impact in the electoral arena by joining together with a common platform." But the reformist common ground these social democrats share with each other (and with Sanders) is precisely the illusion of reforming capitalism, as the bourgeois populist SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) party proposed to do in Greece. It was an utter fiasco, for which Greek working people paid a heavy price. Socialist Action (SA), for its part, counsels leftists to sidestep the Sanders campaign and keep on with antiwar, anti-racist (Black Lives Matter), environmental and women's rights protests, with the aim of building a "labor party" ("Bernie Sand-

ers & the Labor Movement," *Socialist Action*, 5 September 2015). Yet to avoid the common fate of such movements of being co-opted, sucked into the Democratic Party and defeated, it is crucial to directly oppose the Democrats and to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucrats in a struggle to build a *revolutionary* workers party.

The DSA, ISO, SALT, FSP and SA are virtually indistinguishable varieties of what they call "democratic socialism" (the adjective being a promise to the bourgeoisie, liberals in particular, that they are *definitely not communists*). Another neck of the reformist marshland is populated by a Stalinoid strain, heirs of the late Sam Marcy, who broke with Trotskyism to embrace Chinese Maoism. Following a 2004 split over non-programmatic issues, the Marcyites are divided into the Workers World Party (WWP) and its offshoot, the Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL). PSL vice presidential candidate Gloria La Riva told Bloomberg Politics, "I don't think he [Sanders] is a socialist. He ignores socialist countries," by which she means the Stalinist-ruled bureaucratically deformed workers states. But it seems that they're "feeling the Bern" anyway. An extensive article by PSL leader Brian Becker responds to "confusion" on the left about how to deal with "the sudden popularity of the self-proclaimed democratic-socialist Bernie Sanders."

In contrast to "some radical socialists" who have emphasized "how 'bad' Sanders is on some issues, or that he is not a 'real socialist'," Becker argues to focus on "the vast opportunity created by the explosive growth and surprising popularity of the Sanders campaign." He writes that, "even the most moderate socialists have been forced to swim in a very small pond" for the past seven decades since anti-communism became the U.S.' "unofficial religion." "Now the pond has suddenly got bigger." Becker goes on:

"Does it make any tactical sense, if you want to truly popularize socialism with the millions of new Sanders supporters who are supporting him precisely because they want change and see a 'socialist' candidate as the vehicle for change, that they are just really wasting their time or worse?"

"No, it does not make sense. Perhaps it is a psychological fear by small fish who have been comfortably swimming in small ponds for so long that they fear the scary waves and powerful currents of larger bodies of water or simply being swallowed up by the bigger fish. Or, in the case of some very militant and radical young people who are unfamiliar with the crushing suppression of the socialist and communist left in the U.S., they are understandably turned off by and not seeing past Sanders' liberalism....

"We should argue that Bernie Sanders' program for guaranteed health care, college education and other major reforms is what's important and if Sanders is truly serious about winning these reforms, he should run as an independent.... If Sanders ran as an independent candidate for president, as a 'democratic socialist,' he would receive the votes of millions of people. That would be something really significant in creating a new political dynamic in the United States."

—"Socialist tactics and the Bernie Sanders campaign" (*Liberation*, 19 October 2015)

The article praises Sanders' reform proposals, not surprising since it overlaps with the electoral reformist program the



Black Lives Matter activists seize the stage from Democrat Bernie Sanders at August 8 Seattle campaign rally. Sanders' "color-blind" economic populism is no answer to racial oppression, while Democrats preside over racist police terror in cities from coast to coast and nationally.

PSL runs on. And, given the "surprising popularity" of his campaign, Becker lectures those "very militant and radical young people" (including PSL youth, perhaps?) to make nice with Sanders supporters and pressure them to pressure him to run as an independent – the same line as the social democrats.

But the power of positive thinking won't turn Sanders into his opposite: in addition to being a capitalist politician and supporting imperialist war, what he stands for is counterposed to socialism. Instead of pandering to his popularity, these are some of the hard truths that must be told to those with illusions in the Democratic Party "socialist."

In 2008, *Workers World* trumpeted "Millions in streets seal Obama victory" while the PSL's *Liberation* declared Obama's election "an occasion of historic significance," helpfully offering the new CEO of American capitalism "a clear program focused on what the new administration should do to meet the needs of the working people; to fulfill the expectations its campaign has created." Not wanting to spoil the party and turn people off, all criticisms were relegated to the inside pages (see "The 'Obama Socialists'"). Today the WWP is taking a somewhat harder stance toward Sanders, no doubt partly for factional advantage against its PSL rival. A lead article titled "Sanders campaign has people asking: What is socialism?" commented that many workers "are confused because his ideas do not seem fundamentally different from those of others in the Democratic Party" (*Workers World*, 5 November). A couple of weeks later, an article on "Bernie Sanders and Cuban socialism" (titled more sharply on the WWP website "Why Bernie Sanders isn't socialist: In defense of revolutionary socialism") says:

"Sanders isn't a socialist. Socialism must be defended from the misleading confines of the capitalist elections....

"Sanders has been useful to the ruling capitalist class, even though they don't reward him for this. His campaign hooked the growing number of disaffected workers back into the Democratic Party with his commentary on issues such as the lack of affordable health care and the predominance of low-wage work....

"The task at hand is to distinguish revolutionary socialism from Sanders' politics so the two are never confused."

Indeed. So what is socialism?

Making "Socialism" Respectable Is Not Preparing Socialist Revolution

The WWP and PSL Marcyites identify socialism with Stalinist regimes like Fidel Castro's Cuba. Genuine revolutionary Marxists (Trotskyists) defend those bureaucratically deformed workers states against imperialism and counterrevolution. At the same time we insist that they cannot lead to genuine socialism without a proletarian political revolution to oust the narrow nationalist bureaucracy, establish soviet democracy and extend the revolution internationally to the imperialist centers. The ISO, SALT and sundry other social democrats, on the other hand, see socialism as a "welfare state" writ large, with more extensive nationalizations than in Sanders' favored Scandinavian model, but without socialist revolution to smash the capitalist ruling class and its state. Neither Stalinism nor social democracy (and much less Sanders' New Deal liberalism) represent socialism as envisioned by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky who fought for international socialist revolution to prepare the way to a communist society.

The basic argument of the pseudo-socialist "Bernie boosters" of every denomination is that Sanders' candidacy, even though running in the Democratic Party – that elephant's graveyard "where social movements go to die," as one DSAer, of all people, accurately described it – opens a "discussion on what socialism is" and "popularizes socialism." Besides, the platform he's actually running on coincides pretty much with their own reformist minimum programs. Yet *what Sanders is advocating is precisely what socialism isn't*. And what he's doing in the concrete is trying to rope people, particularly young people, into voting for the Democratic Party of racist police terror and imperialist war, which is presiding over the obscene enrichment of the capitalist class at the expense of poor and working people, which is deporting millions of immigrants, the party whose hold over labor and minorities must be shattered on the road to socialist revolution.

Is Sanders "popularizing socialism"? Not really. There *has* been a notable change in popular attitudes toward socialism in recent years, before most people had ever heard of Bernie Sanders. This is borne out even in rigged opinion surveys. When his candidacy was picking up steam, the

The Internationalist

Gallup polling organization added a question about whether respondents would vote for a socialist if their party ran one. The media duly reported that socialist was the most unpopular of all categories, that less people would vote for a socialist than for a Catholic, a woman, a black, a Hispanic, a Jew, a gay or lesbian, a Muslim or even an atheist. But when you look at the stats, what it showed was that 47% would vote for a socialist, and among young people ages 18 to 29, nearly seven in ten would vote for a socialist. A 2010 poll Gallup poll reported that 36% of Americans viewed socialism favorably, and a 2011 Pew poll found young people favored socialism over capitalism by 49% to 43%.

So things have changed somewhat from the past when calling someone a socialist was a drop dead swear word. This is primarily the result of the economic crisis of 2007-08 and the ongoing depression, with its mass unemployment – disguised by official statistics but acutely felt by youth who can't find a job, no matter what. Less and less people believe in the bogus "American Dream" of getting ahead by working hard, since workers today make less than what they earned four and a half decades ago. It may also have to do with a reaction against a right wing which incessantly labels Obama a socialist (as well as a Kenyan, Muslim, etc.). What Sanders' candidacy is doing is not making "socialism" more popular, but making it more respectable in polite bourgeois circles. But those who really fight for socialist revolution and for communism are never going to be respectable in bourgeois society. The ruling class and their media will treat genuine communists and revolutionary socialists as their implacable enemies, which we are.

Karl Marx in his writings on the 1871 Paris Commune and his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) and V.I. Lenin in *The State and Revolution*, written on the eve of, and as preparation for, the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, insisted that socialism is a society without classes, the lower stage of communism, in which the state had "withered away." This requires an abundance of material goods available to all, which presupposes the development of socialized production at the highest technical levels. To achieve that, a series of revolutions are necessary, in at least several advanced capitalist countries such as the



Social democrats of all denominations unite to hail "political revolution" of Democrat Bernie Sanders. Above: Democratic Socialists of America. Below: Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative city council member in Seattle.

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United States. This would establish workers rule, the "dictatorship of the proletariat," to replace what we have now behind the façade of democracy, the dictatorship of capital.² As Marx wrote in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*:

"Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."

Social democrats would have you believe that by enacting a number of social reforms (free education, free health care, throw in free public transportation and rent control), nationalizing banks, utilities, major industry and commerce (call it "public ownership" to make it more palatable), add a dash of "participatory democracy" and – presto! – you have "socialism." Simple, and wrong. Won't happen, the capitalists will see to it. Look at Greece. The Stalinists identify socialism with existing bureaucratic regimes, claiming it is possible to have socialism in a single country. Wrong again. Not only does that contradict the Bolshevik program, its falsity was tragically proven by the counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet degenerated workers state, and is underscored by the mounting counter-revolutionary threat in Cuba and China. As Trotsky warned in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) as he dissected the anti-Marxist dogma of building "socialism in one country":

"If a bourgeoisie cannot peacefully grow into a socialist democracy, it is likewise true that a socialist state cannot peacefully merge with a world capitalist system. On the historic order of the day stands not the peaceful socialist development of 'one country,' but a long series of world disturbances: wars and revolutions."

So how do we get from here to there, from today when political power is monopolized by the two partner parties of American capitalism to the direct fight for revolution? The key is to develop the class consciousness and political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie. The response of reformist pretend socialists is instead to promote "third parties," minor bourgeois parties like the Greens today, the Progressive parties in the 1910s and '20s, and Farmer-Labor parties in the '20s and '30s. Such parties act as pressure groups on the major capitalist parties, mainly the Democrats, and most disappear after having served their purpose as an escape valve to blow off the steam of popular discontent. This is what the left-wing Bernie boosters are aiming at when they beg him to go "independent." That will do nothing to develop class consciousness and would in fact be a roadblock to revolution, just as campaigning inside the Democratic Party for dissident "progressives" is.

As mentioned earlier, "socialist" groups building political support and even organizational vehicles to campaign for dissident liberal and populist bourgeois politicians is nothing new. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Stalinist CP-led Peo-

² This was dramatically demonstrated by recent events in Greece. Despite the January 2015 election victory of a bourgeois populist party, SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical Left), on a program of opposition to austerity, and a July 5 referendum in which over 60% voted against the vicious austerity demands of the European central bankers and the International Monetary Fund, it was the bankers who prevailed. See "Greece: The Naked Rule of Finance Capital," *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.

James P. Cannon on "Third Parties"

In 1948, a discussion took place inside the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) over how to respond to capitalist "third parties" when the Communist Party launched the Progressive Party presidential campaign of Henry Wallace, who had been Franklin D. Roosevelt's vice president. Some in the SWP wanted to support Wallace, a longtime liberal Democratic politician. Before Sam Marcy split from the SWP in the late 1950s to embrace Mao Zedong and prior to his support for the Kremlin crushing of the 1956 Hungarian workers uprising, an incipient political revolution, the 1953 founding document of Marcy's proto-Stalinist tendency argued for "critical support" to Wallace on the grounds that it was a "progressive-radical movement." But James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, speaking for the SWP majority in the 1948 discussion, warned against the danger of "lesser-evil" politics and laid out the reasons why Wallace and any candidate of a capitalist "third party" had to be emphatically opposed while fighting for a workers party:

"The traditional two-party system in the United States has been very well suited for normal times. The ruling capitalists couldn't ask for anything better than this system which absorbs shocks and grievances by shifting people from one bourgeois party to another. But that system can blow up in time of crisis. The aggravation of the crisis which we all see ahead can shake up the whole American political

situation, so that the old two-party system will no longer suffice to serve the needs of the American bourgeoisie. "The less it becomes possible to mobilize the workers' votes for one or the other of these two old bourgeois parties, the more impelling and powerful will become the urge of the workers to found a party of their own or to seek a substitute for it. That mood of the workers will create a condition wherein American capitalism will objectively require a pseudo-radical party to divert the workers from a party of their own...."

"Next time, the role played by [Democratic president Franklin D.] Roosevelt—which was a role of salvation for American capitalism—will most likely require a new party. In the essence of the matter that is what Wallace's party is. Wallace is the, as yet, unacknowledged, candidate for the role of diverting the workers' movement for independent political action into the channel of bourgeois politics dressed up with radical demagoguery which costs nothing. That is what we have to say, and that's what we have to fight—vigorously and openly, and with no qualifications at all. We have to be 100% anti-Wallaceites. We have to stir up the workers against this imposter, and explain to them that they will never get a party of their own by accepting substitutes."

—James P. Cannon, "On the 1948 Wallace Campaign" (February 1948)

ple's Coalition for Peace and Justice anti-war group supported a number of Democratic Party "dove" candidates. In 1984, the Marcyite WWP-led All-Peoples Congress backed the presidential bid of black Democrat Jesse Jackson, and continued to organize rallies for him long afterwards. In 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 Ralph Nader ran as an "independent" under different party labels and was supported by several of the groups chasing after Bernie Sanders today. As we wrote in an article on "Capitalist Nader's 'Socialist' Foot Soldiers" (*Revolution* No. 2, October 2004):

"The ISO and other reformists are fond of talking about an 'alternative,' appealing to those who would like a more 'progressive' leadership of the Democratic Party. Their role is to sucker young people back into the shell game of capitalist electoral politics. For Marxists, it is not a matter of picking between ruling-class 'lesser evils,' but building a revolutionary party that tells the truth. The truth is that all bourgeois politicians are our enemies.... "Because of the class they represent, ruling-class politicians of every stripe are the enemies of full citizenship rights for immigrants, of a genuine fight for black liberation and women's emancipation, of the struggle to defeat U.S. imperialism. For this reason they are the enemies of young people who want to change the world instead of trying to find a place in the capitalist electoral circus as illusion-peddlers for the bourgeoisie."

Chasing after "progressive" capitalist politicians: it's what opportunist pseudo-socialists do. And they do it time after time, because it leads nowhere, and certainly not to revolution. If they do ever manage to get

together on a common reformist program, it could be called (paraphrasing Trotsky's label for another unprincipled lash-up) as the League of Pre-Squeezed Lemons. It shouldn't be all that hard to oppose a somewhat-popular bourgeois presidential candidate. Relative to other tests that face those who would be proletarian revolutionaries, class opposition to the Democrat Bernie ought to be a no-brainer. Class-conscious workers and defenders of the oppressed won't forget which "socialists" buckled under the featherweight pressure of the Sanders fad: such people are not serious. They rounded up votes for the party of war in Iraq and Syria, for the party whose mayors are the bosses of the racist killer cops from coast to coast. They can't be trusted, who knows where they will turn in their next maneuver.

The Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International, has an opposite program. Our goal is workers revolution to clear the way for socialism. This puts us in irreconcilable opposition to Sanders the Democrat, and to Sanders the "independent" "socialist" who exists in the wishful thinking of the leftist Bernie boosters. As internationalist communists we call for a workers party that fights on the program of class struggle against all forms of class collaboration. And what we have to say to working people, African American, Latino, Asian, immigrant and other oppressed minorities, to women and radicalizing youth is the same as the Trotskyist James P. Cannon said in 1948 (see box, above): *accept no substitutes*. We need to oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and build a party on the program of Lenin and Trotsky's Bolsheviks. Anything less is a diversion that will only prolong the bloody rule of capital. ■

Imperialist War Engenders Islamist Terror

After the Slaughter in Paris:

Down with the State of Emergency, U.S./France Out of the Middle East!

19 NOVEMBER 2015 – The horrific attacks against civilians in six different locations in Paris on the night of November 13 were the long-expected blowback from the imperialist terror bombing campaign in Iraq and Syria over the last 15 months. The murders by the Islamic State (I.S.) in the French capital, which killed over 130 people and wounded more than 400, many of them still in critical condition, were an attack against working people everywhere. Such indiscriminate terror is fundamentally counterposed to a struggle against imperialism. It inevitably generates mass chauvinism in the targeted population, putting Muslims and immigrants in particular at risk, in France and elsewhere, and serving as an excuse to escalate imperialist war in the Middle East.

French president François Hollande immediately seized on the attacks to bomb Raqqa, Syria, the reputed capital of the I.S. (also known as ISIS or ISIL). U.S. president Barack Obama vowed to intensify the American air war in the region, whose death tolls far exceed the night of terror in Paris. (Drone strikes okayed by Obama have killed over 3,800 people, including hundreds of civilians.) Meanwhile, the bourgeois government of “socialist” Hollande has imposed a state of emergency in France cancelling constitutional guarantees. He is demanding that parliament extend it for three months (!) and that the constitution be amended to include a “state of crisis” which would prolong police-state measures indefinitely, threatening the democratic rights of all.

Since the onset of the U.S.-led “war on terror,” launched immediately after the 11 September 2001 (9/11) attack on the NYC World Trade Center and Pentagon, the League for the Fourth International and the Internationalist Group/U.S. have called to “defeat the U.S./NATO drive for war and repression.”¹ Since Obama began bombing

¹ See “U.S. Whips Up Imperialist War Frenzy, Drives Toward Police State” (14 September



Police search resident during siege of Paris working-class suburb of Saint Denis, October 18.

Iraq and Syria a year ago, we have called to “Drive U.S./NATO Imperialists Out of the Middle East!”² Imperialist war and occupation have engendered Islamist terror, and the response to the Paris attacks must be to demand that the *U.S. and France get out of Iraq and Syria*, as well as Afghanistan, the Arabian Peninsula and Africa, where since early 2013 Hollande has been waging a war against Islamist *jihadis* in Mali.

And just as it was an elementary duty to denounce the post-9/11 U.S.A. PATRIOT Act as an assault on fundamental civil liberties, revolutionary Marxists in France should *oppose the state of emergency and the “security at all costs” constitutional amendment tooth and nail*, including

2001), in *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001.

² See “For Workers Action to Defeat Barack Obama’s Iraq/Syria War,” *The Internationalist* No. 38, October-November 2014.

seeking to mobilize workers in the streets against the government policies of war and repression. It is moreover an urgent duty of class-conscious workers to *defend immigrants and refugees as well as the millions of people of immigrant origin under police siege or facing racist and fascist attacks*, from the camps of Calais to the *banlieues* (working-class suburbs) outside Paris, Lyon, Marseille and other French cities, as well as in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.

The War Comes Home

For the second time in less than a year, Paris was the scene of a massacre. In January, there was the killing spree that began with the execution of the editor and caricaturists of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* and ended with the killing of Jewish customers at a kosher supermarket. In response, the government called for “national unity,” bringing over four million people into the streets to march behind capitalist heads of state against “terrorism” while singing the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise*. This was accompanied by a wave of anti-Muslim attacks and government denunciation of students in the *banlieues* who dared to say “*Je ne suis pas Charlie*” (I’m not Charlie) due to the magazine’s anti-Muslim and racist caricatures.

In January, revolutionary internationalists, while upholding freedom of the press in the face of this “grotesque terror attack,” also declared “we are not Charlie,” denounced chauvinist “national unity” and French imperialism’s colonial wars, and called to defend immigrants.³ This time

³ See “Defend Muslims in Europe Against Racist ‘War on Terror’ Backlash!” (16 January 2015) in *The Internationalist* No. 39, April-May 2015).

around, after the November 13 attacks, the call by Prime Minister Manuel Valls on the parties to unite went nowhere. Nor were there any marches, only war-mongering rhetoric and repression. On the first two days of the “state of emergency,” almost 300 raids were carried out by police without judicial authorization, jailing dozens and placing over 100 people under house arrest on the basis of suspicion of Islamist militancy, but no proof of any actions.

While the November 13 attacks were indiscriminately directed at the population as a whole, the I.S. itself underscored their Islamist⁴ character, aiming

them against “pagans” and infidels. A majority of the victims were under 30, including many from the heavily immigrant suburbs. The Islamic State has often struck at the civilian population in Syria and Iraq in the name of its religious *jihad* (holy war). In its statement claiming the attacks, the I.S. said the attackers were “hoping to be killed for Allah’s sake ... in support of His religion,” called Paris the “capital of prostitution and vice,” described the crowd at the Bataclan music hall as “hundreds of pagans gathered for a concert of prostitution and debauchery,” and rejoiced over the deaths of the victims whom it called “crusaders.” Not even a pretense of striking at the imperialist state.

Even so, the Paris attack was indeed, as François Hollande told French legislators, an “act of war” – *Hollande’s* war. More specifically, it was what Pentagon strategists call “asymmetric warfare,” in which the weaker side attacks “soft” targets – in this case civilians unable to defend themselves. And the imperialist leaders knew it was coming the minute they started bombing. The hundreds of casualties, dead and wounded, in Paris are the “collateral damage” of the U.S.-led war on the Islamic State, only this time the wan-

⁴ Islamism, or political Islam, is a doctrine holding that Islamic law (sharia) should govern society. Thus for Islamists there is no separation of mosque and state. While there are different Islamist currents, and sharp differences between Islamists of the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam, all call for a theocratic regime in which religious doctrine and authority are supreme, and thus are inherently anti-democratic. *Jihadis* or *jihadists* seek to impose Islamic rule through holy war (jihad) against infidels, apostates and all non-believers.

continued on page 18



Immigrants march from Place de la République, Paris, near where I.S. attackers struck, demanding “Housing, Documents: Respect the Rights of Refugees.”

All Sides Squalid in Syria/Iraq Sectarian Civil Wars – Drive U.S./NATO Imperialists Out of the Middle East!

Dmitri Vinogradov/RIA Novosti

Flashpoint Syria: Russian Intervention and Imperialist Aggression



Russian fighter jets preparing for bombing mission at Latakia air base in Syria, October 1.

Starting in late August, Russia launched a major intervention in Syria aimed at shoring up the deteriorating military position of the regime of Bashar al-Assad, under attack by a host of Islamist militias backed by Western imperialists and their Middle Eastern allies/flunkies as well as by the Islamic state (I.S.). Russian president Vladimir Putin's move took the Pentagon and other NATO war planners by surprise, as did Russia's lightning take-over of Crimea last year in response to the imperialist-backed fascist/nationalist coup in Ukraine. The Syria intervention is being called "a geopolitical earthquake," "a huge, potentially decisive, turning point, the most significant moment in global affairs since the end of the cold war" (*Guardian*, 6 October).

Coming as pressure was building to impose a NATO-enforced "no fly zone" and a Turkish-dominated "safe area" for Islamist "rebels" in northern Syria, Moscow's action qualitatively raised the costs of such imperialist aggression. Instead of having uncontested control of the skies,

as they did in Libya in 2011, NATO warplanes would face Russian jets and air defense systems. This would likely result in significant losses of aircraft and personnel and could set off not just regional but global war. Left-over Cold Warriors and saber-rattling U.S. presidential candidates (including Hillary Clinton) are clamoring for action to counter Russia. Cooler heads may prevail, but the chances for miscalculation or accidents are enormous. And don't forget the Israelis.

As Barack Obama bombs away in western Iraq and eastern Syria, now joined by France and possibly Britain, revolutionaries and class-conscious workers seek above all to *drive the imperialists out of the Middle East*. Every blow struck against the NATO marauders, even by the atavistic *jihadis* (holy warriors) of the I.S., is in the interests of the exploited and oppressed. The "democratic" militarists are by far the biggest mass murderers (and exploiters and oppressors) on the planet. But while geostrategically Putin's move may stymie (for now) a direct imperialist

assault on his Syrian client, it does not alter the nature of the sectarian civil war, in which the victory of any side could lead to slaughter or expulsion of the defeated religious/ethnic groups. As Lenin and the Bolsheviks insisted in the first World War, communists unconditionally defend op-

pressed peoples against imperialism, and workers in the imperialist countries seek the defeat of "their own" bloody imperialist rulers through revolutionary struggle. At the same time, in the overlapping conflicts proletarian internationalists are for the defeat of all sides in the inter-ethnic and sectarian-religious wars now ravaging Syria and Iraq, while upholding the right of communal self-defense against a genocidal threat. This was clearly the case of Kurds in Kobanê in late 2014-early 2015, and we called to defend them against the advance of the Islamic State, while warning of the dangers of allying with imperialism. While hard-line imperialist politicians and right-wing media like Fox News hyperventilate against "Russian aggression" in Ukraine and Syria, social-democratic pseudo-socialists rail against "Russian imperialism." In reality Moscow's moves have been defensive in nature against the threat of U.S./NATO encirclement. Post-Soviet Russia is neither imperialist nor a global superpower but an intermediate capitalist country and regional power with imperial ambitions.¹ At present Moscow is intervening on the side of the Assad regime in the fratricidal civil war in which the working class has no side, but should U.S./NATO forces directly attack Russian or Syrian government forces, revolutionary Marxists should be for the defense of Syria and Russian forces against imperialist domination.

But ultimately the Kremlin is seeking a prominent place for a resurgent Russia in a "multi-polar" imperialist world order. In his September 28 address to the United Nations General Assembly, Putin called for an "international coalition against terrorism ... similar to the anti-Hitler coalition" of World War II. The rhetoric of fighting "terrorism" only serves to justify imperialist domination while Marxists fight to drive the imperialists out of the Middle East. As for WWII, Trotskyists militarily defended

¹ For a detailed analysis, see "The Bugbear of 'Russian Imperialism'" *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015.

the Soviet degenerated workers state, despite the sabotage of that defense by Stalin's bureaucratic regime, but opposed both the German-led Axis and U.S.-led Allies who were fighting over colonies, raw materials and imperialist hegemony rather than for "democracy."

A key component of this "coalition," the Russian leader argued, would be "Muslim nations," including the Islamist regimes of Shiite Iran and Iraq and Sunni Wahabist Saudi Arabia. To this end, Putin met on October 10 with Saudi defense minister and deputy crown prince Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud where they agreed to cooperate in Syria, and on September 21 with Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his military chiefs to reassure them that Russia would safeguard the interests of the Zionist state. Against Putin's defense of these oppressive capitalist states, Trotskyists fight for workers revolution to overthrow Zionist and Islamist rule, as well as Egypt's military dictatorship and the authoritarian Syrian regime.

At the U.N., Putin hailed the 1945 Yalta conference of the "anti-Hitler coalition" that he said gave rise to a "Yalta system" which supposedly "saved the world from large-scale upheavals." In fact, Yalta demarcated Soviet and Western imperialist spheres of influence, leading to the defeat of potential socialist revolutions at the end of the war in Greece, Italy, France and elsewhere. The "system" was soon replaced by the anti-Soviet "Cold War," with imperialist wars directed at the USSR and its allied deformed workers states, as well as others deemed to be Soviet "proxies," from Korea in the 1950s to Vietnam in the 1960s and early '70s, and Afghanistan and Central America in the '80s, ultimately leading to counterrevolution in the Soviet bloc.

Moreover, Russian spokesmen have called for the "Free Syrian Army" (FSA) backed by the U.S. and armed by the Saudi and Gulf monarchies, to join the "political process" and foresee (as does Assad) a coalition government with some of these reactionaries. Yet *all* the Syrian "rebel" militias, whether the Islamic State, the Al Qaeda franchisee (al-Nusra Front) and other hard-line salafis (Ansar al Sharia), or the largely phantom FSA, seek to impose a theocratic regime of Islamic law (sharia), posing a mortal threat to the working-class, secular and religious/ethnic minority populations. Putin could well strike a deal with Obama or his successor that would put the Alawite, Shiite, Druze, Christian and other communities in Syria in grave danger.

Washington now cynically claims that Russian presence in Syria is creating more jihadis. The reality is that the very existence of Al Qaeda and its offshoots, including the I.S., is the direct result of U.S. imperialist domination and wars in the region: first in Afghanistan in the 1980s when Washington bankrolled Osama bin Laden and Islamist mujahedin to fight Soviet and Afghan government troops; then in Iraq from 2003 on,

² The Wahabi sect of the Sunni branch of Islam dominates Saudi Arabia and is sponsored by the government in exchange for the sect's support for the Saudi monarchy. Wahabis are *salafists* who consider the practices of the first three generations of followers of Muhammad to be the model of an Islamic society. They are also *takfiri*, who label all non-Sunni Muslims, including the tens of millions of Shiites, apostates and infidels. Osama bin Laden was a Wahabi, as are the adherents of the Islamic State and many of the so-called "moderate" rebels.

Internationalist photo



As Obama threatened to bomb Syria over false flag chemical weapons attack, IG/LFI called to defend Syria against U.S. imperialist attack. NYC protest, 7 September 2013.

where bin Laden's Al Qaeda garnered support from Sunnis under attack by the Shiite regime installed by the U.S.; and now in Syria, where the U.S. financed and armed hard-line Islamists through its Saudi allies to fight against the Assad regime, eventually giving rise to the Frankenstein's monster of the Islamic State.

A secular, democratic Syria under bourgeois rule is impossible, as it is throughout the Middle East and in semi-colonial countries generally. Under imperialist domination, the local ruling classes are so weak that they cannot tolerate any semblance of democracy for the impoverished masses. Armed with Leon Trotsky's perspective of *permanent revolution*, Fourth Internationalists fight for workers revolution leading all the oppressed throughout the region and extending to the imperialist centers. Key to this are the millions-strong Egyptian and especially Turkish proletariats, but also Israeli workers breaking from the straitjacket of Zionism. Such a revolutionary socialist force would necessarily seek to obliterate all the Islamist armed groups.

Imperialist Offensive Stymied

While the Western media portray Russian intervention as an expansionist offensive by a demonic Vladimir Putin, it was actually in response to the escalation of imperialist intervention. The U.S. is not only bombing the Islamic State but also supplying advanced TOW anti-tank missiles to Islamist militias attacking the Syrian Army. In an article titled "Did U.S. weapons supplied to Syrian rebels draw Russia into the conflict?" (*Washington Post*, 11 October), the well-connected *Post* correspondent Liz Sly (who like her counterpart Anne Barnard at the *New York Times* acts as a conduit for Syrian "rebel" and CIA propaganda) noted that TOW missiles delivered by covert U.S. programs were key in "driving rebel gains in northwestern Syria":

"Supplied mostly from stocks owned by Saudi Arabia, delivered across the Turkish border and stamped with CIA approval, the missiles were intended to fulfill another of the Obama administration's goals in Syria – Assad's negotiated exit from power. The plan, as described by administration officials, was to exert sufficient military pressure on Assad's forces to persuade him to compromise – but not so much that his government would precipitously collapse and leave a dangerous power vacuum in Damascus.

