

Defend Russia & China Against U.S./NATO War Drive –
Defeat the Fascist-Infested Proxy Regime in Ukraine!

U.S. Imperialism Hurtling Toward World War III

Only Socialist Revolution Can Stop It

MAY 17 – For the past 15 months, world politics and economics have been overwhelmingly dominated by the war in Ukraine, the focal point of the imperialist onslaught against Russia, and China. This is no limited regional conflict – its consequences are being felt across the planet. Whether it is food shortages in Africa, inflation in Europe, domestic politics in the United States or the response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has killed millions, these are determined by or heavily conditioned by the desperate efforts of U.S. imperialist rulers to shore up their fraying global hegemony. As the fighting in Ukraine drags on with no end in sight, it has been marked by a *continual escalation by the U.S. and NATO, pointing toward a Third World War*. And this would be no accidental outcome: *the Cold War hawks in Washington and Brussels want, and are systematically preparing for, all-out war and a nuclear showdown with Moscow and Beijing*.

To whip up war hysteria, the imperialists are continually inundating the population in the West with a barrage of lying war propaganda. The “mainstream media” these days is filled with endless atrocity stories about evil Russians and heroic Ukrainians,

with reports of massacres that never happened (Mariupol theater), or that everything indicates were carried out by Ukrainian forces (Kramatorsk rail station). To believe what you read in the papers, you would think, as we have said, that Russian troops are losing every day in every way, right up until they take another key city. The Pentagon feeds the press stories of “200,000 Russian casualties,” which is more than the total number of Russian troops and Donbass militia fighters deployed in the “special military operation.” Not until a trove of Pentagon and CIA documents surfaced on an internet game site was there any but the rarest mention in the media to have any mention that *Ukrainian forces* have been decimated.

In this war, class-conscious workers have a side. *The League for the Fourth International calls to defeat the blood-drenched imperialists and their fascist-infested proxy regime in Kiev, and to militarily defend Russia, a regional capitalist power, and China, a bureaucratically deformed workers state against the U.S./NATO war drive*. A victory for Ukraine – financed, armed and controlled by the Western powers – would be bad news for most of the world, which is strangled by the dic-



Internationalist photo

Internationalist contingent in New York City May Day 2023 march.

tates of Washington and Wall Street. That’s a key reason why none of the semicolonial countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America have signed on to the anti-Russia sanctions. Or look at the trail of death and devastation in the non-stop wars unleashed by the U.S.,

with its NATO allies in tow, in the three decades of their “New World Order” since the imperialist-led counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and the Soviet-bloc deformed workers states of East Europe in 1989-92.

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Cops Murdered Tyre Nichols in Memphis, Tortuguita in Atlanta – It Never Stops Under Biden and Democrats Racist Police Terror Rages On

Mobilize Workers Power Against Racist Cop Terror

FEBRUARY 16 – On the evening of January 7, Tyre Nichols was savagely beaten to death by a half dozen police officers in Memphis, Tennessee. The cops claimed in the official incident report that they pulled Nichols over on suspicion of a traffic violation, that he “started to fight with detectives,” “began actively resisting” and supposedly tried to grab their guns. All lies – nothing of the sort was shown in the video footage of police body cameras and an overhead “crime-fighting” camera, which told a whole different story. A team of the city’s elite “Scorpion” unit swarmed the car, yanked the bewildered Nichols out, screaming at him to get on

the ground, explaining nothing. After they pepper-sprayed him and shot him with an electric taser, Nichols fled for his life. When officers caught up to him eight minutes later, they unleashed a deadly torrent of baton blows, punches and lethal kicks to the head. Tyre died in the hospital three days later. It was murder.

Less than two weeks after the Memphis Police Department’s execution of Tyre Nichols, Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, whose chosen name was Tortuguita, was gunned down in a hail of police bullets during a military-style sweep of an activist encampment in suburban Atlanta, Georgia. Protestors calling themselves the Forest Defenders had been

camped out in the South River Forest since late 2021 to stop the city from building a sprawling police training center – a \$90-million “Cop City” – on greenspace previously slated for preservation. On the morning of January 18 dozens of officers of the Atlanta Police Department, DeKalb County police, the Georgia state patrol, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and the FBI assembled to clear out the occupiers. State police pumped 13 bullets into Tortuguita, who they claimed shot and injured a trooper: no evidence of this has ever been presented. It was a “cold-blooded assassination,” said Terán’s mother.

The back-to-back police murders in Memphis and Atlanta are a brutal reminder that the plague of racist cop terror continues to hold black America in bondage. The legacy of slavery is ever-present in the brutal

repression of African Americans – as well as Latinos, indigenous peoples, immigrants, poor white people and anyone who crosses the arrogant forces of “law and order.” The cops keep killing over a thousand people every year, and the toll is rising. While Democrats from President Joe Biden on down try to keep the lid on with cynical talk of “police reform” and “accountability,” the stark reality is that *the police cannot be reformed*. And whatever happens to the five killer cops (all black), *there is no justice for the oppressed in the capitalist courts*. It is up to the defenders of black rights and democratic rights, with the multiracial working class in the lead, to mobilize our power against that of the murderous capitalist state. In the end, *only revolution can bring justice*.

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WGA Strike Is Taking on a Whole Industry To Win the Strike, All Out to Shut Down Hollywood!

PICKET LINES MEAN DON'T CROSS

MAY 15 – A minute after midnight on May 2, over 11,000 Writers Guild of America (WGA) screen and television writers officially went on strike after attempting negotiations with Hollywood studios since March. Strikers and supporters held witty signs and chanted, “No contract, no content” on packed picket lines in New York and Los Angeles. At some points there have been pickets in 200 different locations in L.A. Strikers in New York have been picketing companies like Silvercup and Steiner Studios, Fox and NBC as well as location shoots, and are joined by other unionists.

The effects of the writers’ absence has been felt, with all the popular talk shows – including CBS’ *The Late Show*, NBC’s *Tonight* and *Late Night*, *The Daily Show* – and weekly shows like *Saturday Night Live* canceling their broadcasts. Hulu’s series *The Handmaid’s Tale*, a major money-maker, halted production until the strike is over. The writers room for the third season of *Abbott Elementary*, a popular sitcom about the struggles of teaching in an underfunded, neglected school, never opened as members of the team joined the strike lines. WGA pickets were able to shut down a number of productions, including top-grossing shows. A striker in New York told us she appreciated “the irony of *Billions*, *Severance*, *Loot*, *American Horror Story* and *Evil* all being the names of productions that were shut down.”

The writers were able to deal these blows to production with support from Teamsters, IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) and SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) members refusing to work and often joining strikers on the picket lines. In NYC, the CUNY Internationalist Clubs have systematically brought out students to support the strike, and their chant of “Picket lines mean don’t cross” has been repeatedly picked up.

On the other hand, the MTV awards went forward with a pre-taped presentation when Drew Barrymore pulled out of hosting it in solidarity with the WGA strike. The experience of the 2007-08 writers strike showed that even if production quality plummets, in many cases the show



Striking members of Writers Guild of America West picket outside Paramount Studios in Los Angeles, May 3, in the WGA’s first strike in 15 years.

can go on without the writers. This points to the urgent need for *united action across the industry to shut down all the production companies* in the AMPTP (Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers).

The writers are up against a so-far solid bloc of production companies that are some of the most resourced would-be strikebreakers in the world, including Netflix, Disney, Paramount, ABC and Fox, to name a few of the 350 studios represented. Just six of the richest of these companies together represent a net worth of \$217 billion as of 2021. That’s about equal to the entire GDP (gross domestic product) of Greece in that year, and it doesn’t even include one of the major studios in the negotiations: Amazon. These companies are the employers of all the workers in the industry, from writers and actors to grips to costume designers and set builders. To defeat these billionaire bosses, who continue to grind down workers’ pay and working conditions despite record profits, *all workers in the industry should be on strike, NOW.*

Spokesmen for these companies have dismissed the strike as a minor inconvenience at worst. Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos remarked, “we do have a pretty robust slate of releases to take us into a long time.” Paramount Pictures’ Bob Bakish said the company has “levers to pull” to

wait out a long strike (*Hollywood Reporter*, 18 April; *Deadline*, 4 May). The hardnosed AMPTP chiefs figure they can wait it out and pick off the unions one by one. Against their common enemy, workers across the industry should refuse to cross WGA strike lines – and help build picket lines so massive that wannabe scabs *can’t* get in. SAG, IATSE and Teamsters shouldn’t wait in line to get screwed. SAG’s negotiations are set to begin in June: actors should walk out now. *One out, all out!* United strike action can KO the Hollywood cartel!

Solidarity Must Be Concrete – Rip Up No-Strike Clauses!

At the start of the strike, other industry unions came out with statements of solidarity, but in several cases including legalistic threats to their own members who stand with the WGA strikers. The leadership of SAG-AFTRA has undercut the strike, telling actors they are “legally obligated” to keep working due to their contract’s “no-strike” clause, which reads: “The Union agrees that it will take such affirmative action as may be necessary and lawful in order to require its

members to perform their respective obligations.” No union should ever agree to such a backstabbing clause! SAG also states that in cases of dual membership in WGA and SAG, its members must cross their own picket line and keep working as an actor!!

SAG bureaucrats like Fran Drescher continue to ostentatiously cozy up to the bosses, saying of upcoming negotiations, “I don’t think what’s very important to writers ... is the kind of stuff we’re going after.” On WGA picket lines, SAG members have carried official signs proclaiming, “Unions Stand Together.” But look carefully and down at the bottom in small letters you will see: “No dispute with any other employer at this site. SAG-AFTRA is not asking any individual to cease performing any services, or to refuse to pick up, deliver, handle or transport any goods.” It reads like a side effects disclaimer on a medication ad. SAG members: you don’t have to ask your doctor to know that throwing WGA under the bus isn’t right for you.

On the other hand, IATSE president Matt Loeb has stated its members have a “legal right” to refuse to cross picket lines. And while the union has kept it vague and hasn’t organized any kind of real support to the walkout, strikers and IATSE members report that production has shut down several times as a result of lead actors and production crews refusing to cross the picket lines. Several IATSE locals have also posted picketing schedules so that members can stand with writers on the strike lines. Many IATSE members are still riled up after their 2021 near-strike resulted in a sellout contract that didn’t address any of the real issues at the heart of the struggle, continuing to allow 14-hour workdays and short weekends and “winning” a paltry pay raise that didn’t even keep up with inflation. It also left the health and pension funds reliant on vanishing residuals.

Another key union is Hollywood Teamsters Local 399, whose secretary-treasurer and chief negotiator Lindsay Dougherty told a rally of 1,800 WGA West strikers on May 3, “Our Teamster members are going to be with you side-by-side as well.... Teamsters do not cross picket lines.” Across the country, Teamsters have turned their trucks around at WGA picket lines. But this is only part of the story. The official IBT Local 399 FAQ sheet issued at the start of the strike says: “Whether you are working or not, our members cannot join the picket line, carry a picket sign or banner, distribute literature for WGA at the picket line, or walk near any picket line.” Union bureaucrats have turned their backs on the

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CUNY Internationalist Club and Internationalist Group at WGA strike picket in New York City, May 15.

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For Class Struggle Against Militarism Germany: War in the East

Axel Heimken/Pool



Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) with a “Cheetah” anti-aircraft tank on 25 August 2022.

United States / NATO / European Union: The Warmongers Are Here

**German Imperialism Out of East Europe!
Break With Reformism, For a Multiethnic
Revolutionary Workers Party!**

The following article is translated from *Permanente Revolution* No. 6, Winter 2022-23, published by the *Internationalistische Gruppe, German section of the League for the Fourth International*.

Among the rulers there is consensus: the war in Ukraine represents a turning point in the history of post-war Germany. Or rather, pre-war Germany. Because since 24 February 2022, Germany has clearly been in the middle of a war. Imperialist capitalism, under its leading power United States and its military alliance, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), is trying to inflict a bloody defeat on the capitalist regional power Russia on the battlefields of Ukraine. By joining the U.S./NATO war drive against Russia – and after that, China – the Berlin government wants to assert Germany as Europe’s military, and not just economic, superpower.

Achieving this will also have huge domestic ramifications, with falling incomes and slashing social benefits, accompanied by an attack on fundamental rights in the name of “well-fortified democracy” (*wehrhafte Demokratie*). As inflation, spurred by war and anti-Russia sanctions, grinds down the working people, the immiseration of the masses is a necessity for German capital, not just a political option. Thus the struggle for food and fuel, for health and housing, clashes

with the imperialist war drive and the chaos of the capitalist system. Even in the most elementary struggles, it is becoming increasingly clear that the time for reforms is long gone and only a struggle for socialist revolution can prevent catastrophe.

On 27 February 2022, federal chancellor

Olaf Scholz (of the Social-Democratic Party) announced a *Zeitenwende*, a “historic turning point.” This was then officially chosen as the word of the year. What is this turning point? First of all, a special fund is to be set up in the otherwise tightly controlled state coffers, its independence from the government budget enshrined in the Basic Law (Germany’s constitution). In the amount of 100 billion euros, the fund is intended to promote “peace, freedom, democracy and justice” around the world in the form of beefed-up German militarism. Scholz boasted that this was his vision of the “strongest army in Europe.”