"Instead, the Russian military intervened to shore up the struggling Syrian army – an outcome that was not intended."

The U.S. claims that the TOW missiles were only distributed to "carefully vetted" Syrian militias. But accounts of the spring offensive that dislodged government troops from northern cities make it clear that the anti-tank weapons were in the hands of the recently formed Jaish al-Fatah (Army of Conquest), an Islamist coalition dominated by the Nusra Front. It also includes "more moderate" FSA units funded and armed by the CIA, until they were cut off last December after turning over their weapons to the Al Qaeda affiliate. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia purchased some 14,000 of these weapons, which it has sent directly to the Ahrar al-Sham jihadis. Since the Pentagon requires "end user" certificates, U.S. approval is implicit.

When the Russian build-up was first reported, various U.S. Middle East "experts" reacted with consternation, having



Kai Pfaffenbach/Reuters

Syrian government "barrel bombs"? No, U.S. "precision bombing" lays waste to Kobanê, 18 October 2014. Drive the imperialists out of the Middle East!

previously discounted the possibility of Moscow entering the Syria imbroglio. The Institute for the Study of War headlined a Warning Intelligence Update "Russian Deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East Game Changer" (17 September). It dawned on them that, "The Russian mobilization may be aimed at precluding expanded U.S. action against the Assad regime," which the Institute has long advocated. A second update concluded that "It can compel the U.S. to accept a de facto combined coalition with Russia, Syria, Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah" ("Putin Ushers in a New Era of Global Geopolitics," 27 September).

When the Pentagon first detected pre-fab material to build barracks near Latakia, it hopefully opined that this would only be for base defense of aircraft. When they saw 1970s vintage Sukhoi SU-24 and SU-25 fighters, mainly used in ground attack and close air support, they argued that Russia was only sending outdated equipment. But when the 1990s era SU-30, specialized in air-to-air combat, turned up and "accidentally" flew into Turkish air space, it was a clear message that Moscow could challenge any effort to impose a "no fly zone." And when top-of-the-line SU-34 fighter-bombers, first deployed in 2014, blasted I.S. sites in Raqaa (and buzzed U.S. warplanes), it signaled that Russia was prepared to match any NATO escalation.

In addition, Russia launched Kalibr cruise missiles from corvettes in the Caspian Sea, flying 1,500 kilometers, making a sharp right turn over Iran and passing over Iraq to hit Islamic State sites (reportedly within 3 meters of their targets). By using these missiles, never before seen in combat, and releasing dramatic videos of the pinpoint airstrikes, Putin was using Syria as a proving ground while showcasing Russia's recent military technological advances. He was effectively warning: "Don't mess with Moscow." But most worrisome of all to U.S. strategists:

"Russia is not only bringing some of its most advanced hardware to the fight, it has also deployed large field kitchens and even dancers and singers to entertain the troops – all signs that Moscow is settling in for the long haul, American analysts said."

–*New York Times*, 15 October

Who knows, maybe the hip Russian police chorus that wowed audiences at the 2014 Sochi Olympics with their gyrating performance of "Get Lucky" will soon arrive in Latakia.

Once they had recovered from the initial shock of the Russian intervention, Western leaders demanded that it must "stop" (lots of luck with that) and predicted imminent or eventual disaster. Obama's warning that the attempt to prop up Assad "is just going to get them stuck in a quagmire and it won't work" is mainly wishful thinking reflecting American fears. Others made outlandish claims that Putin was trying to achieve global stature and bomb his way back into respectability, and to overcome economic sanctions over Ukraine which supposedly "walloped the Russian economy" (*New York Times*, 23 October). But aside from stock market speculators, Russia has barely felt a pinch from U.S./European Union sanctions, and as one analyst wrote:

"Russia didn't launch this campaign for world power status. Nobody launches an intervention in the Middle East, a graveyard for military power, expecting an easy political victory, certainly not after America's experiences there. Nor does Moscow need a distraction from Ukraine, where its plans are coming together quite neatly, and a clear alignment is emerging between the German, French and Russian positions on how to close out the conflict."

–"The Russian Intervention in Syria: Policy Options and Exit Strategies," War on the Rocks, 21 October

There's no need to engage in Kremlinology, Putin has been quite explicit about what he is seeking: to prevent an implosion of the Syrian state as occurred in Libya, and "positive results in military operations [which] will lay the base for then working out a long-term settlement based on a political process that involves all political forces, ethnic and religious groups." To make sure that Assad was on board with this program, Putin summoned the Syrian president to Moscow to say that the goal was "reaching a political settlement" including "the entire nation." In short, achieve sufficient military stability so that the Syrian regime isn't negotiating from weakness, and then bargain over a "transition" that Moscow already agreed to in 2012.

As for the demand that Bashar Assad must go as a precondition, even the U.S. is waffling on that. Washington seriously misjudged Syria from the beginning, considering Assad an isolated dictator like Mubarak in Egypt and failing to appreciate that significant sections of the Syrian population,

not only Alawites but other ethnic and religious minorities, saw the ostensibly secular regime as a protector against Sunni Islamic fundamentalism. Even if Assad were forced out, the core of the state apparatus is unlikely to give up, since they (rightly) fear that the result would be a theocratic dictatorship and genocidal ethnic and sectarian "cleansing." This base of support is why the Syrian government hasn't collapsed despite huge losses by its army.

The Western public has been so brainwashed by the imperialist media that many haven't a clue as to what is happening in Syria. While politicians and pundits talk of Assad "killing his own people" and of endless massacres, they ignore the fact that body counts by pro-opposition outfits like the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights admit that the largest number of those killed are Syrian Army soldiers (while dead opposition fighters are counted as "civilians"). In denouncing Syrian use of crude barrel bombs, it's never mentioned that this weapon was pioneered by the Israelis in 1948, then used by the United States in carpet-bombing Vietnam, and it is just as indiscriminate as the unguided 500-lb. bombs the U.S. dropped on Iraq.

Nor do the media report the constant indiscriminate firing of mortars into pro-government districts by Islamist militias in Damascus and Aleppo. And when Turkish legislators held a press conference on October 20 where they presented a local prosecutor's indictment detailing how sarin gas was procured in Turkey from the government MKE chemical corporation and delivered to Islamist terrorists in Syria – thus corroborating Seymour Hersh's charge that the September 2013 sarin attack that killed 1,300 people in a Damascus suburb was in fact a false flag operation by the Turkish MIT intelligence agency to blame the Assad government and thereby get the U.S. to bomb Syria – this bombshell was not deemed "fit to print" by the "free but responsible press."

In the government-held areas of Syria where 80% of the population lives, including several million refugees from the fighting, there are reports of a warm welcome for the Russian intervention, seen as a lifesaver, including by many opposed to the regime. (The main complaint voiced is that it should have come much earlier.) Those rare voices in the bourgeois media welcoming Russian intervention, such as British journalist Patrick Cockburn,³ seek a united imperialist war on the Islamic State. But it is these very same imperialists who spawned the I.S. by fostering the Islamist gangs. And such a "savage war for peace" would hardly bring salvation to the millions who have suffered as Syria was laid waste.

What that would mean in practice, as Putin laid out at the U.N., is upholding the sovereignty of all existing governments. That would condemn the 30 million Kurds to remain the largest nation without a state; it would mean supporting not only the authoritarian Assad regime in Syria but also the sectarian Shiite Islamist government of Iraq, the Zionist oppressors of the Palestinians, the murderous military dictatorship in Egypt and the Wahabi Sunni Islamist monarchy and various emirates and sheikdoms who hold sway on the Arabian peninsula. This defense

³ See Patrick Cockburn, "The Road to Peace for Syria Means War," *The Independent on Sunday*, 27 September, and "Let's Welcome Russia's Entry into Syria," *IoS*, 4 October.

of the status quo is hardly in the interests of workers, peasants and peoples oppressed by those brutal capitalist regimes.

As for the armed Islamists, neither Russia nor the U.S. would have any fundamental problem in collaborating with these arch-reactionaries, as long as they play by the imperialist rules. Washington has a long history of promoting religious reaction, sponsoring the *mujahedin* forerunners of Al Qaeda against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, and more recently (through their Saudi and Qatari proxies) financing and arming the I.S. and other jihadis against Assad in Syria. For its part, Moscow is quite sincerely offering to buy up the FSA mercenaries. As capitalism decays, it takes revolutionary communists to defend secular democratic principles against those who would subject everyone to the retrograde imagined dictates of their god.

Putin proposes to “strengthen government institutions” and “restore statehood” in places like Libya via the United Nations, the fraudulent body that seeks to mask imperialist domination with the cloak of “international law” and which has presided over monstrous crimes, from the rape of Korea to the assassination of Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba. The Russian president condemns “our Soviet past, when the Soviet Union exported social experiments, pushing for changes in other countries for ideological reasons, and this often led to tragic consequences and caused degradation instead of progress.” This distortion is an apology for the counterrevolution that destroyed the multinational Soviet state that issued from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

In fact, under Stalin and his heirs, the Kremlin rulers far from “exporting social experiments” sought to block revolutions at every step in the name of the lie of building “socialism in one country,” while under Lenin and Trotsky the Soviet republic supported revolutionary struggles. Almost a hundred years later, Leninists and Trotskyists fight to bring down all those regimes that Putin would “strengthen,” as well as his own semi-bonapartist rule in Moscow. And that requires above all uniting the working class and the oppressed in international socialist revolution to overthrow the imperialist club that Putin yearns to join. That is the central task in Syria today.

Syria Unraveling

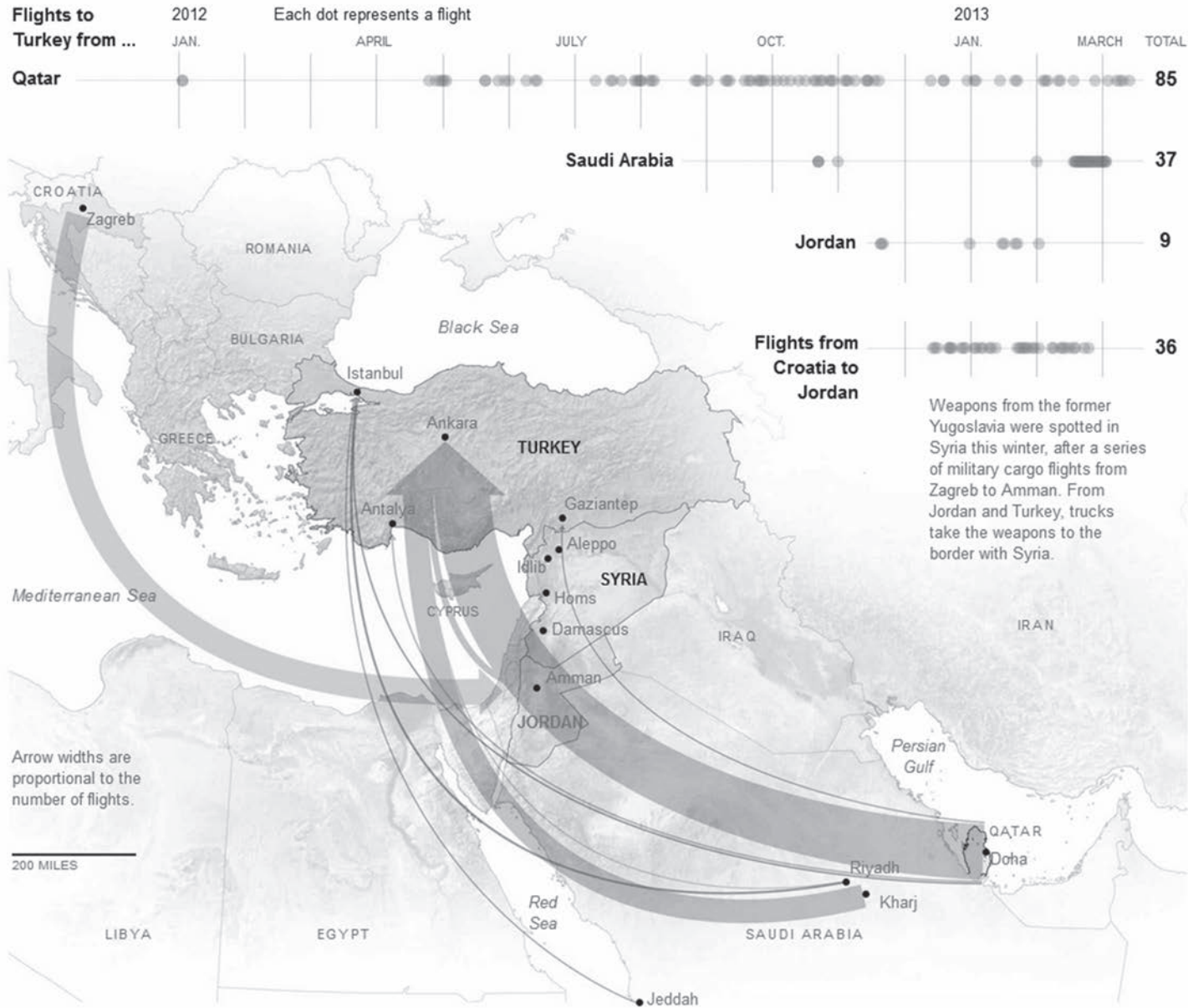
Meanwhile, Syria has been coming apart at the seams. While 60% of the population (some 14 million) are Sunni Muslim Arabs, there are numerous religious sects and remnants of peoples scattered around the country. In addition to 3 million or so Alawites or Alawis (a syncretistic sect historically persecuted by Sunni rulers and considered pagans by salafis), there are religious communities of Ismaili Shiites, Twelver Shiites, Maronite Christians, Greek Orthodox Christians of Antioch and Melkite Greek Catholics, all Arab-speaking, as are upwards of 500,000 members of the Druze ethno-religious group in the South. There are (or were) 400,000+ Aramaic-speaking Assyrian Syriac and Chaldean Christians in the East, 200,000 Turkomans and over 2 million Sunni Kurds in the North, as well as half a million Palestinian refugees.

All of these minorities are at risk should the Sunni Islamist militias take power, whether the various Al Qaeda offshoots and other salafist jihadis or the sup-

An Arms Pipeline to the Syrian Rebels

More than 160 military cargo flights for Syria’s rebels, mostly from Qatar and Saudi Arabia, have landed in Turkey and Jordan since January 2012.

Related Article »



Washington has been arming Islamist gangs against the Syrian government for years. 2013 graphic documents more than 3,500 tons in one year of U.S.-financed, CIA-organized arms deliveries from Saudi Arabia and Qatar via Turkey.

posedly “more moderate” groups linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Also threatened are many Sunni Muslims in the cosmopolitan cities of what used to be the most secular country in the Middle East. The U.S. has consciously promoted the majority Sunni religious opposition to the Assad regime, which has been based on various minorities as well as the Sunni Muslim bourgeoisie. In Iraq, Washington similarly used Islamist sectors of the majority Shiite population, as well as the Kurds, against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq based in the Sunni minority.

The imperialists also whipped up ethnic nationalism to dismember the federal republic of Yugoslavia in the wake of counterrevolution, and spurred nationalist sentiment in the Baltics and Caucasus in their drive to destroy the Soviet Union and restore capitalism. The result has been an orgy of ethnic, national and religious cleansing, including forced population transfers and mass murder. As we have written, imperialist intervention from the Balkans to the Middle East has led to: “a massive escalation of inter-communal and sectarian slaughter, as minority populations are driven out everywhere. The multi-ethnic states resulting from artificial boundaries are being homogenized with a vengeance, with the U.S. pushing the process in the name of ‘democracy’.”⁴

This is not “unintended consequences,” “collateral damage” or ad hoc decisions, but a deliberate policy that in the

⁴ See “From Ukraine to Middle East: U.S. Imperialism Strikes Out,” *The Internationalist* No. 37, May-June 2014.

case of the Middle East can be traced back to the 1996 policy paper, “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm.” This piece by U.S. “neoconservative” ideologues led by Richard Perle, written for Israeli prime minister Netanyahu, called for ousting Saddam Hussein in Iraq. It also advocated “rolling back Syria” by “a redrawing of the map of the Middle East which would threaten Syria’s territorial integrity” using “tribal alliances with Arab tribes that cross into Syrian territory and are hostile to the Syrian ruling elite.” Although Netanyahu supposedly rejected the proposal, the neocon Republicans and warmongering Democrats in the U.S. under the Bush and Obama administrations have carried it out.

And now the Israelis are getting into it. After years of harassing pro-Assad forces, striking military/intelligence targets alleging that they were aiding the Lebanese Hezbollah and quietly providing medical care for wounded Islamist “rebels,” Zionist war hawks are now aiming for “regime change” and dividing Syria into ethnic statelets. A paper by the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies, “Russia’s Involvement in Syria: A Strategic Opportunity for Israel” (20 October) argues that “Israel must gear up for active efforts to topple Assad,” to produce “a strategic loss for Iran and Hizbollah in the bleeding Syrian state.” A second INSS text, “Farewell to Syria” (13 October), calls for carving out Alawite, Druze and Kurdish entities. And Israel is creating “facts on the ground,” stepping up colonization in the largely Druze Occupied Golan.

With this classical colonialist “divide and rule” strategy, the geostrategists in Tel

Aviv figure that a greatly weakened rump Sunni state under a pliant Sunni Arab ruler might be easier to dominate militarily and better able to control radical Islamists, while depriving Hezbollah in Lebanon of its corridor to Iran. The smaller ethnic and religious communities would be out of luck. Already the various Christian populations have lost many to emigration, most of them likely never to return, as Patrick Cockburn testified after a visit to the Assyrian region in eastern Syria (“Why Syria’s Christians can never go home,” *Independent*, 11 October). The same has occurred with the larger Christian, Yazidi and Turkoman communities in Iraq.

The Syrian Army has had to withdraw from some areas due to manpower losses, as Assad himself said in a major speech last July, leading to a growth of local defense forces, many using the name “shield,” allied to differing degrees with the regime, to protect against incursions by the Islamist gangs. Thus a number of new Alawite militias have arisen in the Western coastal region and Druze militias in the Sweida province in the South. The latter was in response to an offensive by the Islamic State and U.S.-armed Islamists in Sweida and following a massacre of several dozen Druze villagers in Idlib province in the North in early June by the Nusra Front, which accused them of blasphemy after earlier demanding forcible conversion to Sunni Islam.

The sectarian massacres and indiscriminate killing continue unabated. In March, the I.S. posted a video of its thugs beheading eight Ismaili Shiites in Hama province.

But the dubious claim that “At least seven hospitals or medical facilities in Syria have been hit by airstrikes since Russia entered the civil war there, killing at least four [!] people” (*New York Times*, 23 October) is an all-too-obvious attempt to take the heat off the U.S. for its October 3 deliberate targeting and bombing of a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killing 22 patients and staff. In that case, a U.S. gunship plane kept strafing the facility for over an hour, even though it was a known medical facility and long after military commanders had been informed.

After all the adulation in the imperialist press of the Syrian Kurdish-led YPG (People’s Protection Units) militia, formerly labeled terrorists but rebranded as freedom fighters since it began coordinating with U.S. airstrikes against the Islamic State, reports are now surfacing about Kurdish atrocities against Arabs and Turkomans in recently conquered areas. Residents of ten villages and towns under the Kurdish Autonomous Administration were driven from their homes, their property destroyed or confiscated and in some cases their houses were burned and bulldozed (Amnesty International, *We Had Nowhere Else to Go*, October 2015).

Christian militias of the Syriac Military Council and Suntoro, which are part of the YPG, have also driven out Sunni Arab residents, and some Assyrian Christians as well, in areas occupied with the aid of U.S. air strikes (*Middle East Monitor*, 18 October). Last fall we wrote that, so far, Syrian Kurds had “largely stayed out of the fratricidal communal civil war,” since both the Assad regime and the armed opposition oppose Kurdish autonomy. Now, in advancing on Sunni areas currently held by the I.S. the YPG is employing some of the kind of strong-arm “Kurdization” tactics that the autonomous government of Iraqi Kurdistan has used in pushing Turkomans and Arabs out of the oil center of Kirkuk and elsewhere in northern Iraq.

Today, the Syrian Kurdish YPG is a semi-ally of U.S. imperialism against the Islamic State, reportedly receiving airdrops of arms for an advance on the I.S. “capital” of Raqqa. But since July the U.S.’ NATO ally Turkey has been heavily bombarding the YPG’s allies of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party) in Turkey, has bombed PKK camps in Iraqi Kurdistan and is now directly attacking the YPG inside Syria as it tries to advance across the Euphrates River to the west. Last fall we noted that the YPG “is doing everything it can to become acceptable to the imperialists.” Calling to “Drive U.S./NATO Imperialists Out



Syrian president Assad and Russian president Putin meet at the Kremlin, October 20.

of the Middle East,” we wrote:

“the U.S. and European imperialists will never accept Kurdish independence, or even real autonomy in northern Syria. That would threaten the Ottoman ambitions of the Islamist Erdoğan and the Turkish nationalism of the army. And NATO Turkey is a linchpin for Western imperialist domination of the Middle East.”

–“For Workers Action to Defeat Barack Obama’s Iraq/Syria War,” *The Internationalist* No. 38, October-November 2014

This warning remains true today.

The League for the Fourth International has stated that: “Proletarian revolutionaries would defend the Kurdish areas against attacks by the Assad regime or the Free Syrian Army and certainly against the Islamic State whose victory would mean wholesale slaughter of Kurds.” We have also reiterated our call for a socialist republic of united Kurdistan. At the same time, the LFI has consistently stood for revolutionary defeatism on all sides in the communal civil wars wracking Iraq and Syria, while supporting the right of self-defense of threatened communities. As long as the YPG was defending Kobanê and Rojava (Western Kurdistan) it was exercising this right, but as it expands its sway it has joined the all-sided communal/sectarian bloodbath.

In late August 2014, U.S. president Obama admitted that “we don’t have a strategy yet” in Syria. That didn’t stop him from launching an open-ended bombing campaign against the Islamic State less than two weeks later. Some 7,700 airstrikes since then haven’t rolled back or even stopped the advance of the I.S., which this year conquered Ramadi in Iraq

and Palmyra in Syria. Despite U.S.-aided advances by the Kurdish YPG along the Turkish border, which provoked the ire of NATO ally Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the prospects for Obama’s “coalition of the unwilling” aren’t looking too good these days. The Iraqi army still won’t fight, and now 17,000 U.S. and other NATO troops will stay in Afghanistan at least another year.

U.S. policy in the region is an all-round failure. The \$500 million program to train non-existent non-sectarian, moderate Syrian rebels was a fiasco, now terminated, fielding at most “four or five” fighters. The White House and Pentagon are reluctant to get bogged down in the Syrian quagmire, yet all the anti-government militias continue to receive American arms via U.S. proxies (the I.S. from Turkey, al-Nusra from Qatar, Ahrar al-Sham from Saudi Arabia) or directly (FSA and YPG). Washington politicians who want to escalate the bombing have been checked by Russia’s move. And after 14 years, the U.S. population has no stomach for more Middle Eastern adventures.

With a standoff on the battlefield, even if the Syrian regime is able to make a breakthrough with Russian support (for example, taking back rebel-occupied areas of Aleppo or Damascus suburbs), no side in the overlapping conflicts is able to defeat the others. The Saudi and Iranian governments, intent on waging a Sunni vs. Shiite contest for regional hegemony, are not about to back down. Even if a “political settlement” is reached, which would take some time, it will at most be a façade masking an unstable division into spheres of influence. One need only look at the 1989 Taif Agreement in Lebanon that put an end 14 years of sectarian/communal civil war stoked by the Israeli Zionists – a tenuous truce that could blow up again at any point.

Much of Syria has already been destroyed by the U.S.-fueled civil war aimed at toppling the Assad government. The only way out of this morass, the only way to overcome ethnic and religious hostilities dating back to the collapse of the decrepit Ottoman Empire in World War I, the only way to achieve self-determination for the Kurdish nation and defend all the endangered minorities, is through a *proletarian-led offensive to drive imperialism from the region and defeat all the warring Zionist, Islamist, militarist and communalist regimes and forces*. That requires an internationalist communist leadership on

a Trotskyist program of permanent revolution, fighting for a socialist federation of the Middle East.

For Workers Revolution From Istanbul to Damascus, Tel Aviv and Cairo

The bulk of the Western left, however, has once again lined up with their imperialist masters. A year ago, many were calling on NATO to arm the Kurds against the “Islamic fascists” of the I.S. This time around they are denouncing Russian intervention in Syria. The most blatant case is that of the heirs of Tony Cliff, the renegade from Trotskyism who broke from the Fourth International pinning the label “state capitalist” on the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state and refusing to defend it during the Cold War, from Korea on. After decades of denouncing “Soviet imperialism,” the Cliffites have seamlessly gone over to vituperating against “Russian imperialism,” from Ukraine to Syria.

Thus Alex Callinicos, the guru of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP), called Syria a “battlefield of imperialist rivalry,” arguing that, contrary to part of the left that “perceives only the West as imperialism Russia too is an imperialist power” (*Socialist Worker* [UK], 6 October). The International Socialist Organization (ISO) in the U.S. likewise argues that Syria is “Caught in the web of imperialist rivalries” and seeks to revive the Cliffite slogan, “Neither Washington nor Moscow” (*Socialist Worker* [U.S.], 5 and 13 October). While Cliff & Co. claimed to represent a “third camp” in the anti-Soviet Cold War, in reality their supposed neutrality was just a “left” cover for supporting the “first camp” of Western imperialism. We see this again today.

Although claiming to oppose U.S. imperial aims, the ISO repeats Syrian “rebel” complaints that “promised military aid from U.S. and European governments has never included the kind of heavy weapons, like anti-aircraft batteries, that would help them confront the Syrian military and now Russian warplanes.” While the American Cliffites still affect a pretense of “independence” from imperialism – just quoting the “rebels” they support asking for Western arms, as they did in the NATO assault on Libya – their main “analysis” of Russia’s Syrian intervention is by Gilbert Achcar, who in 2011 pilloried those opposed to the U.N. “no fly zone” in Libya and explicitly demanded, “arms should be delivered openly and massively to the insurgents” (ZNet, 11 March 2011).

Today this appeal for imperialist aid is raised by one Joseph Daher, who writes: “We must also support the delivery of arms and weapons with no political conditions attached from the West to democratic sections of the FSA and of the Kurdish forces to fight and struggle against the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces” (Syria Freedom Forever, 4 October). Daher, who grew up in Geneva, Switzerland and is now at the University of Lausanne, is often quoted in a range of leftist publications as the voice of the non-existent “Syrian Revolution,” just as Achcar, who has for decades been a professor in Paris, Berlin and now at the University of London, is the go-to “Marxist” authority on the Middle East for various pseudo-Trotskyists.

Whether themselves appealing directly to the Western militarists like Da-



Syriac Christian militia Sotoro, part of the Kurdish-led YPG, in Qamishli, June 27. YPG has expelled Sunni Arab residents from recently conquered areas.



Turkish workers, key force for socialist revolution in the Middle East. Left-wing unions march in Istanbul on May Day 2015. In the face of brutal repression, workers have the power to bring down the Islamist capitalist regime.

her and Achcar, or using a “cutout” of supporting the Islamists who appeal for U.S./NATO support, all of these fakers are “left” apologists for imperialism. Rather than fighting to defeat the would-be masters of the world, the ISO, SWP and the rest of the social-democratic crowd want a more “people-friendly” imperialism. From Libya to Syria, the pseudo-socialists and imperialist governments back the same “insurgent” forces supposedly fighting for “democracy” against dictators. And today the opportunist leftists line up with the most bellicose imperialists on Syria.

In France, the Nouvel Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) publishes Daher’s denunciation of “Russian imperialism” and appeal for NATO imperialist arms against Assad (*L’Anticapitaliste*, 8 October), even as Socialist president François Hollande launches French airstrikes against the Daesh (Arabic acronym for the Islamic State) in Syria while demanding that Assad must go. The NPA is led by the political heirs of Ernest Mandel who are part of what poses as the International (formerly United) Secretariat of the Fourth International. But over time, Cliffites and Mandelites grew closer as the latter abandoned any pretense of defending the Soviet Union, a pillar of authentic Trotskyism, and both hailed the counter-revolution that destroyed the USSR.

For the followers of the anti-Trotskyist Tony Cliff, support for reactionary Islamist forces goes back decades. They hailed Khomeini’s 1979 “Islamic revolution” in Iran that butchered tens of thousands of leftists, women, homosexuals and Kurds, while authentic Trotskyists opposed the mullah regime; in the ’80s Cliff & Co. praised the Afghan mujahedin fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan – while the then-Trotskyist Spartacist tendency hailed the Soviet intervention; for years the British SWP met with Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Rejecting Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution and the need for a proletarian vanguard, they made common cause with whatever bourgeois movement was popular at the time.

If pro-imperialist social democrats like the ISO routinely peddled Western lies about Syria – such as the fabrication that the Damascus regime used chemical weapons on “its own people” when everything points to the Islamist gangs and their Saudi and Turkish backers as authors of that attack, hoping to trigger U.S. bombing of

Syria⁵ – various Stalinist and proto-Stalinist tendencies call to back the authoritarian Assad regime. This, also, is nothing new, as they have for decades regularly given political support to nationalist strongmen in semi-colonial countries. In the U.S., the Workers World Party (WWP) and Party of Socialism and Liberation (PSL) have made this their trademark.

Both WWP and PSL are heirs of Sam Marcy, who split from the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party in the early 1960s supporting the Mao-Stalinist regime in China. Both sing hosannas to the Kim dynasty in North Korea, one really deformed workers state. WWP leader Sara Flounders penned an article upholding Syria’s “right to defend its sovereignty” and arguing that “Because of its independent economic and political policies and because of its decades of support for the Palestinian struggle, Syria was on the ‘hit list’ slated for U.S. conquest since the George W. Bush administration” (*Workers World*, 15 October). While the U.S. has certainly gone after Syria, this is a one-sided portrayal of the Assad regime’s relation to imperialism.

Actually, under Bush II, Syria cooperated closely with the U.S. at the outset of the “Global War on Terror.” Washington sent many suspects to be tortured in Syria under the “extraordinary rendition” program. The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq that ousted Saddam Hussein – whose military-based regime like Assad’s in Syria was derived from the Arab nationalist Baath (Renewal) party – put an end to that. Assad exported local Sunni Islamist fighters to harass the U.S. occupation (and jailed them when they returned to Syria). Today he would renew the “anti-terrorist” collaboration with imperialism, offering his services as a bulwark of stability in the region, keeping Israel’s northern border quiet while talking “resistance,” if only the U.S. would allow it.

For his part, PSL leader Brian Becker writes: “Russia’s intervention was formally requested by the sovereign Syrian government led by Bashar Al-Assad and thus conforms to international law” (*Liberation*, 1 October). It is telling that would-be revolutionaries would place such stress on “international law,” that fiction that reflects the interests of the dominant imperialist powers, and which they routinely

⁵ See “Defend Syria Against U.S. Imperialist Attack!” (28 September 2013), in *The Internationalist* No. 36, January-February 2014.

ignore when it doesn’t suit them. Calling U.S. policy “reckless,” “nonsensical” and “short-sighted,” Becker goes on:

“Obama promised ‘no boots on the ground’ in Syria.... But from a military standpoint, the armies of ISIS and Al-Qaeda cannot be defeated by air assault. They can only be defeated by other forces on the ground.”