This “special fund” means a doubling of military spending compared to 2014,

likely exceeding 70 billion euros. This will be the largest military budget in Europe and, after the U.S. and China, the third largest in the world (spending €10 billion a year more on arms than Russia). The main organ of the German bourgeoisie, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (3 March 2022), was not the only one to rejoice over this “blow for liberation.” The “liberation” consists above all in the fact that, with the Ukraine war, the political rationale and pressure for an arms drive that had been planned long before was finally achieved in order to push through the needed financing for the new German militarism.

At the same time, while the alternative social democrats of the Left Party are reeling from its repeated capitulations and have lost all semblance of an opposition party, the German bourgeoisie sees

an opportunity to enlist pacifist currents in the population in the “war for peace”. When only the fascistic German-nationalist Alternative for Germany (AfD) and its consorts seem to be challenging the war and its consequences, any opposition to the war is labeled “authoritarian” by the government and its supporters. Of course, the AfD, which vows to uphold “military strength,” has no problem with the arms program and can only suggest freeing up even more funds by axing development aid from the budget.

“Traffic Light” Coalition Government: Green Light for Militarization and More Capitalist Exploitation

As we noted more than a year ago, the “traffic light” coalition of Social Democrats (SPD, red), Free Democrats (FDP, yellow) and Greens was made possible by the virtual unanimity of bourgeois politics:

“With German borders sealed off to refugees, there is an all-party consensus around support for the police and the Bundeswehr (army), subsidies for capitalists and austerity for everyone else. This line-up permits an almost kaleidoscopic variety of possible governmental coalitions, including the free marketeers of the Free Democrats.”

–“Germany: Coalition Dance in the 2021 Election Farce,” *The Internationalist* No. 64, July-September 2021

A temporary exception would be made for Ukrainian refugees.

While Scholz’s statement was being prepared in secret, and with the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict as a pretext, the coalition and its member parties had all long ago committed themselves to the massive arms program, with the Greens being the most fanatical proponents of demonizing Russia. The propaganda campaign about the “new responsibilities” of German imperialism and the attack on the “pacifism” standing in its way began even before the 2014 Kiev coup and the subsequent unification of Crimea with Russia. The NATO partners had already agreed to move towards the target of raising military expenditures to 2% of the gross domestic product.

Since 2014, the military budget has been increased from €2.5 to €50.3 billion euros (\$36 to \$55 billion dollars), in accordance with the previous (2013) coalition agreement between the SPD and the Christian Democrats. So much for the myth of a “kaput Bundeswehr due to budget savings.” In fact, the long-term projects of the special fund have nothing to do with soldiers’ underwear or even “assistance” for the Ukrainians. They mainly concern the Air Force and the Navy. A particularly sinister aspect is acquiring F-35 stealth bombers from the U.S., which are intended for “nuclear sharing,” i.e., the transport of U.S. nuclear bombs.¹ This is federal fi-

¹ The idea of nuclear bombs in the hands of the German army makes a lot of people nervous. In order to assuage those fears while heading off any German effort to achieve an independent nuclear capability, as well as to get around the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and to ensure that the German army was on board if nuclear arms are to be used, NATO chiefs came up with “nuclear sharing,” under which countries like Belgium, Canada and Germany would have nuclear weapons stored on their territory and would acquire planes capable of carrying nuclear bombs, which they would fly together with U.S. personnel (who would have the link to permission codes to arm them).



Permanente Revolution No. 6



Greens to the front. As in the 1999 NATO war that destroyed Yugoslavia, the Greens are at the forefront of the warmongers. Above: German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on 8 February 2022 during visit to Shyrokyne (near Mariupol), a stronghold of the fascist Azov Battalion and Pravyi Sektor spearheading the murderous war against the Russian-speaking population of Donbass since 2014.

nance minister Christian Lindner's goal of building the "strongest and most powerful army in Europe."

The coalition slyly announced the cabinet decision to raise the minimum wage to €12 an hour at the same time as the arms program, thus promising both butter and guns.² SPD general secretary Kevin Kühnert claimed that the special fund maneuver meant "the traffic light government does not have to renounce any of its social goals" (*Spiegel*, 30 May 2022). Nonsense. The coalition agreement's promise to ease surveillance and harassment of the unemployed enshrined in Hartz IV³ proved worthless, as the increase in the standard payment barely offset inflation. A sinister alliance of employers, CDU (Christian Democrats) and the AfD fiercely resisted, and the changes were voted down in the Bundesrat (the upper house of Germany's legislature). In the end, only the name changed – these crumbs are now called "citizen's income."

In fact, as agreed with CDU leader Friedrich Merz (who is also a top executive of the BlackRock investment behemoth, responsible for its German operations), who is de facto the fourth member of the coalition, some projects, such as cybersecurity, were not included in the €100 billion special fund. In a few years, they will have to be compensated by social austerity measures, which will certainly include raising the retirement age. It also means cuts in education and both health care and medical supplies, despite the ongoing threat of COVID. Even before the war, the head of the employers' association, Rainer Dulger, said, "A spendthrift social policy is not sustainable. That is why we are promoting a more flexible retirement age and concentrating unemployment insurance on core areas" (*WirtschaftsWoche*, 29 December 2021).

The economic plight afflicting millions of people has deep roots. In the east, where more than 100,000 people demonstrated

against the war and its consequences on October 3, the day of German unity, average wages are €12,000 a year lower than in the west, while half of all retirees there receive less than €1,200 euros a month in pension payments. This is a consequence of the deliberate destruction of the economic base after the counterrevolutionary annexation of East Germany (the DDR, or German Democratic Republic). And although current price hikes are a result of sanctions against Russia, a half-hearted attempt by sections of the Left Party to call protests for purely economic demands without mentioning the war flopped. No wonder the rightists are profiting from that.

Across-the-Board Repression

"Thoughts are free" says the folk song (which was often used for anti-communist propaganda). Not so much these days. The hysterical anti-Russian witch-hunt campaign is now being enforced by law. Not only is there the incessant barrage against "Putin understanders" and "Russian disinformation," extending to outright bans of Russian media (such as RT), as well as cancellation of performances of music composed by Russians a century before the current war. Now booksellers are being taken to court for allegedly endorsing the Russian war in Ukraine in an address at the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park last June 22, the anniversary of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 (*Junge Welt*, 12 December 2022).



Port workers in Hamburg on strike in July 2022 under the slogan "Stop the inflation monster." The bosses tried to avert the strikes with injunctions from the local labor court, to no avail. When the police tried to arrest demonstrators, the striking workers put up a strong defense. It was the longest industrial dispute in the ports for more than 40 years.



The Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park, on 9 May 2022, the day of the Red Army's victory over Nazi Germany. In large parts of Berlin, the SPD/Left Party/Green city government banned the display of Soviet flags.

On March 28, the Federal Ministry of the Interior announced, "Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is a criminal offence. Anyone who publicly approves of this war of aggression may be liable to prosecution. This also applies to showing the 'Z' symbol." The letter Z, said to stand for *Za Pobedu* (To Victory), is therefore taken as a symbol of public support for the Russian army. The statement came after ministries in some states – including Lower Saxony, Hanover, North Rhine-Westphalia, Thuringia and Bavaria – announced similar plans to go after those who publicly support Russia. Lower Saxony and Bavaria threaten perpetrators with up to three years in prison.

In October, the German Bundestag tightened the so-called "incitement paragraph" § 130 of the Criminal Code. From now on, anyone who publicly "approves, denies or grossly downplays" genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes can be punished with imprisonment for up to three years – a deliberately vague formulation. The fact that this is primarily aimed at today's Russia was then dramatically underlined by the resolution on "Holodomor in Ukraine" passed by the Bundestag on November 30. It defines the famine that ravaged the entire Soviet Union in 1932-33 – the result of a drought and Stalin's disastrous policy of forced collectivization – as "genocide" allegedly aimed specifically at the Ukrainian nation.

This rewriting of actual history was devised and propagated decades ago by the remnants of the Bandera fascist group of exiled Ukrainian nationalists. But now

journalists, historians, teachers and others who contradict this bogus claim of "genocide" risk up to three years in jail. Censorship in the service of the fascists who spearheaded the recruitment of imperialist auxiliary troops in the Ukraine – that actually amounts to a step-by-step rehabilitation of the Third Reich. That's how it was on 8-9 May 2022 during the commemoration of the liberation of Germany from fascism in 1945, when hoisting the Soviet flag was forbidden in large parts of Berlin.

And toward year's end, while scandals surrounding fascist nests in the police and army are still on the order of the day, the government attempted to buff up its "democratic" credentials in December by theatrically rounding up a few dozen fascist "Reichsbürger" who were involved in a comic opera coup. (The BND, Germany's FBI, has not yet published the documentation on this.)

Unleash the Power of the Working Class

The German bourgeoisie intends to pass on the rising costs of inflation to the working class in Germany and to bind working people and the poor to the hardships of an economy of war and scarcity: "Freeze for Ukraine." Since the beginning of 2022, impoverishment has rapidly increased, recognizable for example in the overburdened free food distribution of the voluntary (non-governmental) "Tafeln," which are completely overrun with applicants and now register 2 million people dependent on their services, roughly 750,000 more than in the previous year, including many war refugees from Ukraine, unemployed, pensioners and low-wage earners.

In a "concerted action," an institutionalized form of class collaboration, the union leaders were brought on board in order to keep the working class quiet with a deliberate and confusing jumble of demands and concessions. But the message was clear in the end: when push comes to shove, the union bureaucracy will try to save German capital at the expense of the working class. In particular, it sees itself as a full partner in the governing coalition: "There is so much trade-unionism in the traffic light coalition," enthused IG Metall (the metal workers union) in December 2021. The bureaucracy has sometimes even given up any pretense of an independent role: "Exorbitant inflation rates cannot be compensated for by collective bargaining," explained Roman Zitzelsberger, *continued on page 32*

Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party

France: Drive Out Macron, Fight for a Workers Government!

The following article is a translation of a leaflet of the League for the Fourth International distributed at the April 6 march in Paris. MARCH 26 – We are into the third month of mass mobilization against the anti-worker pension “reform” of French banker-president Emmanuel Macron. Faced with massive opposition to raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 in order to maintain the “competitiveness” (read, profits) of French capitalism, on March 15 the would-be “Jupiter-like” president resorted to the deeply anti-democratic Article 49.3 of the Constitution to push through his wrecking of the pension system without a parliamentary vote. Four days later, the embattled government of his prime minister Elisabeth Borne barely survived a parliamentary vote of no confidence. And then on March 22, in his TV interview on TF1 and France 2, Macron arrogantly referred to demonstrators opposing his plans as a “mob” of “seditious” troublemakers. The result: a veritable explosion of popular fury.

Millions of working people in France have had it with this president of the rich and his tantrums. Instead of running out of steam, as Macron and his team of political operators at the Elysée Palace and Hotel Matignon¹ hoped, the union-led mobilizations on March 23 were bigger than ever: 3.5 million demonstrators across the country according to the CGT labor federation, 800,000 in Paris. “Who are the rioters? Who are the scum? Macron resign!” chanted angry demonstrators in Le Havre. Unlike in previous confrontations, strikes by sanitation workers, rail and transit workers, in the power plants, ports and refineries – where trade-union organization is relatively strong, and the workers have strategic weight – have begun to converge in time. And youth came out en masse, particularly high school students, now that they have finished their baccalaureat (final exams).

Acutely aware that his regime has a narrow base of support, that millions voted for him only to keep out the fascist Rassemblement National (RN) and that the proletariat has not been vanquished, Macron re-

¹ Seat of the offices of the president and prime minister, respectively.



The battle lines have hardened. A demonstration in Nantes on March 20, the day the government barely survived a vote of no confidence.

sponded with savage repression. Peaceful protesters are teargassed and beaten with batons. As in the “Yellow Vest” protests of 2019, victims are losing eyes, hands or thumbs to police grenades. Now Macron is

targeting workers in key industries with requisition orders – penalty, six months prison and a €10,000 fine for those who refuse forced labor. But in a victory which points the way forward, on March 24 hundreds of

workers from ports and plants in Normandy, along with strike supporters bussed in from Paris came to the aid of strikers at the Total Normandie refinery at Gonfreville-l’Orcher, facing down police and reestablishing the picket line.

The union bureaucracy has reacted passively throughout. Ever since January 19, it has put forward no other strategy than bi-weekly one-day mobilizations. Now it offers, at most, more of the same – next date, March 28 – as some, like Laurent Berger of the CFDT, want to call off the marches while looking to the Constitutional Council to rescue them. This is the same recipe for defeat that the trade-union misleaders have followed for decades, and which led to the failure of the 2010 mobilizations against raising the retirement age to 62. Macron’s intransigence has led even the servile social-democratic CFDT tops to join the Intersyndicale, the cartel of union federations piloting the protests. But this unaccustomed unity at the top is on the basis of class collaboration, and the bureaucrats are now reduced to pleading with Macron to not actually implement his plan.