In contrast to the “incompetence” and downright “weirdness” of Obama’s refusal to “support the Syrian military that is actually fighting against ISIS and an array of other terrorist groups,” Becker recommends Putin’s “fully rational” call on the Charlie Rose CBS TV show for:

“strengthening the effective [Syrian] government structures and rendering them help in fighting terrorism. But at the same time, urging them to engage in positive dialogue with the rational opposition and conduct reform.”

These Stalinoid reformists, like the social-democratic reformists, are merely proposing an alternative policy for Obama & Co. The difference is that while the ISO et al. want the U.S. to back “moderate” Syrian Islamist gangs, the WWP/PSL want Washington to back the Syrian government. Recall that these opportunists all greeted the 2008 election of Democrat Obama. And since they always seek to ally with liberal Democrats, these leaders of the various popular-front “antiwar” coalitions (IAC, ANSWER, UFPJ) called *no* protest marches when Obama started bombing the Islamic State a year ago, or since. Rather than fighting to defeat “their own” imperialist rulers, they have all signed on to the “anti-terrorist” war against the IS.

In contrast, upholding the program of Lenin and Trotsky, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International call to drive U.S./NATO forces out of the Middle East. While the social democrats buy into the human rights rhetoric that the Democrats bandy about to justify imperialist war going back to Bill Clinton’s two wars on Yugoslavia, the Stalinists and Stalinoids back the nationalist strongmen from Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia to Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Nothing remotely revolutionary about either. The IG and LFI defend those countries militarily against imperialism, while fighting for workers revolution to bring down the capitalist regimes.

In opposing all sides in the sectarian religious and ethnic communal slaughter of the Iraqi and Syrian civil wars, it must never be forgotten that the greatest mass murderers of all are the imperialists, who have killed millions from Korea to Vietnam to Iraq. And while hailing actual blows against imperialism landed even by arch-reactionary forces such as the I.S. in Syria/Iraq or the Taliban in Afghanistan, we look to the international working class – from the Middle East to the imperialist centers – to defeat the “demo-

cratic” imperialists and smash the Islamists of all stripes, who would impose the social and legal norms of seventh-century nomadic tribes on modern secular industrial societies.

It was the bankruptcy of the Stalinist policy of backing bourgeois nationalists such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Hussein in Iraq and Hafez Assad (father of the current president) in Syria who could not fight imperialism that led to the rise of Islamism. Because they maintain capitalist rule, they are always at the mercy of the world market which condemns semi-colonial countries to perpetual poverty while stoking reactionary wars squabbling over the crumbs that fall from the tables of the imperialist feast. The persistence of bonapartist (police-military) regimes in Latin America, Asia and Africa confirms Trotsky’s analysis that in imperialist-dominated countries democracy, national liberation and agrarian revolution – the principal tasks of the bourgeois revolution – cannot be achieved under bourgeois rule.

The programmatic conclusion of this is the Trotskyist perspective of *permanent revolution*, that in order to accomplish the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions it is necessary for the working class to seize power at the head of the impoverished peasantry and all sectors of the oppressed and to undertake socialist tasks while extending the revolution internationally. This was the program that Lenin and Trotsky carried out in October 1917, against the opposition of the bourgeoisie but also of Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and Stalin and others in the Bolshevik Party. *The phony “Marxist-Leninists” of today represent the program of those who opposed Red October.*

This underscores the urgency of the League for the Fourth International’s struggle to forge specifically Leninist-Trotskyist communist parties based on the Bolshevik program of international socialist revolution, from the millions-strong working classes of Turkey and Egypt, to the “belly of the imperialist beast,” fighting for proletarian class independence from all the bourgeois forces, to put an end to the imperialist-capitalist system of war, poverty and racism. ■

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General Strikes Are Back in Greece: Revolutionary Leadership Needed

After the populist SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) came into office in January 2015, the Greek working class held off from mass protest in hopes that Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras would carry out election promises to end the punishing austerity program imposed by European central bankers and the International Monetary Fund. When Tsipras did an abrupt about-face in July and imposed the brutal austerity policies demanded by the imperialist financiers, there were big labor protests, but then a return to quiescence. Two months later, Tsipras was able to win a new mandate in snap elections on September 20 despite anger over his dramatic U-turn.¹ But this fall, Greek workers returned to the streets.

On November 12, the first “general strike” under the SYRIZA government brought out tens of thousands of marchers in Athens and other major cities, shutting industry, transport and much of commerce. A few days later, a November 17 march on the U.S. embassy commemorating the 1973 student uprising that was brutally attacked by the Washington-backed military junta was also quite large. This was followed by regional transit strikes, a farmers protest against tax hikes, student sit-ins against repression, a work stoppage by ambulance workers, a two-day walkout by hospital workers and on December 3, a second, somewhat smaller, one-day national strike to protest further pension cuts agreed to by Tsipras & Co.

Many labor officials and activists had worried what the response would be to the November 12 strike call. Coming not long after Tsipras won the September elections despite imposing hated austerity measures, the large turnout shows that the willingness to struggle of the Greek working people is unbroken. As result, the Greek left almost unanimously proclaimed the strike a success or “big success.” Yet while strike action and mass protests are back, this is still a far cry from the situation of 2010-11 when hundreds of thousands struck and marched. Above all, there is no strategy for a fight for power, in a situation in which the Eurobankers have driven home what has been obvious for years, that no amount of pressure will produce an end to austerity under capitalism. The crisis of revolutionary leadership is as acute as ever.

The Internationalist had a team in Greece reporting on the November strike and events in the following days. Here is their report:

ATHENS – November 12 saw the first general strike here since SYRIZA took office early this year in coalition with the right-wing populist Greek Democrats (ANEL). Some 30,000 marched through the streets of Athens, 10,000 were reported in Thessaloniki in the north, and thousands more in the port city of Piraeus, at Patra in the Peloponnese, Volos in the east and elsewhere around the country. The turnout among public workers in particular was solid. Transport of all types – from

¹ See “Greek Elections: For a Europe-Wide Workers Revolt Against Capitalist Austerity,” *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.



Contingent of PAME (All Workers Militant Front), linked to the Communist Party, in November 12 general strike in Athens.

the Athens subways and buses to rail, domestic air flights and the ferries from the Greek mainland to the islands – was severely disrupted. Public schools and universities were shut down and hospitals had only emergency service. The strike was effective in all of the ports.

The preceding week was filled with rolling labor struggles. On Monday November 1, the seamen’s union PNO decreed a two-day strike of ferries to the Aegean islands. Also on Monday, the OLME teachers union walked out while high school students protested over shortages in the schools. On Tuesday, workers at two main Athens hospitals walked out, followed by subway, streetcar and electric railway workers in the evening. On Wednesday the ferry strike was renewed for another 48 hours. On Thursday, pensioners rallied in central Athens. On Friday, November 6 the seamen’s strike was called off, reportedly due to pressure from the PAME labor federation linked to the Communist Party (KKE).

The November 12 strike was against the austerity policies imposed by the European Union. You can’t exactly say the strike was against the left/right bourgeois government led by Tsipras, as SYRIZA’s labor department called on workers to join it! And one even has to put the words “general strike” in quotation marks, because what this denotes in Greece (and Europe generally) these days is a one-day work stoppage combined with mass demonstrations. For Marxists, a real general strike is a frontal clash between the workers movement and the capitalist government – one step below an insurrection on the scale of revolutionary tactics. Nevertheless, the substantial turnout showed that the SYRIZA spell is wearing off.

The spectacle of a government party backing a strike against the policies it is implementing may be a first. The Greek right-wing parties and European finance ministers howled, denouncing SYRIZA for wanting to “have its cake and eat it too.” But then the double-talking Tsipras last July pulled a fast one, calling a referendum and urging

Greek voters to say “OXI” (NO) to the EU’s austerity demands, almost all of which he had already agreed to, and then when 60% voted “no,” he turned around and agreed to worse austerity. The purpose was to absolve SYRIZA of responsibility for its crime. While the bulk of the left went along with this pantomime, the League for the Fourth International warned that even a “no” vote would lead to more austerity.

The strike was called by the GSEE (the General Federation of Greek Workers) and ADEDY, the government employees’ federation. Giorgios Kalomoiris, a leader of ADEDY, told the press, “The winter is going to be explosive and this will mark the beginning.” Kalomoiris is a supporter of LEA (Popular Unity), the former Left Platform of SYRIZA that split off in the summer (after its ministers were sacked) yearning for the “good old days” of the pre-2015 SYRIZA. The GSEE leadership includes supporters of the populist-nationalist PASOK and even the right-wing New Democracy, the bourgeois duopoly that governed Greece for four decades. The fact that the various sellout bureaucrats organized even a one-day protest strike was a sign of desperation and a need to respond to pressure from the ranks.

In many respects the November 12 strike followed the pattern of preceding general strikes since the onset of the Greek financial crisis – by one count there were already no less than 40 since 2010. When the GSEE/ADEDY called a strike, PAME, the trade-union federation close to the KKE (Communist Party), called its own separate event. The PAME march moved out from Omonia Square a half-hour before the GSEE/ADEDY march left Klafmonos Square, and was then joined by a feeder march of the ostensible far left coming from the Archaeological Museum. So the PAME marched past the Parliament building in Syntagma Square in one direction somewhat before the other march arrived and went by Parliament in the other direction.

The anarchist attacks which helped

precipitate the end of the GSEE/ADEDY rally also had a rather ritualistic character, lobbing some Molotov cocktails at the cops from the cover of some far-left contingents (including some anarcho-syndicalists) inducing the cops to teargas everyone in the vicinity, including us. The anarchists went on to set fires in dumpsters and trash cans, hurled some more Molotovs against the doors of various banks and chipped away at their marble steps, which was quite symbolic of the futility of their actions. The press then had its photos of flames and charging riot police and its headlines about “clashes break out at general strike.” No. 41, going on 42.

The PAME march, which included high school students with handmade banners and a student contingent, was definitely the larger, with 15,000-plus marchers compared to 10,000-plus for the GSEE/ADEDY/far left contingent, and gave a quite militant appearance. The next day, the KKE denounced the “hollow anti-Memorandum rhetoric” of its rivals, and rightly so. But while it has kept its distance from SYRIZA and called the July referendum a fraud, the KKE is itself only seeking to pressure parliament. Rather than calling for workers action to smash austerity, including measures already passed, PAME posters focused on issues pending a vote by parliament: “Don’t gut social security, No foreclosures by the bankers, Lower taxes.”

Over at the GSEE/ADEDY march it was striking that virtually none of the banners attacked the government directly. At most there were some pink balloons with the words “Alexis’ Promises,” implying that they were so much hot air. SYRIZA could endorse the strike because it was just intended to blow off steam. Even most of the banners at the “far left” contingent focused on European Union dictates imposing austerity measures to Greece. The LAE opposed memoranda and “austerity and privatizations” in the abstract. The OKDE-Spartakos² attacked the memoranda and the “new and old minions” of the EU – its maximum demands were the cancellation of the debt and the exit of a (capitalist) Greece from the Eurozone and the EU.

ANTARSYA (Front of the Anti-Capitalist Left), a coalition of allegedly far-left parties that tried desperately to join up with the ex-ministers of the LEA before the September elections, did call to “defeat the government,” but what was to be “overthrown” was “EU-Capital.” Another ANTARSYA banner said, “Let the capitalists pay for the crisis.” I.e., increase taxes on big business rather than calling to bring down the bourgeois government and expropriate the capitalists. All of this fits in with a policy of amnestying SYRIZA by pretending that at its worst it was just capitulating to the Eurobankers. Before the strike, an ANTARSYA spokesman declared bombastically, “our rage will be re-

² Affiliated with the International Committee (formerly United Secretariat), followers of the late Ernest Mandel, which poses as the Fourth International. While the OKDE-Spartakos is part of ANTARSYA, its international ostentatiously supported SYRIZA, seeing it as the more successful opportunist coalition.



Alexis Tsipras and German chancellor Angela Merkel having a good laugh at conference in Malta on refugees during Greek general strike, November 12.

lentless". But not too relentless, it seems.

So SYRIZA tries to take the heat off by endorsing the strike while criticizing "neoliberal policies and economic blackmail," as if it were some kind of alien observer, and the "far left" plays along. In an article on the November 12 strike, the editor of the newspaper of the SEK (Socialist Workers Party),³ Panos Garganas, proclaims it "the biggest strike demonstration since the huge strikes that brought down the government of technocrats in 2012" – even though those were far larger. Calling the prospect of a "real" left government advocated by the LAE "remote" (he's right about that), Garganas argues that the strike showed that "workers' own action can force the government to make a U-turn and stop implementing austerity."

In this social-democratic fantasyland, the Eurobankers force Tsipras to make a U-turn (*kolotoumba* in Greek) to austerity, but workers' pressure can force him to make a U-turn back! It's all to deny that SYRIZA is a bourgeois (populist) party representing a section of the ruling class, and to delude people into thinking that pressure politics can get the bourgeoisie to abandon austerity policies which are vital to European capitalism's survival. Yet Tsipras' *kolotoumba* after the 60% OXI vote in July was the clearest possible demonstration that the bankers' dictatorship will not be moved by protests or votes (see our article, "Greece: The Naked Rule of Finance Capital" (18 July), in *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015).

Even the most left-wing contingent at the march, the ostensible Trotskyists of the EEK (Workers Revolutionary Party),⁴ pulled its punches about who was the enemy – its banner said "Down with the Memorandum and its Managers!" (Who might those be?) It went on to call for an "Unlimited General Political Strike" against austerity and "All Power to the Workers." Only a few short months ago, the EEK was calling on SYRIZA to break with the bourgeoisie, i.e., with itself. Then, after Tsipras' about-face in July, the EEK ran a joint slate with ANTARSYA in the September elections on a supposed "transitional program" consisting of demands on the bourgeois

³ The SEK is also part of ANTARSYA and aligned with the British Socialist Workers Party, followers of the late Tony Cliff, who split from Trotskyism at the start of the anti-Soviet Cold War, calling the bureaucratically degenerated Soviet workers state "state capitalist" and refusing to defend it against imperialist attack in the Korean War.

⁴ The EEK is part of the Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International led by Jorge Altamira's Partido Obrero (Workers Party) in Argentina.

government (ban layoffs, cancel the debt, nationalize the banks under workers control, exit the E.U., etc.) rather than a program leading to the overthrow of the capitalist state.

But is the unlimited or "indefinite" general strike proposed by the EEK an alternative? Merely setting no time limit is playing a passive waiting game – the old anarcho-syndicalist utopia. A genuine general strike involves constructing potential organs of *dual power* – elected and revocable strike committees, workers committees in the factories, workers councils in proletarian districts, the organization of workers self-defense. None of this is included in the "transitional" program of the EEK, or the various components of ANTARSYA, which are wedded to bourgeois electoralism. Above all, a genuine *transitional program for socialist revolution* requires a political mobilization under revolutionary, i.e., Trotskyist leadership.

There is much flammable material in crisis-ridden Greece. You see signs of acute social decay everywhere – the homeless, the addicts, the beggars. Eurostat figures for Greece show overall unemployment of 25%, the highest in the EU; youth unemployment over 50%; 39% of working-age population in poverty. Along with the permanent wage freeze exacerbated by huge tax hikes (value added tax of 23%), the bankers are now demanding stepped-up foreclosures of homes of those behind on mortgage payments. They also threaten to decimate small businesses. Pharmacists and even some shopkeepers joined the general strike. But this is a volatile social layer, and if it does not see the working class as its rescuer, it could well turn to the fascists of Golden Dawn.