To fight to win this crucial class battle requires taking control of the strikes away from the venal bureaucrats, who are deeply entwined with the capitalist state. It is necessary to oust these “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class” as Lenin called them, quoting the American socialist Daniel De Leon, and to forge a *revolutionary leadership of the trade unions* on a program of intransigent class struggle. To start, it means going beyond local coordinating committees to form *elected strike committees* to unite all union members, and also non-union workers, some of whom will be exemplary strike militants. It means building *mass picket lines* that no one crosses, to spread the strike and defend strikers. And it calls for an *elected national strike committee*, recallable at any time. Facing a hard-nosed enemy, relying on a few key sectors will not win a victory for all working people “by proxy.”

Many on the left look to “renewable” strikes (*grèves reconductibles*), whose continuation is voted on each day in as-

It Is Necessary to Organize an All-Out General Strike to Shred the French Pension “Reform”

Sanitation Workers, Utility Workers, Railroad Workers, Transit Workers, Refinery Workers, Port Workers, Postal Workers, Teachers, Hospital Workers – All Out Together!



Demonstration in Blois, February 7.

Mobilize our forces to impose:

- Full pensions at the highest level for all
- A sliding scale of wages and hours to adjust for inflation and eliminate unemployment
- Eliminate short-term contracts and part-time jobs – Raise low wages – For a minimum

monthly wage of 2,500 euros, with COLA

- Free day care – Equal pay for equal work
- Full citizenship rights for all immigrants
- Workers boycott of arms shipments to Ukraine – Defeat the U.S./EU/NATO imperialist war drive against Russia and China!

Cyril Chigot / Divergence pour Le Monde



Demonstration in Paris called by the trade unions on March 7, against the pension “reform” bill of President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne. According to the CGT, 3.5 million people took to the streets.

semblies of strikers (*assemblées générales*, or AGs), as some kind of alternative to endless “days of action” with giant balloons, tasty sausages and evocative recordings of *Le temps des cerises*² ... but which lead nowhere. However, renewable strikes can be tolerated by the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy, and they are no substitute for mobilizing the *power* of the working class, at the head of all the oppressed, in all-out class struggle. As was the case with the “reform” of then-president Nicolas Sarkozy in 2010, in order to defeat Macron’s determined push to gut pensions, setting the stage for further raising the retirement age, it will take nothing less than an *unlimited general strike* – not a one-day or two-day pseudo-strike, or a “renewable” strike, but a struggle to the end – which will inevitably pose *the question of power*, and therefore the fight for a *workers government*.

There is a burning necessity to extend the strike movement, particularly to the private sector (including notorious anti-union employers like Amazon). To go beyond narrow strikes by category, it is necessary to raise a platform of *class struggle* which can serve as a bridge from the most immediate felt demands of today to the goal of socialist revolution, as Leon Trotsky put forward in the *Transitional Program* (1938). Not just returning to retirement at age 60 (55 for unhealthy occupations) and defending the special regimes (SNCF, RATP, EDF, etc.) against attack by the bosses’ state, but fighting for *full pensions for all* at the highest levels. Against the hollowing out of the law for a 35-hour workweek and merciless exploitation (which led to the notorious wave of suicides at France Télécom), fight for a *sharp reduction in hours with no loss in pay*, creating new jobs.

Such a program (see page 1) would address the discrimination against women by the lengthening of requirements of uninterrupted work,³ as well as demanding *free day care*. It

² *Le temps des cerises* (Cherry Blossom Time), is a haunting song written by French composer Jean-Baptiste Clément, a fighter in the Paris Commune, who dedicated it to a nurse who fought in the *Semaine Sanglante* (Bloody Week) in May 1871 when French troops overthrew the Commune, massacring thousands (and subsequently executing tens of thousands of *communards*). The verses evoke a time after a revolution when oppression and exploitation have been overcome, and the suffering that brought this about.

³ Raising the required number of years of continual employment sharply limited the eligibility and lowered pensions for women who had left the work force for a number of years to care for their children.

would address the low-paid precarious employment of young workers, and the threat of regimentation under Macron’s “national service” schemes, demanding a *big increase in the minimum wage* and *job security for all*. As a step toward *workers control*, it would systematize EDF workers’ actions in providing free energy to sectors and households at risk. With immigration next up on Macron’s hit list, it would fight for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*, and for *workers action to stop deportations*. And against repression, as Trotsky wrote: “In connection with every strike and street demonstration, it is imperative to propagate the necessity of creating *workers groups for self-defense*.”

The Left Adrift

Above all, the battle royal over pensions is a political struggle against the capitalist state, and against imperialism. No matter who is at the helm – whether the right-wing Macron government, a fascist-led government under Marine Le Pen (akin to Giorgia Meloni in Italy), or a “left” populist like Jean-Luc Mélenchon, backed by reformist union tops and leftists in a new “popular front” – all these are or would be bourgeois governments. They will do the bidding of capital, which is on the warpath, using every crisis from the COVID pandemic to the U.S./EU/NATO war on Russia to prop up profits, beef up its repressive forces and crack down on workers and any threat to its class rule. As the ruling class dispenses with the forms of parliamentary “democracy” (49.3 to the rescue), a workers government must be based on workers councils (soviets) built in the course of struggle.



It is necessary to mobilize the heavy battalions of the proletariat in all-out class struggle. Above: striking oil refinery workers in Normandy face off against police seeking to enforce the government edict requisition of strikers.

Macron brandishes the spectre of fascism to smear those demonstrating against his anti-worker “reform,” talking of “sedition” and using the loaded expression “factieux” – the same term used for fascists in the 1930s and OAS (Secret Army Organization) terrorists in the Algerian War – while cynically equating protesters to the 6 January 2021 riots by fascist Trump supporters in Washington and the 8 January 2023 imitation by fascist Bolsonaro supporters in Brasilia. In fact, the sinister fascist Rassemblement National of Le Pen is waiting in the wings, but its feigned opposition to Macron’s “reform” is pure demagoguery. The RN is against the strikes, and it echoes the bourgeois lies that the pension system will be overwhelmed by a longer-lived population. Its solution? To purge “foreigners” – meaning the immigrant workers who are vital to whole sectors of the economy.

The semi-bonapartist Fifth Republic, ushered in by a military coup d’état in 1958 and presided over in its early years by General Charles de Gaulle, is in fact in crisis, its “democratic” façade splintering as THE hapless prime minister Borne has used section 49.3 eleven times to enact measures for which she did not have a legislative majority. Actually, the “left” government of François Mitterrand outdid Macron, using the same clause some 28 times to push through anti-popular measures, including restructuring the military and privatizing Renault. But there should be no illusions that a Sixth Republic, long advocated by Mélenchon and his La France Insoumise (LFI – France Unbowed), would be more democratic. While the “left” nationalist *líder máximo* may assume the airs of a Latin American caudillo, on the French terrain he is reduced to parliamentary histrionics.

Mélenchon (like Le Pen) is peddling an imaginary referendum as an antidote to the attack on pensions. Yet that would require rounding up 4.87 million signatures (10% of the electorate) on a petition in the nine months after the pension “reform” went into effect, the text of which would then be sent to the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, which are not required to act on it. In short, it’s a dead-end.

As Macron and the bourgeois media whip up hysteria in backing Ukraine, whose fascist-infested regime was installed by an imperialist-sponsored coup in 2014, Mélenchon is fully on board with the imperialist war drive via the U.S./NATO proxy regime in Kiev. The large majority of the opportunist left has joined him in railing against Russia, a capitalist regional power, and China, a bureaucratically deformed workers state – which uniquely was able to contain

the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic by mobilizing the resources of a collectivized economy. The once pseudo-Trotskyist, now thoroughly social-democratized leadership of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA, New Anti-Capitalist Party) has been sucked into NUPES (New Ecological and Social Popular Union), a ramshackle popular front built around Mélenchon/LFI and the reformist Communist Party (PCF).

While the CGT/CFDT/FO tops look to influence the Constitutional Council with strikes, the various “far left” organizations are, as usual, acting as the “left” face of the union bureaucracy, their ritual calls for a “general strike” seeking to push the Intersyndicale slightly to the left. While the NPA leadership of Olivier Besancenot and Philippe Poutou is by now a mere appendage of the LFI/NUPES popular front, Lutte Ouvrière (LO, Workers Struggle), led by Nathalie Arthaud, is virtually silent on the key question: what is to be done? Its editorial for this week (“The Workers’ No Confidence Motion Is the Strike”) declares: “What the government is doing, the workers on strike can undo!” (*Lutte Ouvrière*, 24 March). That’s all! LO is getting ready to blame the working class itself for the crisis of proletarian leadership.

For its part, Révolution Permanente (RP, French affiliate of the misnamed international Trotskyist Fraction [FT]), after fleeing the sinking NPA and setting up shop last December, a few weeks ago was observing that there was not a revolutionary crisis in France, while advising Mélenchon’s LFI to be more “Jacobin” and call for abolition of the Senate and to form a single legislative assembly in its putative Sixth Republic. Back in 2019, the RP puffed up the Yellow Vest movement into a full-blown revolutionary threat to French capitalism on account of a few attacks on the Arc de Triomphe and fire-bombing of an upscale restaurant. Now, following the “democratic coup d’état” (!) of Macron’s use of 49.3 and some trash bins set alight after the union mobilization on March 23, the RP proclaimed a “pre-revolutionary moment” (*Révolution Permanente*, 25 March).

The current vehicle for the inveterate maneuverers of the RT/FT is a “Network for a General Strike,” to promote “renewable strikes” everywhere. But this “network” and its “action committees for a general strike” are basically front groups of RP sympathizers to pressure union bureaucracy into calling a generic “general strike.” Yet a general strike posing the question of power while led by pro-capitalist labor leaders cannot win. That is why in the 1930s Trotsky called for factory committees, workers councils and committees of action as *organizational forms for mass working-class struggle*, like the soviets in the 1917 Russian Revolution. The RT/FT’s call is a caricature of revolutionary politics, to provide a cover as it “peddles its wares in the shadow of the popular front,” as Trotsky wrote of the 1930s centrists.

The present acute crisis of the Macron regime, confronting sustained opposition by key sections of the working class backed by an overwhelming majority (more than two-thirds, according to every opinion poll) of the population, could potentially become a revolutionary situation. The law to gut workers’ pension rights can be defeated, and the would-be Bonaparte could be driven from the Elysée Palace. But that will not be accomplished by parliamentary pressure politics and endless popular-front parades, from Place de l’Opéra to the Bastille, from Place de la République to

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Mobilize for an All-Out General Strike to Smash French Pension “Reform” Against the Authoritarian Fifth Republic, Fight for a Workers Government

Opposition to Macron Still Boiling But Banging on Pots Won’t Bring Him Down

Forge a Leninist-Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party

APRIL 30 – Two weeks after French President Macron’s assault on pension rights became law, the opposition is still up in arms. True to form, Macron lost no opportunity to express his contempt for the mass of the population. After forcing through the law (raising the age of retirement from 62 to 64 years) without a vote in parliament, barely seven hours after it was rubber-stamped by the Constitutional Council,¹ it was published in the *Journal Officiel*, at 2 a.m. on April 15. The head of state then skipped the country on an international junket, returning on April 17 to deliver a speech calling for “100 days of peace, of unity....”

Macron is at a peak of unpopularity. Three out of four respondents in public opinion polls express a negative opinion of the president, while the same percentage want a referendum on the pension “reform” (also ruled out by the Constitutional Council) and two out of three support the protest movement against it.² Hundreds of thousands of young people have joined the fray, chanting “*Macron t’es foutu, la jeunesse est dans la rue*” (Macron, you’re screwed, the youth are in the streets) and marching (along with older workers) to the rhythms of the hit song “*On lâche rien*” (we’re not letting go). But for the arrogant would-be Jupiter,³ this overwhelming opposition is a badge of honor. We are reminded of the emperor Caligula, who, the Roman historian Suetonius tells us, “found in himself nothing more beautiful and more praiseworthy than what he called his utter in-

¹ Known as « *les sages* », or the wise, the council is in reality a club of superannuated politicians, charged with ruling on the constitutionality of legislation.

² IFOP poll for Sud-Radio, 15 April.

³ During his first campaign for the French presidency, in 2016, Macron declared that he planned a “Jupiterian” presidency, like the Roman god of gods.

flexibility.” Caligula, as we know, ended badly.

But there was to be neither peace nor unity. From now on, Macron is “Mr. 49.3.” His use of that constitutional article to enact his widely hated “reform” by decree is proof positive that “French democracy” does not represent “the will of the people.” The president’s April 17 speech was accompanied by “*casserolades*” – the banging of pots and pans by huge crowds of protesters seeking to drown him out. Then, within minutes after it ended, crowds started marching through the streets across France.

Trash was set on fire to general approval. Across the length and breadth of the country, his ministers have gotten the same treatment, frequently accompanied by fog horns and auto sirens. The call went out on Twitter, “*at-trapons les tous*” (catch them all).

The more prudent among the Macron gang just cancelled their trips. Of those who did not, the health minister had to sneak into a hospital in Montreuil through the emergency exit. When the president arrived at a woodworking factory in the Alsatian town of Muttersholtz, the mines and energy federation of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) had cut the power, leaving him in the dark. The regime’s hard man, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin, declared “pots and pans are not forbidden”, yet when after leaving Alsace, Macron was pursued through the



Bourgeois “democracy” in action. After ramming pension “reform” raising the retirement age through parliament without a vote, enacting it by decree, Macron sent it to the Constitutional Council (above) for validation, and promulgated it within hours, in the dead of night.

southern department (district) of Hérault, an “anti-terrorist” law was invoked against some of the demonstrators, and pots and pans were indeed confiscated. (Once again the power was cut off to the school he was visiting.)