Many on the left have been wringing their hands over defeatism and resignation among the masses. If so, much of the responsibility lies with opportunist leftists, who "by seeing the populists in power as allies rather than representatives of the class enemy," as we warned months ago, could only "demoralize the mass of the workers and poor" (see "Greece The SYRIZA Illusion Exploded" [March 2015], in *The Internationalist* No. 39, April-May 2015). But the Greek working class remains militant, as we saw on November 12. In Piraeus, even dock workers from the non-union container port owned by the Chinese shipping conglomerate Cosco marched in a contingent for the first time ever.

Public employees are on the chopping block. At the GSEE/ADEDY march we spoke with a group of Athens municipal workers who have only temporary contracts and make barely half the previous minimum wage, meaning they have to live on around €400 (about US\$435) a month. And these "pampered" public workers are supposed to be the "privileged" sector! While the bourgeois press pretends that private sector workers are hostile to general strikes, the solid shutdown of shipping, not to mention contingents such as the telephone workers of the privatized OTE (now owned by Deutsche Telekom) in the strike march, expose this as a lie.

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An important development is taking place in the military under the impact of the refugee crisis. Almost 600,000 migrants from the Middle East have flowed through Greece this year. Now the same EU bosses who are impoverishing Greek workers are demanding that Greece "crack down" on immigrants by setting up concentration camps ("hot spots") to house these desperate people fleeing imperialist bombing and Islamist terror, from Syria to Afghanistan. At the beginning of November, conscript soldiers from 50 different units signed a joint statement declaring "We don't fight, we do not suppress, we don't hunt down migrants." At the November 17 march on the U.S. embassy we met some of these leftist soldiers.

They are part of Diktyo Spartakos (Spartacus Network), linked to the New Left Current (NAR), which is the largest component of ANTARSYA, but also including other "far left" groups, among them OKDE-Spartakos and anarchists. The draftees' statement denounces the state's "collaboration with the Nazi Golden Dawn"; that they are ordered to participate in "crowd suppression drills," to prepare to repress "hungry-thirsty-imprisoned immigrants" such as on the island of Kos; and the Parmenionas 2015 exercise at the border fence separating Greece from Turkey, where several refugees have been gunned down by border police. Unlike many of the mealy mouthed banners on November 12, the soldiers directly denounce the Tsipras government:

"The SYRIZA-ANEL government continues the War on Terror, participates in imperialistic plans, targets 'asymmetric threats' (immigrants, social movements), playing on the false distinction of 'good' refugees from war – and 'bad' economic migrants. The Armed Forces call on us, the conscripted soldiers alongside professionals and officers, to make war on the 'enemy within'..."

"We refuse to convert the Greek army into a repressive apparatus whether that involves migrants or social movements.... We call on our colleagues to not only show compassion but to take note of our common class interests. It is the bourgeois institutions, bourgeois policies, bourgeois governments themselves which are destroying even our dreams. "We are part of a modern anti-war and labour movement that can exist only within a working class, anti-capitalist and internationalist perspective. We resist, oppose, and totally reject the gov-

ernment, its imperialist mechanisms, and the bourgeois world of oppression."

The appearance of such class-conscious soldiers is a sure sign of the escalated radicalization among Greek workers and youth, reminiscent of developments in the U.S. Army when soldiers turned on officers as the imperialist war on Vietnam spiraled downwards to defeat in the late 1960s. But their demands are incompatible with capitalist rule. For this radicalization to lead anywhere except to defeat it is necessary to join it with a program for revolutionary struggle. We addressed this in an article last summer as the crisis was coming to a head:

"What's needed, as the League for the Fourth International has repeatedly stated, is a revolutionary mobilization of the Greek working class, seizing banks, ports, airports, and key industries and imposing workers control, organizing workers defense guards to crush the Nazi-fascists of Golden Dawn and appeal to the ranks of the conscript army, and organizing workers councils with delegates recallable at any time. This would lay the basis for a new state power, a workers state, led by a Leninist-Trotskyist communist party built on the program of international socialist revolution."

–"What Road for Greece: Perpetual Debt Peonage or Workers Revolution?" (12 August), in *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015

As a warehouse worker at the November 12 march bitterly remarked to us, what's needed is a revolutionary left "in deeds and not just words." Nowhere more than in Greece is this so excruciatingly clear. And that means, first and foremost, a Trotskyist nucleus fighting to build a genuinely Leninist communist party of the working class, a party that opposes class collaboration in every form and which is capable of being a "tribune of the people" championing all of the oppressed – first and foremost the immigrants and refugees. The many variants of opportunism have already been tried over the last five years, and all have failed to stop the money gougers who have ruined the lives of Greek working people.

With the euro or new drachma, a capitalist Greece inside or outside the imperialist European Union will only intensify the austerity. Revolutionary internationalists fight instead for a socialist federation of the Balkans and Europe-wide socialist revolution. ■



Syrian refugees arriving on island of Lesbos from Turkey, July 2015. Leftist Greek soldiers refuse to suppress or hunt down refugees. LFI calls for asylum for all refugees, full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

ICL Consigns Revolution to the Greek Calends*

**In the Roman calendar, the calends were the first day of every month, when the pontiffs, or priests, would announce the number of days until the end of the month when debtors had to pay off their debts. The Greek calendar, however, had no such concept, so consigning something “to the Greek calends” was to relegate it to a time that will never arrive.*

The Greek working class has been battered by one political disaster after another this year. First, SYRIZA, the “Coalition of the Radical Left” which is actually a bourgeois populist party, formed a coalition government with the right-wing populist ANEL (Greek Democrats) the day after its January 25 election victory. After running on a platform promising to undo the brutal austerity imposed on Greece, only weeks after taking office, on February 20, the SYRIZA-ANEL government signed a joint statement with the Eurogroup of central bankers agreeing to *more* austerity measures. Then, following several months of *Sturm und Drang* (thunder and lightning) negotiations in Brussels, the bankers demanded a Greek capitulation. Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, having already agreed to almost all their extortionate demands, tried to wash his hands of responsibility by calling a referendum on the terms of surrender, urging a “NO” vote (OXI in Greek). 62% voted “No,” whereupon Tsipras pulled a U-turn and agreed with the parties that voted “Yes” to an even worse program of devastating austerity.¹

Those on the left who contributed to these betrayals by fostering the SYRIZA illusion were left dumbfounded and bitter. This included the various components of the Left Platform of SYRIZA and a second electoral coalition, ANTARSYA (Front of the Anti-Capitalist Left), which acted as a pressure group on SYRIZA. Also among those who got singed was the International Communist League (ICL – the Spartacist tendency), and its local outlet, the Trotskyist Group of Greece (TGG). After having called for no vote to SYRIZA in January, the ICL did its own flip-flop and heeded Tsipras’ call for a “No” vote in the July referendum. Coming off that debacle, the ICL/TGG issued a call for “workers committees of action” on an eight-point program that makes no mention of revolution, a revolutionary party or the overthrow of capitalism. It was a parody of Trotsky’s concept of transitional demands as a “bridge between present demands and the socialist program of the revolution.”²

After three decades of upholding revolutionary Trotskyism, the ICL was unhinged by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and entered on a downward spiral of almost 20 years of centrist degeneration in which it has abandoned one key plank of the Trotskyist program after another. In opposition to the 1996 founding

document of the Internationalist Group upholding the central thesis of the Transitional Program – “The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.... the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind’s culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International” – the ICL declared this outdated in the post-Soviet world. Trotsky’s thesis, the very reason for being of the FI, “predates the present deep regression of proletarian consciousness,” declared the ICL, essentially pinning the blame on the workers rather than the misleaders. Now, faced with a potentially revolutionary crisis in Greece, these ex-Trotskyists have turned sharply to the right.

Stung by our description of the ICL/TGG’s perversion of Trotsky’s Transitional Program in omitting the socialist revolution as a “road to nowhere” and a “minimum program” like those of Stalinists and social democrats who limit struggle to the bounds of capitalism, the ICL responded with an article titled “IG on Greece: Bridge to the Fourth Reich” (*Workers Vanguard*, 2 October). The demagogic headline indicates that they have decided to play dirty. (An accompanying piece slanderously accuses us of “provocation” and “a set-up for violence” against the ICL.) The ostensible justification for the soft-core Nazi baiting is our warning that the July referendum was a fraud, that while a “Yes” vote would mean abject surrender to the Eurobankers, even a “No” vote would approve draconian austerity and be a vote of confidence in Tsipras. Our warning, according to the ICL, “was nothing less than a betrayal, a capitulation to the EU [European Union] imperialists, centrally the Fourth Reich of German imperialism.”

The ICL claims that the referendum was just “‘for or against’ the Troika’s vicious austerity program,” as if this was some kind of simple opinion poll. It was not, it was a ploy by Tsipras to give the appearance of resisting the hated “Troika” of imperialist bankers (ECB, EC, IMF), while actually giving into their demands. It was a classic “bait-and-switch” scam which any street-smart New Yorker, and certainly any revolutionary Marxist, should instantly spot: promise them one thing, give them another. Ever hear of “αγοράζετε ένα γουρούνι στο σακί” (buying a pig in a poke)? The reformist KKE at least recognized this, but the ICL helped Tsipras’ rip-off. Instead of going along with the charade, the job of Trotskyists is to warn the targets of this cynical operation, that they are being used, that there is no escape from austerity under capitalism. As the Transitional Program says, “To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be... – these are the rules of the Fourth International.” Not so for the ICL, though.

Workers Vanguard also alleges that, “The resounding “no” vote in the July 5 Greek referendum destabilized the parliamentary order in that country, providing an opening for the working class to come forward in struggle.” This is fantasy. The

result of the “no” vote, which Tsipras then used to impose *more* austerity, was to demoralize Greek workers, leading to resignation rather than struggle. If it served to “expose” Tsipras & Co., how come SYRIZA got almost the same percentage of the vote in September elections as it did in January? The ICL joins the ANTARSYA and LEA (Popular Unity) opportunist leftists who pretend that the “no” vote in the referendum was somehow against the government. But large numbers of those who followed Tsipras’ appeal to vote “no” did so precisely in order to back him in his negotiations. Shocked that the outcome did not serve to rally the working masses, leftist backers of the “no” vote seek solace in conjuring up a “movement for No” that only existed in their imagination.

Actually, the ICL was well aware of what was going on in the referendum, which only underlines its cynicism. A subsequent article in *Workers Vanguard* (13 November) stated: “Syriza called for a ‘no’ vote, with the declared intent of utilizing the outcome to pressure the EU for more favorable conditions.” It goes on to report, as we did months ago, that SYRIZA insiders said Tsipras secretly expected and hoped for a “yes” vote, so he wouldn’t have to do the dirty work. But that didn’t negate the fact that Tsipras called for a “no” vote as a pressure tactic, and that once he got it, he went ahead and agreed to the sellout that he was preparing all along. We in the League for the Fourth International warned in advance that the vote was simply to hide the fact that the government had accepted the Troika’s terms, and that’s exactly what happened. Squirm as it might, the ICL can’t get around that basic fact, and that in its modest way, it helped stoke the illusions. Having done so, it shares responsibility for the result.

Next on the ICL’s list of grievance is the LFI position on Greek exit from the Eurozone, colloquially referred to as *Grexit*. According to the ICL, a Grexit “would help break Greek workers from nationalism,” and for us to say that calling for Grexit under capitalism is pandering to bourgeois nationalism is pro-imperialist. The mental gymnastics they perform to buttress this claim surpasses Nadia Comaneci’s perfect-10 performance in the 1976 Summer Olympics. In the first place, a capitalist Grexit is *the* program of Greek nationalists of every hue, from right to left. The ICL then claims that Greece “has even less national sovereignty today than neocolonial Mexico,” and argues for Grexit on the grounds that “control over its currency is an elementary prerequisite for national sovereignty.” So in the case of Greece, part of the imperialist European Union, the ICL calls to defend its “national sovereignty,” but in Puerto Rico, an actual colony of U.S. imperialism, it *pointedly refuses to call for independence*.³

³ The ICL, which used to call for Puerto Rican independence, abandoned this fundamental demand in 1998 and has since then called only for its “right to self-determination” (or “right of independence,” which is the same thing), something every U.S. president in at least the last four decades has claimed to support (see “ICL Renounces Fight for Puerto Rican Independence,” *The Internationalist* No. 6, Novem-



Petros Giamakouris

Alexis Tsipras at July 3 Athens rally calling for a “No” (“Oxi” in Greek) vote in referendum. We warned that this was a scam, and even a “No” vote would bring more austerity. As we foretold, immediately after the vote, Tsipras accepted the bankers’ ultimatum. ICL joined other opportunists in heeding Tsipras’ call.

To justify its call for Greece to leave the euro and the European Union under capitalism, *Workers Vanguard* repeats its claim that, unlike hard-line German imperialists who want to push Greece out to shore up profits, the ICL’s “Grexit” scenario “would create more favorable conditions for the working class to struggle in its own interests.” We have repeatedly said that Greece may be forced to leave the eurozone simply to stave off economic collapse, but to claim that this will create better conditions for Greek workers shows fatal illusions in the imperialists. The Eurobankers can simply refuse to accept a new drachma and continue to demand the euro debt be paid. It also ignores the extent that EU membership has destroyed large parts of the productive apparatus. Greece is heavily dependent on imports simply to feed itself: 63% of pork consumed (for example in souvlaki) is imported, as is much of the milk in “Greek” yogurt, two-thirds of flour used in baking bread, along with 80% of beef and almost all fuel, fertilizers, pesticides and agricultural machinery.

SYRIZA came to power peddling the illusion that it would somehow be possible to put an end to, or at least substantially limit, the devastation wrought by policies imposed by the Troika of imperialist bankers that have slashed wages by 40%, produced 25% unemployment (over 50% among youth) and sent the Greek economy into a tailspin. We have explained elsewhere that the entire Eurozone structure was designed to enforce austerity on the working class, and that this is the result of the depression in the advanced capitalist countries since the 2007-08 market crash and financial crisis, and more generally of the falling rate of profit.⁴ That will not substantially change whether a capitalist Greece is in or out of the EU. To pretend that somehow Greek workers can escape the hammer blows of austerity *without* overthrowing capitalist rule, as virtually the entire Greek “far left” and the

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ber-December 1998). It was logical then, in a perverted way, when these social-colonialists defended the U.S. imperialist invasion of Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, supposedly to supply humanitarian aid but actually to prevent the outbreak of protests, a position that we denounced and the ICL later renounced as “social-imperialist” (“Spartacist League Backs U.S. Imperialist Invasion of Haiti” and “Repentant Social Imperialists: Open Letter from the Internationalist Group to the Spartacist League,” in *The Internationalist* No. 31, Summer 2010.

⁴ For example, in “Greece: The SYRIZA Illusion Exploded,” *The Internationalist* No. 39, April-May 2015.

¹ See “Greece: The Naked Rule of Finance Capital,” *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.

² See “The ICL on Greece: Goodbye Trotsky, Hello Minimum Program,” also in *The Internationalist* No. 41.

Paris Attack...

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ton killing shocks Western sensibilities because it occurs “at home,” not in some far-off land invisible to the citizenry, and it instills fear, as intended.

There was no such outcry about another indiscriminate suicide-bombing by the I.S. that killed 43 people the day before in Beirut, Lebanon. On the contrary, the initial headline of the *New York Times* (13 November) called the targeted neighborhood of southern Beirut a “stronghold” of the Shiite Hezbollah militia (which is aiding the Syrian government), as if to justify the terror attack. Nor was there international commotion when at least 99 people were killed in an attack on a peace demonstration called by left-wing unions and Kurdish parties in Turkey’s capital, Ankara, on October 10. Or when 34 socialist youth were killed in Suruc on July 20. These terror attacks were carried out by Islamists in league with sectors of the Turkish state. Since Turkey is an “ally” and member of NATO, its crimes are unmentioned.