As we noted in our article, “France: Drive Out Macron, Fight for a Workers Government!” (*L’Internationaliste*, 26 March), distributed as a leaflet in the April 6 march in Paris, such actions, if extended and sustained, could touch off a struggle for workers control throughout the economy. But the union bureaucracy, closely tied to the state, has no intent of going beyond stunts and occasional displays of militancy to a battle for power. Instead, they look to repeat the mass demonstrations – a dozen so far, each with over one million marchers – that have failed to budge the smug president Jupiter-Caligula.

The massive kettling of demonstrators (“*la nasse*,” or fish net), the vicious beatings, the indiscriminate use of tear gas continue. In a case reported from Nantes in late March, the round-up even included vaginal searches of female students. Alongside the *casserolades*, nightly skirmishing with the cops continues, include attacks on police stations as well as blockades of rail lines and highways. There are still stop-and-go strikes in various key industrial sectors such as refineries. Yet this all amounts to guerrilla warfare, and can neither stop the assault on pensions nor spark a working-class counter-offensive against the capitalist attacks.

The intransigence of Macron is the French version of the overall capitalist drive to grind down the working class, using the imperialist war against Russia in the Ukraine to push for “sacrifice.” In Spain, the “left” bourgeois government of the Socialist Party and populist Podemos has used a combination of the carrot and stick to attack strikes

and slash pensions, with the connivance of the trade-union bureaucrats. In Germany, the government is resisting workers’ efforts to catch up to inflation and continues to persecute the unemployed. In Britain, the right-wing Tory government is seeking new legal tools to repress the strike wave, while the Labour Party stabs the strikes in the back.

In France there is a burning need for a decisive mobilization of the power of the working class – an all-out general strike – but the trade-union bureaucracy has nothing to offer other than semi-monthly one-day demonstrations and tolerance for “renewable” strikes in various sectors. Next up is a massive march on May Day, where for the first time all the labor federations have joined in calling for a united protest. But this unprecedented unity at the top is based on a lowest-common-denominator policy of class collaboration. The more rightist leaders are just waiting for a “decent interval” to resume business as usual with the government, while the more left-talking ones are no less hostile to the revolutionary politics needed to break out of the impasse.

The trade-union bureaucrats and their apologists (including the bulk of the so-called “far left”) point to the relative quiet of the private sector and moan about the weakness of rank-and-file participation in strike or union meetings. But they themselves, with their politics of “popular-front” coalitions with bourgeois parties and groupings, not to mention integration into capitalist state institutions, are prime purveyors of defeatism and cynicism and mortal enemies of proletarian class consciousness. To win this battle, it is necessary to forge a revolutionary leadership to defeat the government’s attacks on the working class through hard class struggle.



Tens of thousands went into the streets on April 17, banging pots and pans to drown out speech by President Macron justifying his attack on pensions.

New/Old Bureaucrats and Their “Left” Retainers

In the midst of the three-month-old movement against the pension “reform,” the CGT, the second largest union federation in France after the social-democratic CFDT (Democratic Confederation of Labor), held a congress at the end of March in Marseille. Reflecting widespread unrest among the ranks, for the first time in the 128-year history of the federation, the report of the outgoing leadership under Philippe Martinez was rejected, by 52% of the delegates. In addition, the candidate proposed to replace him was rejected.

The opposition, led by the federations (such as Mines and Energy) which have been pushing renewable strikes, plus a smaller group around Olivier Mateu, head of the Bouches-du-Rhone district, also failed to elect its candidate. This opposition was only a slightly more militant-sounding version of the old bureaucracy, and its candidate was the former head of the CGT federation of prison guards – agents of capitalist repression who have no place in the workers movement. The situation cried out for a genuine class-struggle opposition.

The surprise compromise candidate, Sophie Binet, quickly proved to be no more combative than Martinez. While promising a “historic, popular tsunami” for May Day, her most “militant” action so far has been to refuse to meet with Macron after he immediately promulgated the pension law. She sought to revive the dead-end of a referendum, which would have no practical effect, and lamented that “Macron is closing all the doors to a way out of the conflict in a very worrying form of radicalization” (*Le Monde*, 17 April). Well, what did the CGT tops expect? That Macron would simply abandon his law?

Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s bourgeois populist party, La France Insoumise (LFI, France Unbowed), is also pushing the referendum scheme and praising the “unity” of the trade-union leaderships. The same mantra is repeated by Philippe Poutou, former presidential candidate of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), in an interview (*Ballast*, 25 March) titled “*Tout redevient*



Mobilization on eleventh day of action against the pension “reform” brought hundreds of thousands into the streets of Paris. Sign says: “Euthanize the reform, eclipse Jupiter” (Macron).

possible” (Everything is possible again). Poutou praised the “dynamic” set off by the NUPES (New Ecological and Social People’s Union) popular front around Mélenchon’s LFI, formed on May Day last year, and the Intersyndicale cartel of reformist and subreformist union leaders.

Poutou was no doubt consciously echoing the words of Marceau Pivert (centrist leader of a wing of the French social democracy in the 1930s) who famously proclaimed during the mass strikes of 1936 that “Everything is possible,” by pressuring the popular-front government of Léon Blum. (Maurice Thorez, the French Stalinist leader, responded to Pivert with his equally famous phrase, “You have to know how to end a strike.”) Now Poutou, NPA spokesman Olivier Besancenot and Le Poing (the Fist), the youth group of the NPA, are proclaiming that “Macron has already lost,” because the pension “reform” could only be legislated by decree and upheld by brutal repression. This is utter “democratic” delirium.

What is true is that, while Macron has imposed his attack on workers’ rights, the struggle is not over. But to prevail, it is not enough to call to “reinforce the mobilization” (NPA leaflet, 18 April) – i.e., more of the same. It is necessary to bring to bear the power of the working class to stop production and paralyze the country, leading to a

PCF, experts in “know[ing] how to end a strike,” in ’36 and again in ’68.⁴

The key is revolutionary leadership. Without it, the mobilization that has produced ten enormous mass marches will be for naught. Left to their own devices, the union misleaders will aid Macron in running the protests into the ground. A few nights of “wildcat protests” roaming the streets, battling the cops and setting fire to trash bins will not change that. The fact that, so far, the bulk of the population “understands” (and tacitly supports) those “riots” indi-

⁴ In June 1936, after negotiations with the popular-front government of Léon Blum leading to the Matignon Accords (including paid vacations), Communist Party leader Maurice Thorez famously said “it is necessary to know how to end a strike.” Militant workers sought to continue the general strike, and did for several days. In May 1968, the PCF leader of the CGT labor federation, Georges Séguy, negotiated the Grenelle Accords with the government of de Gaulle, calling for a return to work in exchange for a wage increase. Metal workers in auto plants rejected the agreement, and the general strike continued, but with the PCF and CGT against them, it petered out a week later while pockets of militancy were crushed by the CRS paramilitary riot police.

proletarian struggle for power. But for the NPA, “incantations about the general strike which are aimed at denouncing the trade-union leaderships do not suffice.” Calling for a general strike, is fine, they opine, but “doing it in a sectarian way plays a negative role, by denying the problems of the movement and creating divisions within it.”⁴

While alibiing the labor bureaucracy – naturally “taking into account class consciousness as it really is, and not in our dreams” – the line of NPA leader Antoine Larrache was to continue the on-again, off-again renewable strikes and to encourage all sorts of “sectoral” struggles, with the ultimate goal of ending the Fifth Republic and calling a constituent assembly. It was necessary, he declaimed, to “speed up the ripening and awareness. Without ultraleftism, without shouting ‘we are determined and revolutionary’ at every street corner,” etc. For this “realist,” someday, maybe, a general strike, but forget about socialist revolution.

Révolution Permanente/ Trotskyist Faction: Bourgeois “Democracy From Below”

When Larrache sneers at supposed “ultraleftism,” he is addressing Révolution Per-
⁴ Antoine Larrache, « Retraites : une semaine de bazar, pour aller vers la victoire ? » (Pensions, a week of chaos, heading towards victory?), NPA, 29 March.

cates awareness that the biweekly marches have been insufficient. But this state of affairs will not last. Either the full power of the working class is mobilized in hard class struggle or the forces of capital, headed by the 45-year-old banker-president, will prevail – and millions of working people will pay a heavy price.

The struggle to forge a workers party on the Bolshevik program of Lenin and Trotsky, acting as a champion of all the oppressed, fighting for a workers government and international socialist revolution, is key to the battle over pension rights in France. This cannot be separated from the fight for workers action against the imperialist war drive. The failure of the general strike of 1936 and the blocking of proletarian revolution by the popular front of Léon Blum, together with the defeat of the popular-front Republican forces in the Spanish Civil War, led to the victory of Marshall Philippe Petain and Generalissimo Francisco Franco, and the slaughter of the second imperialist world war. Today as the U.S., NATO and EU imperialists hurtle toward a thermonuclear World War III, the stakes are as high, or higher. ■

manente (RP), which split off from the NPA in December 2022 after extended infighting. But a look at RP’s politics shows that they are not so far removed from NPA. In an article following the Constitutional Council’s approval of the pension “reform,” RP stated the obvious, that “In the Face of this Anti-Democratic Power Grab, Another Strategy Is Needed!” (*Révolution Permanente*, 14 April). But what strategy? The authors advocate one which “expands the demands, by posing along with social and wage demands the question of the end of the Fifth Republic regime and demanding radical democratic measures: a single chamber combining legislative and executive powers, representatives elected completely proportionally for two years and revocable by local assemblies at any time, the end of privileges for elected representatives.”

This *fuite en avant* (fleeing forward) to “expand” the struggle by including a palette of social and democratic reforms is actually an attempt to sidestep the showdown with the capitalist state that is posed over the attack on workers’ pension rights. To buttress this *defeatist* program, RP “theoretician” Juan Chingo published an article, “Against the Authoritarian Radicalization, For a Radical Democratic Response From Below” (*RP Dimanche*, 8 April), that is a veritable ode to the social reforms enacted “from the outset of the Third Republic” (1870-1940) – which began with the massacre of tens of thousands of Communards, i.e., a counterrevolution. The article quotes Claude Serfati, the author of a recent treatise who says that “In France, more than in other Western countries, the army has been the backbone of the state for centuries.” But, “It is only with the Fifth Republic that the army has been placed at the heart of the State and of French society.”⁵

First off, for Marxists, the fact that the army is the backbone of the state is not some French peculiarity or particular characteristic of the semi-bonapartist Fifth Republic, but the essence of class rule. Second, it is a “democratist” illusion to claim (as much of the French left does) that Macron’s use of Article 49.3 to force through enactment of the pension “reform” law represents a “radicalization” of French bourgeois democracy. As we have noted, “left” president François Mitterrand was the champion in using this rule-by-decree device. Third, and most important, for Trotskyists the answer to the bonapartist / authoritarian aspects of the capitalist state under the French Fifth Republic is not a series of “radical democratic” reforms, à la Révolution Permanente, or a constituent assembly advocated by Mélenchon (and all over Latin America by RP’s parent tendency, the Trotskyist Faction [FT]), but to *fight for socialist revolution*.

The craze for constitution-tinkering of what passes for the left and “far left” these days is merely a symptom of their social democratization. The position that full, consistent and permanent achievement of democratic rights (which has never actually been attained in any capitalist society) is a bridge to socialism was a staple of the Second International, in particular for Karl Kautsky. It was also the basis for his denunciation of the Bolshevik Revolution. Seeking to head off proletarian revolution

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⁵ Claude Serfati, *L’État radicalisé. La France à l’ère de la mondialisation armée* (The Radicalized State. France in the Era of Armed Globalization), 2022.

Drive Out Macron...

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Place de la Nation, etc. It can only be the by-product of a revolutionary struggle for power, of an all-out general strike, which requires the leadership of a genuinely communist party of the proletarian vanguard.

The battle over pension rights in France has been a constant for the last 30 years, going back to Premier Edouard Balladur’s 1993 plan to reduce private-sector pensions and Premier Alain Juppé failed attack on the “special regimes” of the most powerful unions. As virtually every bourgeois commentator has noted, the outpouring of opposition to Macron’s “reform” is because it amounts to a frontal attack on social solidarity programs central to the “French way of life.” And as every French worker knows, key aspects of those programs were the product of huge social struggles. The month-long vacations were the result of the 1936 general strike. But that gain was a “consolation prize,” resulting from the *betrayal* of that strike – which had the potential of turning into a proletarian revolution – by the Stalinist reformist

Interview with Dock Union Leader

What Pension Fight Means for French Workers and Youth

LE HAVRE, France, April 7 – The day after the eleventh national day of action called by French unions against President Emmanuel Macron’s vicious assault on workers’ pension rights, comrades of the League for the Fourth International visited the port of Le Havre, on the northern coast in the Normandy region of France. The city has been a stronghold of militant labor protest for decades, including in the present struggle. Here and in other ports around the country, tens of thousands of workers marched on April 6, as they have in the previous days of action. In Le Havre, dock workers are continuing to shut down the port completely for half of each workday.

During our visit, we had the opportunity to interview Le Havre dockers leader Anthony Tétard, a union delegate for the Dock Workers Union of the Port of Le Havre and one of the leaders of the national federation of dock and port workers affiliated to the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) labor federation.

The Internationalist: Can you tell us a bit about dock workers’ participation in the current struggle, and what it means for the working class and for dockers in particular?

Anthony Tétard: This “reform” is not in our interests; we see it as a big social regression, making people work two years longer. For dockers it is even more harmful, since studies have shown that dock workers’ life expectancy is seven to eight years less than the national average in France. So this “reform” is unacceptable, not only for us but for everyone.

This is a response of the capitalist system, with financiers demanding that France cut back on social rights, which after all are not important for them. The big employers and financiers want France to continue “reforming” social security, which is unacceptable for us. Over the past 20 years this has accelerated, with unprecedented reductions aimed at pension rights, healthcare rights, coverage for family members...

So for us this fight against the pen-



Anthony Tétard (left) on the dock in Le Havre. Port workers have led protests and undertaken strike action against the attack on workers pensions.

sion reform is a first phase, as we want an integral social security protecting all workers, and we will continue this struggle. The healthcare system is being degraded, with healthcare turned into a commodity. The social security system has a deficit today, because one government after another have given employers the gift of exempting them from contributions to social security.

The Internationalist: We have been struck that a significant number of young people, including secondary-school students, have been participating in the protests. Why is this struggle important for them?

Tétard: Young people’s participation is important in great social movements. Though schools today don’t teach people about this history, or about trade unionism, or the history of social security, nevertheless youth see they are facing being forced to work longer and to spend more years

paying into the retirement system, in a situation where the labor market is very hard for them. For many it would mean not retiring until the age of 69 or 70, and they are conscious of this. And they are aware that many will face interruptions in their work careers which will make it take

longer to qualify.

Meanwhile, under the growing pressure of the bosses, working conditions keep getting worse for workers in France. There is a lot of burnout and depression among young workers, a lot of them have been quitting because of harassment on the job. People know they have to work part of their lives, that’s normal – but the idea is you’re supposed to be able to enjoy part of your life when you retire.

There is a connection between the attack on retirement and the increasingly insecure nature of jobs for young people – it is harder and harder for them to get a stable job, and the ones they can get are frequently precarious. This “reform” would make that even worse; people will remain in bad jobs even longer [to try to qualify for the pension]. And, unfortunately, the reality in France is that if you lose your job after the age of 50, your chances for getting another one are bad; people will be staying longer in precarious jobs

The Internationalist: What about Macron’s maneuver of using the provision of Article 49.3 [of the French Constitution]?

Tétard: During the last presidential elections there was a high level of abstention; Macron only got about 36% of the eligible voters, and then with the legislative elections, he could only get a majority [in parliament] through alliances. He knows he faces a problem with the pension reform. Among working people, 93% oppose it, and more than 75% of the population at large opposes it. Various political parties have come out against it, though for various different reasons, some because they oppose it, others to position themselves against the government. Using Article 49.3 the government could enact the law without the risk of being voted down. To avoid a democratic vote, the government has used this mechanism, since it does not

have a majority in favor of the law.

Meanwhile the extreme right is seeking to profit from the situation, to make people think they have a position socially acceptable to the workers, to fool people, as in the case of the Rassemblement National (RN – National Rally) party. This is simply the old National Front, which opposed raising the minimum wage and other wages, and has not changed on immigration, etc.¹ Marine Le Pen, the head of the National Front, called for army strike-breaking; her father [Jean-Marie Le Pen, the founder of the National Front] called for going after the unions and the dockers union specifically.

The Internationalist: We spoke earlier about how Democratic president Joe Biden used an anti-labor law against railroad workers in the United States, as well as about the spread of anti-strike laws, and the danger of their extension Europe-wide.

Tétard: In France the right to strike is under attack, but illegally, since it is in the Constitution. The employers and the government are pushing against the right to strike, to limit and cut it down. In some sectors there are measures requiring that a “minimum level of service” be maintained, and that “advance notice” be given: 15 days’ notice for railroad workers before going on strike, for example. And we’ve seen how in the struggle over pensions police have been sent to refinery workers’ homes, and workers have been “requisitioned” to force them back to work. A second wave of “requisitions” started this week, but we found out that a court just issued a ruling against that measure here in Normandy.

The Internationalist: What is the role of international solidarity right now in the current struggle, which is clearly important for the working class internationally.

Tétard: We have received many messages of solidarity. We know that many people are watching this struggle, and we think that if we win this will give hope to sectors of workers internationally. We just learned that yesterday, workers in Belgium blocked a TotalEnergies facility there from sending fuel to France.

The Internationalist: What do you see as the perspectives for the struggle?

Tétard: On April 14 the Constitutional Council will be issuing its ruling, though we don’t expect much from it. It is a body made up of former presidents of France, plus other members one-third of whom are designated by the president, one-third by the head of the National Assembly [the lower house of parliament] and one-third by the head of the Senate. In any case we are going to continue the struggle. We cannot know exactly what will happen, but for our part we hope the mobilizations will continue.

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¹ The fascist RN (Rassemblement National) party has sought to demagogically exploit opposition to Macron’s “reform” while calling for increased repression against strikes and protests and railing that France is being “submerged” with immigrants.



Monument in the Port of Le Havre to dock workers who died of asbestos poisoning.

Message From Memphis

The following message from Memphis, Tennessee, was written for and sent to the January 31 speak-out against police murder organized by the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York.

My name is Cleo Silvers

I was a member of the Black Panther Party and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. I was the co-chair of HRUM [pronounced "H-Rum"], the Health Hospital Unity Movement. I was a member of the New York hospital workers union 1199. In 1970, as a member of the Young Lords Party, I participated in the occupation of Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx. I received an honorary doctorate from Lehman College/City University of New York in May of 2022 in recognition of years of activism in the South Bronx.

After living in Brooklyn and Harlem for 30 years, my husband Ron, an auto-worker and anti-Klan activist, and I moved to Memphis, the home of Tyre Nichols, until he was beaten to death by the police on January 7.

Police Terror in Memphis, the Murder of Tyre Nichols

2 MPD police officers relieved of duty,
5 fired, charged with 2nd degree murder – all free on bail,
2 MFD EMTs fired
1 MFD Lt. fired
2 Shelby County deputies relieved of duty

Memphis' population is 67.9% Black

Why is it that five Black and one White police officers tasing and beating Tyre Nichols to death represent the blood-drenched "strange" fruit of white supremacy? Terror directed against our Black communities for 400 years enriches a tiny racist elite scum. By scapegoating us and pitting our white working-class brothers and sisters against us, they keep us, the working-class masses who produce the entire wealth of this society, divided and weak.

But they also divide our own Black communities. Slave patrollers and Klan night-riders gave way to automotive wage-slave patrollers. Lynching gave way to

death row and mass incarceration. Religion, the opiate of the masses, became social activists! That gave way to real opiates: heroin, fentanyl, oxycodone plus crack cocaine and meth. The CIA prefers drug lords in Central America to social activists! Hence, peasants fleeing to the North!

The role of the police is to terrorize the working masses – they "Serve and Protect" not us but the ultra-rich! To be more effective patrollers, they reached into our communities and enrolled unsuspecting or naive young Black men and women. Five years in any U.S. police force, institutional racism, transforms almost all recruits into hardened, jaded, self-hating cynics who have lost any empathy especially for workers or those in desperate poverty.

Look at the body and pole cams! Where are the people in Tyre's neighborhood while he is being stomped and beaten on the sidewalk? Terrorized! A mob of crazed cops running amok at night! No telling who else they will attack.

Why did the Fire Department Lieutenant stay in her ambulance the entire time? Terrorized! She avoided being an eyewitness and risking testifying about what she saw! She knew the kind of brutal pressure that would be put on her to maintain the blue wall of silence. She would not risk her life to try to save Tyre Nichols's life! This shows the insidious nature of institutional racism.

Racist divide-and-rule has been the most effective and finely honed weapon of the U.S. ruling elite for 400 years! But as the wealth gap widens and the avaricious greed of the ultra-rich increases – working people become more and more fed up – the shrinking slice of the pie has become crumbs! Each rampage of killer cops means another kid shot in the playground; a young man or woman shot or choked to death; a confused grandparent with dementia killed in their backyard. Anger and outrage at the terror gradually spreads.

We need to form action groups, local activist committees to build unity among ourselves. We need to learn about and study the struggles against oppression in the past: the Memphis Invaders, the Louisiana and Mississippi Deacons for Defense, the Alabama Lowndes County Black Panthers, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, the Young Lords (NYC & Puerto Rico), and SNCC

(Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee).

The ultra-rich capitalists are cultivating the forces of repression – police Scorpion-type units, the Klan, neo-Nazis, fascists and psycho-Trumpites. We need to mobilize in demonstrations; talk with our neighbors, find out what really urgently needs to be done around us! Talk with folks in other communities to organize joint projects. Work to organize struggles against foreclosures, to support

Cleo Silvers

union shops and strikes and, especially, to mobilize against police and fascist terror!

We need to reject our capitalist brainwashing and study the political struggles and theories of the socialists, communists and anarcho-syndicalists. We should forge new, powerful weapons of critical thought and political education. If possible, set up study groups with other open-minded people. Reform is insufficient – what crumbs the capitalist class concedes – they steal back again! The right to vote – trying to take it away again! Women's right to control their own body (*Roe v. Wade*) – no longer national – now abolishing the right to an abortion one state at a time! A revolutionary socialist transformation is the only long-term solution!

They're talking about how the cops are really on top of this: a black, female police chief firing the cops, charging them with murder

In reality, they're just trying to keep the lid on things.

Nothing has changed: no matter the color of the killer cops or their chief, or the politicians, the master is still the same: the bosses, the banks, the capitalist class.

About the time I joined the Panthers, a young brother in Philadelphia, my home town, did the same thing. His name is Mumia Abu-Jamal. He was known as the Voice of the Voiceless and the Philly cops were watching. They framed him and Mumia has spent 41 years in jail, most of them on death row, for a crime he didn't commit.



Tyre and Mumia, despite their difference in age and residence do, or did, share one fundamental thing: being Black men in a racist society.

The media keeps talking about how we need a new conversation about race.

We've been having a conversation – after each of these deadly horrors – and nothing has changed.

What could change things? Who, what force can stand up to the institutions of capitalism backed up by their armies of police?

Look to the Bay Area on February 16. The dockworkers there have voted to shut down the port of Oakland demanding freedom for Mumia.

That's what we need here, and in every city.

Memphis is the headquarters of FedEx. Tyre Nichols was, in addition to being a loving son and father, a FedEx worker. Let the transportation workers, sanitation workers, hospital workers of Memphis put Tyre's name on their banners and shut down the city. Let the workers of New York, Minneapolis, Philadelphia raise the names of Eric Garner, George Floyd and Mumia Abu Jamal and do the same.

We don't need another "conversation." We need the labor movement to make police brutality and murder in communities of color stop now!

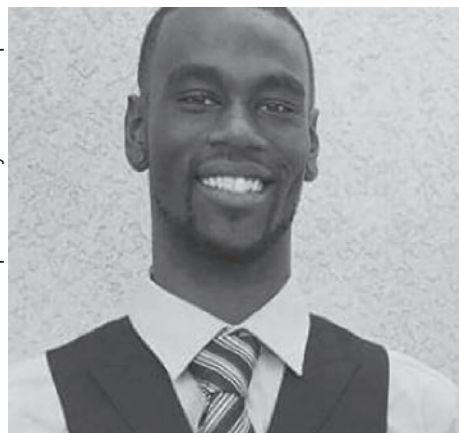
Join us!

Memphis, Atlanta...

continued from page 1

To spearhead the fight against racist police terror, we urge one and all to take up the struggle for workers action to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. Mumia, the former Black Panther and world-renowned journalist, is the U.S.' foremost class-war prisoner, framed by the cops and held in prison hell for 41 years, 29 of them on Death Row – another heritage of slavery. Today, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 will stop work and shut down the ports of Oakland and San Francisco, California, to demand freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal. Across the globe there will be demonstrations by the Doro-Chiba rail workers union at the U.S. embassy in Japan; by NUMSA metal workers at the U.S. embassy in Pretoria, South Africa, and by dock workers at the U.S. consulate in Durban; in New York City, a teach-in under the watchword "Mumia's Freedom Is La-

Photo provided by Ben Crump



Tyre Nichols (left) and Manuel Esteban Paez Terán (Tortuguita), killed by cops.

bor's Cause"; and in San Francisco, a march along the Embarcadero that will also highlight the case of Tyre Nichols in Memphis.

In the U.S., Painters (IUPAT Local 10) and Stagehands (IATSE Local 28) in Portland have recently passed resolutions calling for workers mobilization to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, while the Vermont AFL-CIO has come out in his defense and resolu-



Stop Cop City ATL

shut down every West Coast port (including Canada) on Juneteenth (June 19) demanding "Stop Police Terror!" Today, the labor-centered actions of February 16 must not be a one-shot affair but the kickoff for a campaign of labor action to free Mumia and bring out workers' power against the police murder machine.