And while the French president denounces “the enemy” – the I.S. – as “barbarians,” there is no mention about how this terrorist force was for years armed by the imperialists and their regional allies and puppets (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc.) in their failed attempt to bring down the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad, seen as an ally of Iran and stumbling block for imposing a Pax Americana in the region. Not a word about how Hollande secretly approved shipments of thousands of arms to Islamist gangs in Syria who then joined the Al Qaeda affiliate and eventually the Islamic State. Or about how the casualties inflicted by the I.S. “dogs of war” who have slipped the leash in Paris are only a fraction of those caused by their former masters.

130 lives cruelly taken away in the City of Lights – that’s how many victims U.S. warplanes take out every time they hit a wedding party in Afghanistan, which they do with sickening regularity. What about the **600,000+** violent deaths between 2003 and 2006 due to the U.S. invasion of occupation of Iraq, including some 100,000 caused by aerial bombing, according to the report by researchers from the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health published in the respected British medical journal *Lancet*? Or the **over 1 million** Iraqis who died because of the United Nations economic sanctions between 1991 and 1998, including over 500,000 children, according to surveys by the United Nations Children’s Fund?

Faced with the utter failure of the U.S. (and French) war campaign against the I.S., two policy options are being weighed by the “great” and not-so-great powers: intensify the bombing and oust Assad in Damascus, or intensify the bombing in conjunction with the Assad regime. Both depend on the policy of Vladimir Putin’s Russia.⁵ Hard-line war hawk Democrats and Republicans in Washington and “socialist” Hollande in Paris want to topple the Syrian president, but not have the regime apparatus collapse, a nearly impossible scenario. The “realists” want to work in tandem with Russia, Iran and Assad without saying so or openly collaborating. In either case, the elusive goal is a “peace” imposed by the imperialist mass murderers and their reactionary allies.

⁵ See “Flashpoint Syria: Russian Intervention and Imperialist Aggression,” on page 13.



Some of the 130 people killed in carnage of indiscriminate terror attack by Islamic State in Paris, November 13.

The League for the Fourth International calls instead *to drive out and defeat the imperialists* and their allies. As we have repeatedly stated, “Every blow struck against the NATO marauders, even by the atavistic *ihadis* (holy warriors) of the I.S., is in the interests of the exploited and oppressed. The ‘democratic’ militarists are by far the biggest mass murderers (and exploiters and oppressors) on the planet” (“Flashpoint Syria”). From Afghanistan in the 1980s on, Trotskyists emphatically opposed the Islamist cutthroats, whose services the imperialists repeatedly used against targets from the Soviet Union to the Middle East. And we do so today calling for *workers revolution* to smash the I.S. and all the Sunni and Shiite Islamist, Zionist, militarist and authoritarian regimes that oppress the peoples of the region.

No to the State of Emergency – Defend Muslims and Immigrants!

“*La patrie en danger!*” (the Fatherland is in danger) cry French rulers whenever they want to step up repression. And the (bourgeois) republican and (reformist) socialist left invariably snaps to attention, saluting the tricolor flag and intoning the *Marseillaise*. It was no different this time. At the Congress of Versailles on November 16, Communist Party (PCF) senator Éliane Assassi declared that in the face of the attacks, “the state of emergency is fully justified,” while piously appealing for “respect of public liberties.” Left Party (PG) leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon greeted Hollande’s declaration that the “security pact is superior to the financial stability pact,” while ironically expressing doubts about his “staggering addition to imagined security.”

The French president began his speech to the Congress declaring, “France is at war,” as if this was something new. France, which refused to join the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, has been bombing the I.S. in Iraq and now Syria since Obama launched his war there in September 2014. But Hollande’s war is above all against the “enemy within.” He went on to call not only to extend the State of Emergency for three months, but also to add thousands of new police officers, to create a National Guard, to amend the Constitution to introduce an ongoing “state of crisis,” to shut down mosques that “preach hatred” and deport their imams, to permit the cancellation of French citizenship and deportation even of

those born in France, and to ban them from returning to France if the government decides they “represent a terrorist risk.”

In addition, Hollande is demanding the government’s right to use “the whole range of intelligence techniques offered by new technology” by administrative decision (i.e., without a court order), to tighten gun control and to expand police officers’ right to use their weapons so they can shoot at will “in legitimate defense.” He gave parliament until Friday to vote yes.⁶ In short, this pudgy social-democratic wannabe Napoléon just took over the security program of the right-wing parties in the name of fighting a “war against terrorism.” Fascist National Front leader Martine Le Pen grimaced and made approving noises while saying Hollande didn’t go “far enough” in the “indispensable cleaning out of the cellars and suburbs gangrened by criminality.”

If, so far, there hasn’t been a wave of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant attacks as there was after the attack on *Charlie Hebdo*, the fascists are laying the basis for it by whipping up hysteria against Syrian refugees. The government, meanwhile, is using police to attack migrant camps, notably the “Jungle” at Calais, near the entrance to the Channel tunnel linking France to Britain. In recent days, 1,800 police have besieged the camp. CRS riot cops lob tear-gas grenades while Nazis in hoods attack migrants near the Eurotunnel. Dozens of residents have been put on planes to camps in the South, and on November 12 construction equipment began bulldozing dwellings, supposedly to build a “safer” camp (consisting of shipping containers!) that would hold only a quarter of the 6,000 living there now.



French president François Hollande (at tribune) and legislators sing *La Marseillaise* at Congress in Versailles Palace, October 16. The Communist Party and Left Party shamefully voted to extend state of emergency and grant police-state powers to the bourgeois government.

Channel tunnel linking France to Britain. In recent days, 1,800 police have besieged the camp. CRS riot cops lob tear-gas grenades while Nazis in hoods attack migrants near the Eurotunnel. Dozens of residents have been put on planes to camps in the South, and on November 12 construction equipment began bulldozing dwellings, supposedly to build a “safer” camp (consisting of shipping containers!) that would hold only a quarter of the 6,000 living there now.

The report that one of the Paris attackers had a Syrian passport and may have arrived in the wave of refugees a couple of months ago has led right-wing demagogues to claim that migrants are being used as a cover to smuggle in terrorists. The same hysterical appeals are echoed in the United States, not only by the execrable Donald Trump but also “mainstream” Republican governors who announced they would not take any Syrian refugees, even though many are fleeing from areas controlled by the I.S. (and bombed by the U.S.). Now the U.S. House of Representatives has overwhelmingly passed a vile racist bill tightening restrictions on these refugees, with dozens of Democrats joining the Republicans in the vote. At the same time, local police, Homeland Security and the FBI are ominously stepping up surveillance, while intelligence agencies want to reinstate monitoring of all e-mails and phone calls.

Across Europe, immigrants and refugees are feeling the heat of an anti-foreigner backlash against the dramatic wave of migration from the Middle East, including threats of violence, fascist attacks and official repression. While Balkan countries seal off borders with barbed wire, in Germany, the far-right Pegida (European Patriots Against the Islamization of the West) movement regularly brings out 10,000 to 20,000 demonstrators in Dresden to demand closing the borders. Arson and other attacks on asylum facilities in Germany are skyrocketing, with 580 registered so far this year compared to 198 in all of 2014, with Nazis implicated in many. This underscores the urgency of organizing workers defense of immigrants, in France, Germany, Belgium and elsewhere.

Despite the immigrant-bashing war frenzy, Parisians’ most common form of “resistance” has been to have a drink at the local café or bistro. But the main danger is from the government as it escalates the war in Iraq and Syria and seeks to impose police-state



Head of personnel at Air France flees from strikers, October 5. Union tops distanced themselves from workers' action, called off new strike scheduled for November 19. Almost entire left has gone along with state of emergency.

measures indefinitely. The state of emergency which was used by future Socialist Party leader François Mitterrand against Algerian independence fighters in the 1950s and after the generals' putsch in 1961, which allows the government to ban demonstrations and meetings, censor media, carry out arbitrary searches and seizures, impose curfews and house arrests, even set up military tribunals, is not sufficient for the *va-t-en-guerre* (war-monger) Hollande. He wants all those powers and more, permanently.

Build a Revolutionary Internationalist Party

What's urgently needed in the wake of the Paris attacks is a revolutionary opposition to the imperialist aggression and bonapartist repressive measures "at home." Certainly that won't come from the reformist, long-since social-democratized PCF, whose Senate spokeswoman said they would "study" Hollande's call for more police powers. Unions led by the PCF and PS have dutifully called off strikes and mobilizations. One canceled walkout was that scheduled for Air France on November 19 to protest massive layoffs and arrests after their militant strike last month when incensed workers tore the shirts off top airline executives. (CFDT and CGT union leaders shamefully distanced themselves from the workers' bold action.)

But even groups traditionally classified as "far left" have almost all tacitly gone along with the government. Reformist pseudo-Trotskyists like the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA), led by followers of the late Ernest Mandel, and Gauche Révolutionnaire (GR), part of Peter Taaffe's Committee for a Workers International, take exception to calls for "national unity," say that this is "their war, our dead" (NPA), "not our war" (GR), and criticize the state of emergency. But beyond these abstract bromides neither they nor other groups like Lutte Ouvrière (LO) are calling to mobilize in the streets to demand France get out of Syria and Iraq – i.e., not only opposing the state of emergency in words but defying the bans on demonstrations.

The reason there is not now and has not been a mass struggle against French bombardment in the Middle East is that these opportunists largely share the same policy as the ruling Socialist Party, calling for support to the supposedly "moderate" Islamist armed gangs against the Assad regime in Syria. The NPA, which is the most egregious, has even

demanding, repeatedly, that Hollande – i.e., the French imperialist government – arm the "Free Syrian Army"! In fact, *Hollande admitted last year that France had been surreptitiously doing just that*. (In the U.S. there have been no major antiwar protests since Obama began bombing: since liberals support the war on the I.S., the opportunist leftists who tail after them stay home.)

As for the state of emergency, almost the entire French left is "electoral cretinist" to the core. Even though "far left" parties get a tiny percentage of the vote and almost no one elected, they devote a huge amount of their efforts to participating in the capitalist election shell game. They are not about to risk their ballot status, or the government subsidies they receive for running candidates, by violating a government ban on demos. Yes, Bolsheviks can make use of the rigged electoral platform to put forward our revolutionary program, but it is hardly a main focus of activity. If anti-parliamentarism is an "infantile disorder of communism," as Lenin wrote, the ingrained electoralism of the French left is a sign of *social-democratic senile dementia*.

In the Middle East, Islamist forces have mushroomed because of the failure of the Stalinist left and the bourgeois nationalist regimes it supported to confront imperialism and offer an alternative to the grinding poverty and social disintegration of neo-colonial capitalism. Likewise in France and elsewhere in Europe, the reactionary *jihadis* recruit among disaffected Muslim youth who see no future for themselves amid the opulence of the imperialist *metropole*, and no revolutionary alternative to their degrading life. If when residents of the banlieues rose up in 2005 against police brutality, French leftists and workers had come out to set up defense guards around the besieged HLM (housing projects), it would be a very different story today.

Any of the three major organizations in France claiming some affinity to Trotskyism had the numbers and wherewithal to do that. But for that what's required above all is a Leninist and Trotskyist program of revolutionary action, and that they were lacking. The heinous killings in Paris, the never-ending imperialist butchery in the Middle East and the intensifying police repression everywhere cry out for an authentically Bolshevik, internationalist workers party. It's up to the League for the Fourth International and revolutionary-minded militants everywhere to build it. ■

ICL...

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ICL do, is to propagate the same kinds of illusions that SYRIZA did, only this time with the drachma instead of the euro.

Workers Vanguard accuses us of "trying to make time with the Stalinists of the Greek Communist Party" because we noted that in calling for a "double OXI" (no to the austerity of the Troika and of SYRIZA) the KKE stated that there is no "alternative for the people in a capitalist Greece of the drachma." *WV* pretends this means dropping opposition to the EU, even though it quotes our article saying that "Unlike Euroleftists like SYRIZA, authentic Trotskyists have opposed the imperialist European Union from the beginning." But it has a little problem: while the LFI called for critical support to KKE candidates in the January election, so did the ICL's Trotskyist Group of Greece. It now claims that this was "*because* it [the KKE] stood in opposition to the EU" in January but subsequently changed its policy. However, the KKE dropped its call for a Greek exit from the euro under capitalism well *before* January 2015. After rereading the documents, perhaps the ICL/TGG will renounce its earlier critical support.

The ICL takes us to task for "argu[ing] that there is no way out of debt peonage for the Greek working class and oppressed short of a Europe-wide workers revolution."⁵ "Sounds really r.r.revolutionary, but it isn't," sneers *Workers Vanguard*. (Actually, what we called for was "a Europe-wide workers revolt that becomes a revolution.") It derides our alleged "hot air urging the Greek workers to occupy the banks and the ports."⁶ It scoffs at the "revolutionary offensive" blowhards in the IG" for whom "the very notion of defensive struggle as outlined by Trotsky is anathema." Instead the ICL proffers the program for "workers action committees" it put forward in its July 17 leaflet. We have noted that this leaflet raised "some correct calls, including for a number of demands we have put forward in recent articles (workers defense guards, shorter work-week with no loss in pay, workers control of food distribution)," but with a crucial difference: *the ICL/TGG did not link these to a struggle for workers revolution*.

Rather than calling for a workers government based on organs of workers power (the dictatorship of the proletariat), the ICL refers vaguely to "a government which will act in the interests of the working people and be subordinated to them." This could be, we wrote, "a government of the capitalist state backed by unions and supposedly pledged to carry out pro-worker reforms." The ICL formula is almost identical to calls by Greek pseudo-Trotskyists like the DEA who mean exactly that⁷ and whose pseudo-"transitional program" bears a striking resemblance to the ICL's. Now, the 2 October *Workers Vanguard* explicitly *confirms* that its program is *not* calling for proletarian rule. As for Trotsky's view of defensive struggles, he does not divorce them from revolutionary struggle as the ICL does, but links them. Thus he writes

⁵ "What Road for Greece: Perpetual Debt Peonage or Workers Revolution?" *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.

⁶ See "Greek Workers: Defeat the Bankers' Dictat, Occupy the Banks and Ports!" *The Internationalist* No. 41.

⁷ See "Capitalist 'Left Government' vs. Revolutionary Workers Government," *The Internationalist* No. 41.

in 1932 about Germany that the situation "dictates a clear strategic plan, beginning on the defensive, then assuming the offensive" leading to "the conquest of power" ("What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat" [January 1932]).

A program for defensive struggle that does not lead to struggle for revolution is precisely a reformist "minimum program." Actually, the social democrats and Stalinists would often tack on a few phrases about socialism and even revolution in the sweet bye-and-bye – their "maximum program" for Sunday speechifying. This mini-max program is the very antithesis of Trotsky's Transitional Program, but the ICL dispenses with any reference whatsoever to a final goal. To try to give its Greek minimum program a Trotskyist pedigree, the *Workers Vanguard* article cites Trotsky's November 1935 article "For Committees of Action – Not the People's Front" (part of his pamphlet *Whither France?*). Well and good. Trotsky's call for Committees of Action is explicitly directed against the popular front tying the workers organization to sections of the bourgeoisie – just look at the title. But the ICL's eight-point program includes no plank against the populist SYRIZA government, and is clearly intended to include critical SYRIZA supporters.