Democrats Scramble to Contain Outrage Over Cop Murder of Tyre Nichols

When a composite video of body cam and surveillance camera footage of the police execution of Tyre Nichols was finally posted on the Internet in late January, there was an anguished outcry coast-to-coast of "Not again! It never stops." In May 2020, a video by a courageous young woman bystander of the wanton murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis, Minnesota cop set off a summer of massive protests across the country. Upwards of 26 million people took to the streets for weeks to denounce racist police

Memphis, Atlanta: Horror Show of Cop Terror

The video of the Memphis police at work horrified millions. Many compared it to the cop beating of Rodney King by officers of the Los Angeles Police Department in 1991, which led to the L.A. upheaval the next year when a jury with not a single African American in suburban Simi Valley acquitted the five police. But that video was from a distance and King lived, while multiple cameras recorded the vicious beating of Tyre Nichols up close, and he died. If the enduring image of the suffocation of George Floyd in Minneapolis was the cold-blooded killer cop Derek Chauvin smirking as he refused to take his knee off his victim's neck, what perhaps most shocked those who watched the hot-blooded ultra-violent murder of Nichols was the relentless screaming by the police and their repeated deadly punches and kicks to Tyre's head that were like scenes out of a horror movie.

The footage starts with the police charging his car, manhandling Tyre and bombarding him with commands to get on the ground as he says, "I'm just trying to get home." The cops put a taser to his leg and fire pepper spray at him. After he manages to break free, the police catch up with him, tackle him as he cries out "Mom!" (this takes place barely 100 yards from her home). As Nichols lay writhing on the ground crying out for help, an officer lands seven blows to his face while another pepper-sprays him. The cops start hitting him with their batons even as an officer drives his boot into Nichols' head so hard that he almost slips, and then, yelling to "Lay flat, goddammit," kicks him in the head again. This is followed by even more baton blows. As Nichols groans in agony, both arms held by a cop, one can see from the skycam as an officer starts throwing more punches to his head, landing at least four blows.

In the videos, the police are barking orders nonstop – 71 commands according to a tally by the media. After the beating stops, story time begins. The police brag about their punches: "I was hitting him with straight haymakers," says one. Another



View from overhead Memphis Police Department SkyCop surveillance came as MPD officers mercilessly beat Tyre Nichols as he cried out for help. Police pepper-sprayed him, shot him with an electric Taser, struck him repeatedly with batons, hitting and kicking him in the head at least 13 times.

takes photos of Tyre propped up against a car and sends the photos on his cellphone. Then they start trying to get their stories straight, claiming that Nichols took a swing at one of cops (a lie), that he supposedly grabbed a cop's gun (another lie), and then went for another officer's gun (also a lie). None of this is on the video footage, but they are clearly checking to make sure they are all telling the same tale. They are furious that they couldn't find anything in Nichols' car that they could use to frame him with. The Fire Department Emergency Medical Team arrives fairly early on, but for 19 minutes does nothing to aid Tyre – one EMT technician never even leaves the van.

The scenes are harrowing. The standard response from the authorities in the past when the police have been caught red-handed was to conjure up the story line of "bad apples," of "rogue cops" who have "run amok." But by now those fictions no longer work. Everyone in the country knows, admit it or not, that threatening and using deadly force is standard operating procedure of big city police, county sheriffs and state patrols. The statistics are there to prove it, although police departments try to cover this up, reporting less than half of their kills to the federal

repression in the largest sustained protests in U.S. history. In Minneapolis, a police station was torched while in Washington, D.C., demonstrators were assaulted by police outside the White House. This time, in 2023, the authorities were determined to get out ahead of the protests, in Memphis and elsewhere. The killer cops were suspended on January 8, the day after they assaulted Nichols; they were fired on January 20 and charged with second-degree murder on January 26, the day before the videos were released.

Instead of the usual stonewalling, refusing to release evidence "in an ongoing investigation," refusing, delaying and minimizing charges against the cops, a different playbook was adopted. The Memphis chief of police declared that the video would show cops' actions that were "inhumane" and "heinous." Where in 2020 Republican president Donald Trump egged on police with talk of "shooting" rioters, in 2023 Democrat Joe Biden mouthed platitudes about "fair and impartial justice, equal treatment, and dignity for all." (In response to

Trump, Biden grotesquely said that, instead of shooting people in the heart, police should "shoot 'em in the leg.") At the same time, police and National Guard units were alerted in major cities for the day the video would be released. And it worked. In Memphis protesters spilled onto the Interstate and took the bridge over the Mississippi River to Arkansas without incident. Around the U.S., there were small demonstrations in New York City, Washington, D.C. and Sacramento, California on the first night, and elsewhere in coming days. But nothing that could be billed as "riots."

What the Democrats' exercise in preventive urban counterinsurgency *did not, will not and cannot do* is stop the murderous police repression – particularly against African Americans but not only – because that is built into the system of racist American capitalism. After the millions-strong protests against racist police terror in 2020, the number of civilians killed by police has only *increased*, to a record 1,192 in 2022 – *over three people a day* – according to the database maintained

government.¹ Tyre Nichols and Tortuguita are the latest high-profile victims of an apparatus of brutal repression geared to keeping the exploited and oppressed down. The "law enforcement community" (police) along with the military, courts and jails, are pillars of the capitalist state. Their job is, and always has been, to defend the interests of the ruling class.

The Memphis Police Department whose officers chased and beat Tyre Nichols to death is the same MPD whose cops in 1974 chased an unarmed 15-year-old youth, Edward Garner, accused of stealing, and shot him in the back of the head. That case became famous with the 1985 U.S. Supreme Court decision, known as *Tennessee v. Garner*, holding that police may not use deadly force to prevent escape unless "the officer has probable cause to believe that the suspect poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to the officer or others." This

¹ Using the counts from Mapping Police Violence, Fatal Encounters and The Counted (a project of *The Guardian* newspaper), a study on U.S. police violence published in the British medical journal *The Lancet* (2 October 2021) estimated that over half (54%) of deaths at the hands of the police were *not* reported to the federal government's National Vital Statistics System.

leaves a giant hole as the killer cop can claim "probable cause." But despite this decision of the highest court in the U.S., half the states refused to change their use-of-force laws. Even in those that did (like Tennessee), this has not stopped the police using deadly force with abandon, as when in 2015 MPD cops shot and killed 19-year-old Darrius Stewart as he was "running away" after a traffic stop.²

Meanwhile in suburban Atlanta, "Manny" Terán/Tortuguita was not a random victim of some out-of-control, trigger-happy police but of a quasi-military operation that sent in a small army of city, county, state and federal officials to put an end to the occupation of the planned "Cop City." In December, seven Forest Defenders were jailed on spurious charges of "domestic terrorism," the same charges filed against those arrested on January 18, for the "crimes" of trespassing in the woods, camping or occupying a tree house! What is behind such heavy-handed repression? It turns out that the slated Atlanta 85-acre police training center is to be paid for mainly by the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF), whose board members and contributors are a roster Atlanta's corporate elite, including from Home Depot, Delta Air Lines, Coca-Cola and Cox Enterprises, the media giant that owns the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.³

The APF is one of many corporate "police foundations" founded in recent years to promote more flagrantly direct capitalist control of the police. The first and prime example is the New York City Police Foundation, started in 1971 in response to the Knapp Commission investigation of police corruption. In the bad old days, business owners paid off the cop on the beat in a Mafia-style protection racket. Now Wall Street bankers and real estate titans (as well as media moguls, such as the *New York Times* and Spectrum, owner of NY1 cable news) help ensure that the police do their bidding by funneling millions in (tax-exempt) funds to the NYPD. This pays for programs like Crime Stoppers (luring viewers to become informants for the cops), computers for the Compstat program racially profiling black and Latino neighborhoods, stationing NYPD officers in Israel and whipping up hysteria over rising crime with saturation media coverage. ■

² *The Guardian*, 16 December 2015.

³ "The New Fight Over an Old Forest in Atlanta," *New Yorker*, 3 August 2022.

by mappingpoliceviolence.us.¹ The same site reported that black people are three times as likely to be killed by police as white people; that most police killings begin with traffic stops, mental health checks, family disturbances, other non-violent offenses and where no crime is alleged; that one-quarter of police killings are of people seeking to flee; and in 98% of killings by cops, no officers are charged with any crime.

Nor have police killings in the city of Memphis declined. In fact, cops shot and killed three black people in the month leading up to the murder of Tyre Nichols (and another since). Various "reforms" have been proposed to reduce racist police brutality, including civilian review boards (Memphis has had one since 1994), more black police (58% of Memphis cops are black); black

¹ These numbers are very conservative, roughly half the number recorded by the now-defunct website killedbypolice.net and by fatalencounters.org, both based on published reports. When all three sites were available, the year-to-year trends were the same.

police chiefs (the Memphis chief is an African American woman, Cerelyn Davis); black city governments (while the current mayor, Democrat Jim Strickland, is white, Memphis has had black mayors since 1992, and the present city council has an 8-5 black majority); training and use-of-force policies (the Memphis Police Department bans chokeholds, requires de-escalation, warnings before shootings, duty to intervene to stop excessive force, reporting use or threats of force); federal consent decrees (Memphis has had one since 2015, against police spying on activists). All to no avail.

The fact that all five of the Memphis cops who murdered Tyre Nichols are black underlines that racist repression in the United States is *systemic*. Like liberal Minneapolis, Memphis implemented every supposed police reform on the books, but it hasn't made a dent. During the 2020 protests over the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks and so many others, would-be radicals and many liberals called to "defund the police" – some even raising the utopian call to

“abolish” these enforcers of capitalist rule under capitalism. The opposite happened. In the 2020 elections, Democrat Joe Biden, a long-time backer of the police, won the presidency and Democrats won control of both houses of Congress. In his 2021 State of the Union address, Biden declared: “We should all agree the answer is not to defund the police, [it] is to fund the police,” he said. “Fund them. Fund them. Fund them with resources and training.” And fund them, they did. Memphis got a \$10 million “public safety partnership and community policing” grant. And Tyler Nichols got murdered by the cops.

This underlines the importance considering what demands protesters should raise in protesting racist police repression. The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL), which organized protests in many cities against the police murder of Tyre Nichols while much of the left did nothing, called to “Jail Killer Cops.” But as the PSL handed out signs with this slogan on January 27, the killer cops had already been arrested (and then quickly released on bail), thanks to the Democratic Party efforts to defuse protests. The PSL’s reformist program is at bottom a call on the Democrats to clean up their act. In contrast, the Internationalist Group demonstrated on January 27 and following days in New York, Los Angeles, Portland and Boston with signs calling “For Workers Strikes Against Racist Police Terror,” declaring “Democrats Are the Bosses of the Racist Killer Cops – Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!” and “Only Revolution Can Bring Justice!”

Police “Reforms” Change Nothing

While Democrats run most big cities, ruling-class support for escalating police violence is bi-partisan. In Atlanta, the “Cop City” facility – which one Forest Defender called “a police murder playground” – was pushed by both Democrat then-mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms and Republican governor Brian Kemp as an answer to high crime and low police morale. During the 2020 George Floyd protests, the mayor denounced the “chaos” of the protesters. When shortly after, APD cops gunned down restaurant worker Rayshard Brooks for the “crime” of falling asleep in his car blocking a drive-thru lane at a Wendy’s fast-food restaurant, she had them fired and they were charged with murder. But then Democrat Fani Willis was elected D.A. with the support of the police. Willis asked the Republican governor to appoint a special prosecutor, who declared that killer cop Garrett Rolfe acted reasonably in arresting Brooks for drunk driving in a parking lot, shooting him in the back and kicking Rayshard as he lay dying.²

In Memphis, the cops who killed Tyre Nichols were part of the S.C.O.R.P.I.O.N. (Street Crimes Operation to Restore Peace In Our Neighborhood) task force. This is one of numerous special police squads in cities around the country, often in street clothes riding in unmarked cars, set up to terrorize poor and minority neighborhoods. Examples include the C.R.A.S.H. (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums) unit in the Rampart Division in Los Angeles that in the late 1990s, in the guise of fighting gangs, stole drugs, beat suspects and even robbed a bank; street crime units in New York City that assassinated Amadou Diallo (1999), Sean Bell (2006) and Eric Garner (2014); and the R.E.D. D.O.G.

² Willis is now hailed by many liberals because she may charge ex-president Donald Trump with interfering in the 2020 elections (“The Implacable Fani Willis,” *New York Times Magazine*, 5 February).



NYC protest against Memphis police murder of Tyre Nichols, January 27.

(Run Every Drug Dealer Out of Georgia) unit in the Atlanta Police, notorious for ambushing young men to carry out strip searches on the public streets, and killing a 92-year-old grandmother in her home.

Memphis police chief Cerelyn Davis, who set up the now-infamous “Scorpion” unit, was in 2006-08 in charge of the “Red Dog” force in the Atlanta Police Department, which used similar brutal tactics.³ She also commanded the APD’s S.W.A.T. riot squads, established and headed its Homeland Security unit, received “leadership training” with the Israel National Police in 2013 and set up a program of annual APD command visits to Israel. The Israeli training includes observing the repression of Palestinian protests in the occupied West Bank and joining Israeli police patrols in East Jerusalem. City University of New York sociology professor Alex Vitale noted that this “encourages a warrior mindset in police and exposes them to practices that would be unconstitutional in the U.S.”⁴ In the wake of the 2020 protests over racist police brutality, a number of anti-crime/anti-drug/anti-gang units were disbanded. But from 2021 on, they are being brought back with a vengeance.⁵ The police murder of Tyre Nichols in Memphis is a result.