Okay, so there's no call for a revolutionary workers party, workers government, workers revolution, struggle against SYRIZA – or occupying the ports and banks, heaven forbid – that's because it's "an application of the tactic of the united front.," says the ICL. But the united front is a temporary agreement for united *action*. The program for the ICL/TGG's "workers action committees" calls to cancel the debt, abolish regressive taxes, expropriate the banks, decent pensions, etc. That is no united front, it's a *propaganda bloc* – which Trotsky always warned against. It's a political coalition of the sort that's been plaguing the Greek left for decades, where coalitions exist within coalitions. The *WV* article makes this explicit, saying "such committees would be arenas for vital debates on the way forward involving the different parties that claim to represent the workers' interests." So they're to be social-democratic debating clubs for sundry fake-left groups, all of whom call for a capitalist Grexit, have very similar minimum programs, and all (ICL included) attack the reformist Stalinist KKE *from the right*.

If such committees ever come to exist at all, that is. The ICL is a latecomer to this milieu and may not find many takers. But what they're not is what's needed most: a step toward galvanizing Greek workers to take class-struggle action against the Eurobanker loan sharks and their local collection agency, the SYRIZA government; to fight for asylum for all refugees and full citizenship for all immigrants; and above all, to forge a revolutionary workers party to lead a workers revolt, from defense against austerity attacks to offense against the capitalist system. To fight for a socialist federation of the Balkans and a socialist united states of Europe requires building an authentic Trotskyist vanguard on a transitional program for socialist revolution, which the ICL's "bridge to nowhere" platform most decidedly is not. Having relegated workers revolution to the Greek calends, after so many other revisions of the Trotskyist program, these centrists are tacking to and fro in the Aegean, adrift without a compass headed ... where? ■



El 6 de noviembre, cientos de trabajadores de B&H, sus familias y activistas abarrotaron un salón de reuniones en Brooklyn para celebrar el triunfo histórico del logro de la certificación sindical.

Victoria!...

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trabajadores expresaron su aprecio por el papel jugado el LWC al orientar la lucha, así como para el dedicado equipo de abogados, que jugaron un papel clave al bloquear uno a uno los sucios trucos de la compañía, así como a quienes apoyaron la lucha. El hecho de que el sindicato United Steelworkers respaldó a los trabajadores, convirtiéndose en su representante para la negociación de un contrato colectivo, fue citado como una parte clave de la campaña. Un momento memorable de la velada ocurrió cuando el almacenista Jorge Lora leyó un poema que escribió, que dice en parte:

“Ya hace más de un año, el día yo ni me acuerdo, un grupo de trabajadores decidieron tumbar un imperio. Eran sometidos a maltrato, irrespecto y discriminación, el grupo de trabajadores que venían de distinta nación.... Y todos estamos contentos con el resultado de la votación.... Ahora es que empezamos la lucha para el contrato ganar.... Y esto después va a continuar.”

Ya habíamos señalado previamente que la victoriosa lucha de la panadería Hot and Crusty en Manhattan inspiró la de B&H. Ahora la victoria de B&H inspirará otras, entre la clase obrera de Nueva York, con su gran contingente de inmigrantes, como señaló el camarada Antonio, portavoz del Grupo Internacionalista, durante la celebración del 6 de noviembre. “Es un ejemplo para todos los inmigrantes y también para los trabajadores nacidos aquí”, dijo. Hay “medio millón de inmigrantes indocumentados en Nueva York”, señaló. Al menos 150 mil mexicanos viven aquí, en su gran mayoría trabajadores, junto con “ecuatorianos, guatemaltecos y dominicanos así como africanos, haitianos, chinos, bangladeshis, paquistanés y muchos más que compartimos la explotación con los trabajadores negros, latinos, asiáticos y blancos nacidos en este país”.

“Así que la lucha de ustedes va a inspirar a muchos más trabajadores en esta ciudad y tenemos que prepararnos para eso”, continuó, y para la siguiente fase de esta lucha. Ganar un sindicato es un primer paso crucial. En la lucha por el contrato, será esencial movilizar la fuerza independiente de los trabajadores como clase, con apoyo activo por parte del resto del movimiento obrero de Nueva York (transporte, comunicaciones, construcción, educación y otros sindicalistas) y defensores de los derechos de los inmigrantes. Así también, es fundamental recordar la lección de luchas como la de Hot and Crusty, de que “jugar con reglas del patrón es segura perdición”. Para ganar, los trabajadores deben basarse en su

propio poder de clase, no en las instituciones, medios y políticos del sistema capitalista.

“¡Unión, fuerza, solidaridad!”

Empresa lucrativa y de alto perfil, conocida en toda la industria de la fotografía y el video, lo que hace B&H tras bambalinas trae a la mente los talleres del sudor y el cruel desdén por la seguridad de los trabajadores que llevó al

“levantamiento de los 20 mil” trabajadoras de la industria del vestido —principalmente mujeres y adolescentes inmigrantes judías e italianas— en la ciudad de Nueva York, dos años antes del tristemente célebre incendio de la fábrica Triangle Shirtwaist de 1911.

Frente a un oponente de línea dura tal como la gerencia de B&H, enfatizó la organizadora del LWC Rosanna Rodríguez, la victoria de los trabajadores ha exigido valor y trabajo duro, “un año de organización y mucho sacrificio”. Esta preparación, junto con las lecciones que los trabajadores extrajeron de los intentos que realizaron durante años para resistir en contra de los abusos de los patrones, han rendido frutos de gran importancia. “Los trabajadores de B&H han mostrado un nivel de organización, disciplina y determinación que he visto raras veces a lo largo de mis muchas décadas en el movimiento obrero, dijo un veterano activista de las luchas obreras a *El Internacionalista*.

Tres semanas antes de votar la sindicalización de los almacenes de B&H, los trabajadores mostraron el poder de su solidaridad y determinación cuando la administración y “consultores” antisindicales amenazaron a los trabajadores con un despido en masa en las instalaciones de los Navy Yards en represalia por haberse rehusado a firmar documentos antisindicato. Al enterarse de la provocación de los patrones, los trabajadores del almacén de la avenida Evergreen pararon de inmediato labores en una protesta de solidaridad que puso a los patrones contra las cuerdas, obligándolos a retractarse de sus amenazas de despido y a “disculparse” por este “error”.

Habiendo contratado al infame bufete legal Jackson Lewis, conocido por sus maniobras para impedir la formación de sindicatos, la compañía siguió el manual antisindical, pero cada triquiñuela les resultó inútil, pues los trabajadores confirmaron una y otra vez las predicciones que hicieron los organizadores sindicales con respecto a las jugarretas que vendrían. Los trabajadores respondieron al intento de los propietarios de intimidarlos con una numerosa y animada marcha frente a la tienda ubicada en el centro de Manhattan tres días después de la amenaza de despido en masa, coreando “¡El jueves mostramos que no tenemos miedo!” y “¡Unión, fuerza, solidaridad!”

Los trabajadores cuya voz e individualidad son sofocadas en el molino diario de la explotación —en que los patrones que los “tratan como animales” y los ven como poco más que bestias de carga, como varios comentaron— se dieron cuenta de qué es lo que pueden hacer en el curso de una lucha colectiva “por nuestra dignidad y

nuestros derechos”. La lucha despertó una enorme creatividad, por ejemplo cuando los trabajadores pintaron sus consignas en cajas para llevar en alto a las marchas de protesta. Subían y bajaban las cajas con consignas mientras coreaban “Arriba trabajador, abajo explotador”.

Otra consigna coreada con mucho sentimiento fue la de “Uno, dos tres, queremos nuestros breaks”. El break es un descanso, y muchos habían estado trabajando 58 horas a la semana, o más, con apenas una breve pausa para comer. En el mitin del 1º de noviembre frente a la tienda de B&H hubo una votación simbólica. Al depositar su voto, cada uno declaraba sus razones para votar “sí” a la sindicalización: “seguridad en el trabajo”, “no más discriminación”, “mejor salario”, “respeto”, “dignidad”, “por mis hijos” y “Estoy votando por el futuro”, fueron algunas de las muchas respuestas.

En este bastión sindical que es Nueva York, la notoria valentía de los almacenistas de B&H despertó para ellos apoyo de parte de muchos sectores. Más de un millar de fotógrafos y artistas firmaron una petición para respaldar su causa. Para estudiantes de la Universidad de la Ciudad de Nueva York (CUNY) que los Clubes Internacionalistas de CUNY trajeron a las protestas y para apoyar las actividades de los trabajadores, la experiencia “ha representado un increíble aprendizaje”, como dijo una joven activista, “puesto que lo que leemos y estudiamos en nuestros círculos de estudio marxistas cobró vida aquí, y somos parte de esto”.

En la celebración del 6 de noviembre, los internacionalistas y otros cantaron dos canciones escritas por un camarada una noche antes de la histórica votación para la sindicalización. Uno de los coros dice: “Es la hora de decisiones, los obreros no somos reos, almacenes no son prisiones”. Otra canción se burla de la rifa organizada por los patrones y declara: “No nos dejamos comprar con trucos del patrón”.

A escala nacional se ha dedicado mucha atención en los medios de comunicación a las protestas y “huelgas” en compañías tristemente célebres por sus bajos salarios, incluidos restaurantes de comida rápida como McDonald’s, y grandes tiendas

como Walmart. Pero de hecho, muy pocos trabajadores en esos lugares de trabajo han ido efectivamente a huelga, por temor a que de hacerlo serían inmediatamente despedidos, y se trata de acciones tipo espectáculo dirigidas por burócratas sindicales, orientadas a los medios de comunicación y con frecuencia para servir de plataforma a políticos del Partido Demócrata. Un verdadero intento de sindicalizar a los trabajadores de bajos salarios exige un sistemático esfuerzo de organización para movilizar a las bases con independencia de los partidos patronales. Esto es lo que muestran las victorias de Hot and Crusty y B&H.

La conciencia y la organización de los trabajadores seguirán siendo cruciales en la lucha para conseguir un contrato sindical que incorpore avances significativos para los trabajadores en una compañía en la que “los almacenes parecen cárceles”. Continuar y profundizar las actividades de educación obrera que ya están en curso será de importancia fundamental en el período que sigue. También será vital establecer un comité de mujeres vinculado a la unión (debido a la discriminatoria política de contrataciones de la compañía, todos los almacenistas son varones) para integrar completamente en la lucha a las esposas y compañeras de los trabajadores en una situación en la que esta cuestión puede ser clave para la victoria o la derrota, como lo han mostrado muchas batallas de clase en el pasado.

Por medio de su intensa campaña a lo largo del año pasado y de la resultante victoria sindical, los trabajadores de B&H pueden ser la chispa para luchas, que ellos pueden ayudar a dirigir, de toda la clase obrera en el área de Nueva York. Están emergiendo nuevos organizadores en el curso de la batalla. El enorme potencial para una ofensiva obrera en contra de la intolerable desigualdad, la discriminación y la represión racista exige una dirección clasista a la altura del desafío, empeñada en llevar a la victoria la lucha de los trabajadores contra todo el sistema capitalista de despiadada explotación. La victoria de los trabajadores de B&H será inspiración y ejemplo para todos los que quieren que esto ocurra.

¡Luchar, vencer, obreros al poder!

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Con votación arrolladora se gana la sindicalización

¡V-I-C-T-O-R-I-A!

Almacenistas de B&H logran triunfo histórico para el movimiento obrero y los derechos de los inmigrantes



Foto: El Internacionalista

Almacenistas y sus partidarios se manifiestan frente a la tienda de B&H Photo en el centro de Nueva York, el 1° de noviembre. La muchedumbre coreó, “¡El 4 de noviembre, vamos a ganar!” De hecho, el 4 de noviembre, los trabajadores de B&H ganaron la certificación sindical con una votación de 200 contra 88.

Cientos de trabajadores almacenistas inmigrantes en Brooklyn, Nueva York, lograron una victoria histórica el 4 de noviembre, cuando su campaña de sindicalización –que llevaba un año en curso– consiguió una votación arrolladora en la conocida empresa de equipo profesional de fotografía y video B&H. Los días 11 y 18 de octubre y 1° de noviembre, los trabajadores realizaron animadas manifestaciones afuera de la tienda de la empresa en la calle 34 en Manhattan. Y entonces llegó el día decisivo. Mucho antes del amanecer del día 4, los trabajadores se concentraron en las cercanías de los almacenes de la com-

pañía en los Navy Yards y en la avenida Evergreen.

“Hoy vamos a ganar”, decían los trabajadores una y otra vez, con una mezcla de determinación y júbilo mientras tomaban café y pan que habían llevado sus partidarios, asegurándose de que todos se presentaran a la votación para la certificación sindical, que se llevaría a cabo en estos dos lugares de trabajo. Cuando abrieron las casillas a las 6:30 a.m., los trabajadores marcharon en destacamentos hacia los sitios de votación, coreando “¿Qué queremos? ¡Unión! ¿Cuándo? ¡Ahora!” Para los activistas del movimiento obrero y defensores

de los derechos de los inmigrantes, fue una mañana para recordar.

“Vamos a conseguir 200 votos”, aseguraba el organizador Mahoma López del Laundry Workers Center (LWC), esto como reflejo del carácter intensivo y sistemático que tuvo la campaña de organización. López es el dirigente de los trabajadores de la panadería Hot and Crusty, cuya exitosa campaña de sindicalización de 2012 inspiró la campaña de los trabajadores de los almacenes de B&H Photo, que fue encabezada por el LWC junto con el sindicato United Steelworkers (USW). (Véase “¡Victoria a la lucha de los trabajadores de B&H Photo!”, 19 de octubre, en www.internationalist.org/victoriatrabajadoresdeBHphoto1015.html.)

Poco después del mediodía, mientras que organizadores y simpatizantes esperaban con impaciencia en los alrededores a que se anunciaran los resultados del recuento, llegaron las noticias: el voto a favor del sindicato había ganado con un aplastante 200 contra 88, con una participación de aproximadamente el 80 por ciento del personal. Dentro del almacén, los trabajadores hicieron correr la voz de departamento a departamento. Los jefes estaban desconsolados –“tenían las cabezas gachas”, comentaron varios trabajadores– en tanto que algunos “felicitaron” a los trabajadores por su victoria en tono burlón, pero también en reconocimiento del indiscutible hecho.

Cuando se reunieron después del trabajo esa misma tarde, los trabajadores

expresaron su orgullo por haber desafiado con éxito una compañía que ha usado todos los trucos del manual antisindical para intentar intimidarlos, silenciarlos y desgastarlos. Dos días antes de la votación, la compañía realizó una rifa y anunció la celebración de una fiesta para los trabajadores, pero ésta fue cancelada cuando casi nadie asistió. “Mostramos lo que se puede hacer”, dijeron los trabajadores. Sobre todo, hubo determinación para mantener la solidez de su unidad y organización –que fueron fundamentales para ganar la votación para el reconocimiento sindical– en la próxima batalla: conseguir un contrato colectivo. Arturo Archila, organizador principal por la USW, les dijo: “Hoy es su día, su victoria. Ahora ustedes van a determinar las demandas en la lucha por el contrato.”

Dos noches después, cientos de trabajadores y sus familias, junto con organizadores y grupos solidarios, abarrotaron un salón de reuniones en Brooklyn en una animada celebración de la victoria. Los hijos de los trabajadores perseguían globos, mientras las luces estroboscópicas centelleaban y la pista de baile estaba repleta. Se hizo playeras con los eslóganes “Arriba trabajador, abajo explotador” y “Unión, fuerza, solidaridad”, que fueron frecuentemente coreados en las manifestaciones.

El programa formal de la noche comenzó con un reconocimiento para el grupo de dirigentes elegidos que fue un factor fundamental para la victoria. Los

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El Internacionalista

El Grupo Internacionalista y los Clubes Internacionalistas participaron activamente en apoyo a la campaña para la sindicalización. Aquí en la protesta del 1° de noviembre.