One of the places where such elite units have been reinstated is New York City, where ex-cop Eric Adams (currently a Democrat, previously a Republican backer of fascist NYC mayor Rudy Giuliani) was elected mayor on a “fear city” program, as the tabloid press, TV news and radio talk shows whipped up hysteria over crime in the streets, subways, schools, everywhere. On taking office in January 2022, Adams announced that he was resuscitating the anti-gun units which carried out the racial-profiling “stop-and-frisk” program in African American and Latino areas. He claimed that this time it would be different because the cops would wear body cameras. Adams is also touting surveillance cameras and facial recognition technology, dismissing complaints of racist misidentification and violation of civil liberties, baldly proclaiming “Big Brother is protecting you.”

Meanwhile, in Memphis, some have praised the SkyCop overhead cameras. Did body cams and sky cams protect Tyre Nichols? No, they did not. The killer cops carried out their beating knowing that it was being caught on camera. The video footage shocked the public, and in this case may aid prosecution – or not, since the whole racist “justice” sys-

³ “Memphis police chief once led the aggressive ‘Red Dog’ anti-crime unit in Atlanta,” NBC News, 2 February.

⁴ “Memphis Police Chief Trained With Israel Security Forces,” *The Intercept*, 2 February.

⁵ “As Crime Spiked, Cities Revived Elite Police Units,” *New York Times*, 7 February.

tem is rigged to protect the badge-toting killers in blue. But dozens of studies have “found no evidence that body cameras significantly reduced police misconduct,” as *Grid* (29 January) reported.⁶ Another frequent theme among liberals calling for police “reform” is to call for more “training” and “professionalization.” But these special units of the police – and not just street crime units,

but also other special operations squads – are trained to be violent. They are the professional killer elite of the police: a 2018 study showed that of 174 people killed by NYPD police since 2000, 54 (31%, almost a third) were killed by plainclothes or undercover cops.⁷

Now the Memphis police “Scorpion” unit has been disbanded, by the same police chief who set it up. But that won’t stop police killings either. It’s a familiar pattern: following an outcry over rampant crime, special squads are set up to intimidate, harass and entrap. Officials brag about statistics purporting to show falling crime rates. Then, after these action squads do what they were supposed to do, there is a scandal over their heavy-handed, ultra-violent and often lethal tactics, and they are dissolved, among much hand-wringing, only to be reinstated in the next round. But the killings by cops don’t stop: 2014 (Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Laquan McDonald, Tamir Rice), 2015 (Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland, Walter Scott), 2016 (Philando Castile, Alton Sterling), 2017 (Justine Diamond), 2018 (Stephon Clark, Botham Jean), 2019 (Elijah McClain), 2020 (George Floyd, Breonna Taylor), 2021 (Anthony Alvarez, Adam Toledo, Daunte Wright), 2022 (Jayland Walker), to list only a few of the most prominent cases.

Police: The Armed Fist of Capital

In response to the uproar over the murder of Tyre Nichols, the White House sent Vice President Kamala Harris to his funeral in Memphis and invited his mother and stepfather, RowVaughn and Rodney Wells, to the State of the Union address, where President Biden called to “finish the job on police reform.” This was taken as a reference to the “George Floyd Justice in Policing Act” which passed the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives in 2020 and 2021 but went nowhere in the Senate, even though with Harris presiding the Democrats had a one-vote majority. This year they haven’t even bothered to revive the bill. But even if they did, it would hardly make a dent in police killings. Many of its provisions (against chokeholds, duty to intervene to deescalate, deadly force only as last resort) are already in police regulations around the U.S., with little effect. And while it calls to curtail the “qualified immunity” from prosecution of state and local police (certain to be challenged in court), it does not do so for federal agents!

Just as Bill Clinton sought to quell unrest with his “I feel your pain” pitch, the Democrats ⁶ See also “Body Cameras Haven’t Stopped Police Brutality. Here’s Why,” *Wired*, 17 June 2020; “Why filming police violence has done nothing to stop it,” *MIT Technology Review*, 3 June 2020; and “Do body cameras affect police officers’ behavior? Not so much,” *Yale News*, 27 October 2017.

⁷ “Plainclothes NYPD Cops Are Involved in a Staggering Number of Killings,” *The Intercept*, 9 May 2018.

routinely pose as friends of African Americans, Latinos, immigrants, labor, women and others with rhetoric and empty legislative gestures, while “reaching across the aisle” to pass vicious “bipartisan” laws escalating police repression. Case in point: Clinton’s 1994 omnibus crime bill (authored by Joe Biden) that was a prime factor in escalating mass incarceration. But when all the police “reform” measures do nothing against racist cop terror, the politicians and pundits fall back on the old standby, “police culture.” That “culture” is not the cause of police brutality, although it certainly contributes to it. Instead, it is the reflection of and part of a system of brutal racist repression that has been integral to capitalist rule in the U.S. since the country was founded on chattel slavery of African Americans and genocide of Native Americans, and which has been further fueled by U.S. imperialist wars, many of whose veterans become cops.

The fact that five black cops beat a black man to death is cited by conservatives as supposed “proof” that race has nothing to do with it. The same refrain is sounded by the anti-union, pseudo-socialist WSWS Internet outlet (which should be universally known as the World Scab Web Site) as it denies that there is any such thing as “systemic racism.”⁸ Liberals, on the other hand, while praising body cams, say that “Officers’ Race Turns Focus to System,” and “Tyre Nichols Beating Opens a Complex Conversation on Race and Policing” (*New York Times*, 29 January). Contrary to the phony “color-blind” rhetoric of the right, which now poses as being opponents of discrimination and supporters of “equal opportunity,” systemic racism is deeply ingrained in the U.S. But what is that system? Liberals and some radicals label it “white supremacy” – as if the issue is white people vs. black people. This lets those who profit from black oppression off the hook.

Rather, the system that produces rampant cop terror directed against the exploited and oppressed, including white workers fighting for their rights, is racist American capitalism. That is the system that spawns the actual white supremacists of the Ku Klux Klan and other racist terrorists. Who do the police serve, and whose interests do they protect? Not white people in general but the owners of capital, from the slave-owning plantation owners to the post-Civil War kings of cotton to the Wall Street titans, modern-day robber barons like Amazon and other union-busting companies like Coca-Cola and Delta Airlines, headquartered in Atlanta, and FedEx, based in Memphis. An important fact that is scarcely mentioned in the media coverage is that Tyre Nichols was a FedEx worker, as is his stepfather. FedEx bosses reap billions from the low-wage labor of “their” wage-slaves, and the police are there to do their bidding.

The fact that the material conditions that breed racist police brutality are rooted in capitalist exploitation has a direct effect on how to fight this deadly plague. A black conservative commentator from the right-wing Manhattan Institute (and Columbia University), John McWhorter, writes that “Police Brutality Is Not Always About Race” (*New York Times*, 7 February), and points to the effects of poverty. Police are sent to “poorer neighborhoods more often than to middle-class or affluent ones,” he notes. It is an important fact that Memphis today is considerably poorer than it was in 1968, when Martin Luther King was assassinated there. “Median family income, in inflation-adjusted dollars, has dropped nearly 20 percent, and the ⁸ “Race, class and the police killing of Tyre Nichols,” WSWS, 31 January.

nine-county Memphis region has the highest poverty rate of any metro area in the nation with at least 1 million residents,” noted the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* (1 April 2018).

But brutal police action is not limited to impoverished inner-city neighborhoods. The Brandywine Cove area where Tyre Nichols was murdered, and where his mother and stepfather live, is in a black middle-class and working-class census tract where the median family income is \$49,000, well above the average for Memphis. In fact, many of the police actions by the “Scorpion” unit as they “rolled through Memphis” in their muscle cars, “zooming up on targets, jumping out of their Dodge Chargers at a dead run, shouting at people” to hit the ground, as they did with Tyre, were in modern apartment complexes.⁹ And the Atlanta city-county-state-federal police raid in which Tortuguita was killed took place in the majority black, overwhelmingly Democratic middle-income suburban DeKalb County. In short, race, poverty and class intersect and overlap in the areas most subjected to marauding police repression.

Because the cop terror that has killed more than 1,000 civilians every year (and double that in the count of now-discontinued data bases) is rooted in the racist capitalist system, little affected by whatever police “reform” is currently being pushed, the answer to it must take on that system. You can’t “Stop Police Terror” (as many protest signs proclaim) by marching to chants of “No justice, no peace,” or by “speaking truth to power,” but only by bringing to bear a greater power than that of the capitalist state. That is the power of the working class, whose labor produces the profits that make capitalism go round. But that potential power must be mobilized in action. Every resident of Memphis is vividly aware that when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, he was supporting a strike of sanitation workers who marched, facing National Guard bayonets, with signs proclaiming “I Am A Man.” Today protesters march on the Interstate bridge to Arkansas with pictures of Tyre in the hospital and the same message.

The police murder of Tyre Nichols in Memphis and Tortuguita in Atlanta should be met with workers action nationwide, accompanied by a drive to fully unionize FedEx, whose hub at the Memphis airport makes it the busiest cargo airport in the world. In Atlanta, headquarters of the unionized United Parcel Service, labor-led protests with Teamsters in the lead could shake city rulers, and prepare the way for a powerful strike against UPS later this year. Taking up the struggle today to make Mumia’s freedom labor’s cause is a first step in the direction of a *class struggle* against racist cop terror.

Such a struggle must be waged *politically* against the capitalist parties that finance and institute these practices in the first place. That means centrally breaking with the Democrats, who are the bosses of the racist killer cops at home and lead U.S. imperialist wars abroad, from World Wars I and II, through Korea and Vietnam to the Middle East. Today, Democrat Biden is pushing the U.S./NATO imperialist-provoked war against Russia over Ukraine as part of the war drive targeting China tomorrow, hurtling down the road toward a thermonuclear World War III. To wage and win the fight against poverty, racism, imperialist war and cop terror requires building a *class-struggle workers party* leading the struggle for *socialist revolution* to bring down the capitalist system that breeds them all. ■

⁹ “Memphis Unit Driven by Fists and Violence,” *New York Times*, 5 February.

Rail Workers: Fight for Workers Control of Safety Norfolk Southern Derailment in Ohio: A Capitalist Disaster

On February 3, Norfolk Southern train 32N derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, near the Pennsylvania border, sending 38 cars, including eleven cars carrying a million pounds of hazardous chemicals, off the tracks. An initial huge fire caused by the crash burned for several days, and 100,000 gallons of hazardous material was dumped. Toxins were released into the air, water and soil. Then, three days later, fearing a massive explosion, Norfolk Southern initiated a “controlled” burning of vinyl chloride from five more cars. This released a huge black mushroom cloud of phosgene, a highly toxic gas used as a weapon in World War I, and hydrogen chloride. Residents of the town of 4,800 residents were given a one-hour notice to “leave immediately or face the possibility of death” (*AP*, 6 February).

Only two days later, on February 8, the Ohio and Pennsylvania governors declared it “safe” for residents to return to their homes. While government testing has claimed low levels of toxins in the air and soil, if not the water, in March a majority of residents surveyed by CDC inspectors reported they had had symptoms of headaches, nausea, coughing, and irritation or burning of the skin. The CDC inspectors themselves fell ill. Vinyl chloride is known to cause liver cancer and other serious diseases, which may develop in coming years.

This was a predictable *capitalist* disaster which had long been warned of by railroad workers unions. Train 32N was 151 cars and 1.76 miles long, weighing 36 million pounds. In their search for ever-greater profits, the seven Class 1 railroad freight companies have been making trains longer and heavier and drastically slashing manpower. The number of operating personnel has been cut by some 30% in the past six years alone, under a system known as Precision-Scheduled Railroading (PSR). In the past, before PSR, trains typically had 80-90 cars and five workers on board. Now, two workers oversee 150 or more cars, while these trains routinely carry hazardous material though populated areas. And the railroad bosses have been pushing for one-man operation!

According to the preliminary report on the derailment by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), issued on February 23, the East Palestine train derailment was initiated by an overheated wheel bearing, detected by a hot-bearing detector (HBD), which were posted about every 10-20 miles beside the tracks. Twenty miles previously, the detector had indicated that the bearing had increased to 103 degrees above ambient temperature, but Norfolk Southern had not set that as triggering a warning to the crew. By the time the train arrived at the East Palestine HBD, 20 miles later, the wheel area was on fire, 253 degrees above ambient temperature, triggering an alarm to the crew to slow and stop the train. As the crew applied the brakes, an automatic emergency brake kicked in, causing the massive train to derail.

U.S. trains use a braking system developed in **1868** that uses air hoses to ap-



Overturned cars with toxic waste in East Palestine, Ohio. In relentless drive for profits, dictated by Wall Street, rail companies endanger workers, communities.

ply brakes from the front cars to the back, so the front cars slow while the rear cars continue at the same speed, which with heavy loads in back can cause the train to jackknife, as it did in East Palestine. The safest modern brakes use Electronically Controlled Pneumatic Braking (ECB) that employs electronic signals to slow all the cars at the same time, reducing the chance of a pileup and stopping the train faster. On train 32N much of the weight was at the rear of the train, contrary to safe practices. In the interest of “saving time” (i.e., money) the company did not rearrange the cars for safer operation.

Following the 2013 train derailment in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, which killed 47 people and destroyed most of a town with a massive explosion and fire,¹ the Democratic administration of Barack Obama proposed mandating ECB brakes on freight trains carrying hazardous materials. But after lobbying from the railroad companies, including Norfolk Southern, the administration caved and required ECB only on certain “high hazard flammable trains,” i.e., those with flammable fluids, *not* trains carrying toxic chemicals. In 2017, the Republican administration of Donald Trump repealed even that mandate and did other bidding for the railroad companies.

Seeking to squeeze electoral mileage out of the train derailment, Trump travelled to East Palestine, grotesquely portraying himself as a foe of Norfolk Southern, when in reality his administration’s cozying up to the rail companies was a major contributing factor to the more than 44,000 train accidents and incidents between 2017 and 2020, causing almost 31,000 injuries and 3,225 deaths.² Meanwhile, his supporters put forward a racist conspiracy theory that the Democratic Biden administration and Department of Transportation (DOT) secretary Pete Buttigieg had ignored the people of East Palestine because they are poor and white.

¹ See “Pipelines, Oil Trains and Capitalism,” in *The Internationalist* No. 46, January-February 2017.

² Erick Borgeño Salas, “Rail Accidents and Incidents in the U.S., 2013-2021,” *Statista*, 30 May 2022.

In fact, Buttigieg did not say a word about East Palestine for ten days, mainly because the DOT is loath to criticize the railroad bosses that it is tight with. And not only as industrial giants. Warren Buffet (owner of Burlington Northern – Santa Fe) is a Democrat as are a number of the CEOs of hedge funds and foundations that are major investors in the railroads, including Blackrock, JPMorgan and Lazard (all major stockholders of Norfolk Southern), the Gates Foundation (major investor in Kansas City Southern) and others. Biden’s Department of Transportation is no less a servant of the rail bosses than was that of Obama and Trump.

The deployment and maintenance of Hot-Bearing Detectors is not regulated by the government either, but is left to the discretion of the companies. Had the HBDs been placed at closer intervals, or set to trigger differently, train 32N could have been stopped sooner, before the axle failed and caught on fire. Again, Norfolk Southern and the other railroad carriers successfully lobbied to stop such regulation.

The shrinking of the workforce has meant dangerous cutbacks in maintenance and inspection of the trains and the railroads. For example, an inspector for a 150-car train is now allotted barely a minute per car. At Norfolk Southern, an inspector may have to inspect a thousand cars in a single day, and management pressures them not to report defects. Instead of investing in installing ECB braking systems and other safety measures, the railroad carriers have spent about \$20 billion every year on stock buybacks and shareholder dividends.

The East Palestine crash was not at all unusual. There are about 1,000 derailments in the United States every year. As reported by *USA Today* (9 February), hazardous material has been released in 172 train derailments in the last decade. On February 16, a Norfolk Southern train carrying hazardous material derailed outside of Detroit; another derailment on March 4 caused a shelter-in-place order in Springfield, Ohio. In the wake of the East Palestine derailment, many are calling for more regula-

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Biden, DSA's AOC and "Squad" Vote to Ban Rail Strike Democratic Party Strikebreakers Shackle Railroad Workers

Rip Up the Railway Labor Act with a Powerful Rail / Truck / Port Strike! Break with the Bosses' Parties and Politicians – Build a Workers Party!

DECEMBER 2022 – At the beginning of December, some 115,000 railroad workers were poised to walk off the job, tying up 40% of all U.S. freight, at the height of the holiday shopping season. A majority had voted against a Tentative Agreement (TA) that outrageously did not include even one paid sick day. A major labor battle was posed. Instead, Democrat Joe Biden, who proclaimed himself the “most pro-union president you’ve ever seen,” signed legislation passed by Democrats in both houses of Congress, imposing a presidentially dictated contract and banning a strike. This blatant *strikebreaking* sums up countless reasons why the capitalist Democratic Party is a noose around the neck of labor. This underlines why *workers urgently need to break with all the bosses’ parties* and *build a class-struggle workers party* to lead the battles of all the oppressed.



Freight train departing from switching yard in Galesburg, Illinois, June 2021. In the name of “economic stability,” Democratic president Biden and Democrat-controlled Congress imposed contract with no paid sick leave after a majority of railroad workers voted against it. Capitalist Democrats are no “friends of labor.”

A Showdown Between Labor and Capital Posed

Unionized rail workers in the United States had been working for three years without a contract. Even before that, over the last six years, the freight rail companies slashed their workforce by nearly 45,000 workers – almost 30% of the total. There were 20,000 laid off in 2019 alone. This job-destroying operation is the product of the Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) system, the gospel of today’s railroad owners. Cutting down on idle time for freight cars, it has led to longer trains (often two miles long or more) with two-person crews (formerly five) working killer schedules. It also means fewer inspections, deteriorating track and more accidents affecting workers and passengers, while shippers complain of deteriorating service. Providing time-off benefits contradicts railroads’ whole business strategy. So the bosses flat-out refuse.

PSR sacrifices safety, service and railroaders’ working lives and livelihoods to maximize profits. The seven Class I railroads (BNSF, Canadian National Railway, Canadian Pacific, CSX, Kansas City Southern, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific) are awash in money. The business news site *Bloomberg* (3 August 2022) reported: “Adjusted operating [profit] margins for the five largest U.S. railroads were 41% last year, compared with 29% 10 years ago and 15% less than a couple of decades ago.” Meanwhile, payouts to shareholders have skyrocketed. A *New Yorker*¹ article reports that “Between 2011 and 2021, the big railroads spent a hundred and ninety-one billion dollars on dividends and stock buybacks, which was far more than the hundred and thirty-eight billion dollars they spent on capital investments in the industry’s infrastructure.”

Like the original railroad barons, Jay

Gould, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Leland Stanford, et al, today’s lords of the rails are cutthroats. Warren Buffett, owner of the BNSF line, sometimes puts on populist airs, like when he said back in the 1980s, “There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.” They still are. Increasingly, Wall Street financial operators are milking the railroads as cash cows.² Like the deregulation of the airlines by the Democratic Carter administration, the *Staggers Rail Act of 1980* (named for Democratic

² “BNSF, for example, is 46 percent owned by Wall Street investment funds. At CSX, the figure is 35 percent; at Union Pacific, 34 percent; at Kansas City Southern, 33 percent; and at Norfolk Southern, 32 percent, according to Bloomberg News,” from “Who owns the railroads,” SMART, 21 June 2009.

congressman Harley Staggers) let railroads shut down unprofitable lines and determine freight rates (previously set by the Interstate Commerce Commission). So while in 1976 there were 63 Class I railroads, now there are seven, controlling over 80% of the market.³

Railroaders were deemed “essential workers” and toiled through the COVID-19 pandemic without a break. With reduced numbers, their workload increased sharply in 2021-22 as huge backlogs developed in the just-in-time supply chain. In addition to layoffs, many rail workers resigned before retirement as their working conditions grew worse and worse. Glass Door, the job evalu-

³ That will be reduced to six if the proposed merger of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern goes through.



President Joe Biden with negotiators who brokered the rail labor “agreement” with no paid sick days, September 15. Rail workers voted it down, Biden and Congress imposed it.

ation web site, rated Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern the two absolute worst U.S. companies to work for, and a third railroad (CSX) as No. 5. By this past summer the push for better contracts was building up a head of steam among rail workers. When rail unions rejected binding arbitration on June 16, a 30-day “cooling-off” period began, during which strikes are prohibited under the 1926 Railway Labor Act (RLA).

Then on July 15, President Biden appointed a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB), which began a second “cooling-off” period, this time for 60 days, under the elaborate provisions of the RLA. Ever since the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 (which sparked a general strike in St. Louis and week-long union control of East St Louis) was broken by company goon squads, state militias and U.S. troops, railroad labor has been tightly regulated by federal law. After World War I, the Railway Labor Board slashed workers wages by 12% and outlawed a 1922 rail strike. As the unions refused to deal with that Board, the RLA was passed to impose a regime of supposedly “neutral” arbitration and, ultimately, presidential control. By mid-September 2022, the rail union chiefs were plenty “cooled off” while many in the ranks were hot under the collar.

On September 15, Biden proclaimed with much fanfare that an agreement had been reached, one day before the strike ban expired. The new “agreement” between the Association of American Railroads and leaders of the 12 rail unions was brokered by Biden’s labor secretary Marty Walsh, the former mayor of Boston and one-time skilled trades construction union leader. It included a 24% wage increase over five years starting in 2020 (when the last contract expired). That averages out to 4.8% per year, while the current rate of inflation is 7.7% – so the “pay hike” amounts to a pay cut! Above all, this contract – now imposed by Biden and the Democratic-led Congress – provides for *one* additional paid “personal day” off and *no paid sick leave*. (Members of Congress have unlimited paid sick leave.)

Within days, the members of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWED) and the Brotherhood of Railway Signalmen (BRS) voted “no,” as did the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers (IBB) in October. Although the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET, which along with the BMWED is part of the Teamsters), with 24,000 members, ratified the deal based on the “recommendations” of the PEB, the White House got really nervous when on November 21 the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART-TD), the largest rail union, representing 28,000 conductors, brakemen, yardmen and others, gave the thumbs down to Biden’s shotgun deal. If even one of the

¹ “The Averted National Rail Strike Is a Parable of Contemporary American Capitalism,” *New Yorker*, 6 December.

unions picketed rail yards, the other rail unions pledged to honor the pickets.

The stage was set for an epic showdown between labor and capital, between the workers and the bosses. Once again, the bosses won – thanks to the actions of the capitalist Democratic Party, which is backed by the leadership of almost all sectors of the railroad unions. As bargaining went nowhere, the railroads turned to the politicians. With the unions hamstrung by the Railway Labor Act – which since 1936, thanks to Democratic president Franklin D. Roosevelt, also includes airline workers – once the Democrat-controlled Congress acted to make a strike illegal, that was it. Game over. Or is it? That assumes everyone plays by the bosses’ rules, which means that workers are sure to lose. But it doesn’t have to be that way. As the Internationalist Group has underlined time and again, *labor’s gotta play hardball to win.*

Democrats, Including the DSA “Squad”: Strikebreakers and War-Makers

On Monday, November 28, Joe Biden called on Congress to act. Two days later, on November 30, after piously lamenting the rail bosses’ “obscene profits [made] on the backs of workers,” Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi declared, “Let me be clear: a nationwide rail shutdown would be catastrophic.” That night, the House voted overwhelmingly to deny rail workers the right to strike, while 136 Republicans, for their own reactionary reasons, voted against bill. Among those voting for the strike-ban bill (Joint Resolution 100) imposing a rotten contract on rail workers – *wielding the bosses’ anti-labor law to suppress the workers’ right to strike* – were “progressive” Democratic Congress members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Cori Bush and Jamaal Bowman, members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).⁴ The DSA Democrats and their fellow members of “The Squad” are in fact *capitalist politicians*, and now certified strikebreakers ... as well as *imperialist war-makers*, having voted for Biden’s \$40 billion arms and economic support (and subsequent aid packages) to arm and finance Ukraine spearheading the NATO-provoked war with Russia.

In a “CYA” (cover your ass) piece of parliamentary theatrics, the “progressives” got Pelosi to go for a second bill, calling for seven days of paid sick leave, which was also approved by the House. This was a completely cynical ploy, since Pelosi, AOC and the rest – while doing the dirty work of backing Biden in fastening the RLA’s chains on the workers to “illegalize” their very right to strike – knew that this “seven-day” bill would never make it through the Senate. So on December 1, the Senate passed the strikebreaking bill and, sure enough, there were no sick days. On December 2, Biden signed it into law, a week before the strike deadline. Who says Washington can’t get anything done? Strikebreaking is bipartisan. When bottom-line class interests are at stake, the legislative and executive branches of government and the feuding capitalist parties can move with lightning speed.

The imposition by a Democratic-led Congress and a Democratic president of a strikebreaking contract which had been voted down by the unions’ membership is proof positive that the Democrats are no “friends of labor,” as they sometimes claim to be. This is already reverberating in the unions, as

⁴ Rashida Tlaib was the only one of this crew who voted against H.J.R. 100.



Strikebreakers: DSA Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of “The Squad” and right-wing Republican Marco Rubio as strike ban law was railroaded through Congress. Fox Business News headlined: “AOC, Rubio Find Common Ground.”

even the bourgeois mainstream media have noticed. *The New York Times* (27 December) headlined, “‘Most Pro-Union President’ Runs Into Doubts in Labor Ranks.” Some commentators noted that, “Having played the Biden card, union leaders were left with nothing” (*The Intercept*, 11 December). An Open Letter to President Biden and Labor Secretary Walsh by over 500 historians makes many of the same points. But instead of calling to *break from the Democrats*, they urged the Dems to ensure a contract with paid sick days for rail workers.

How did that work out for workers?

Many in the rail union said they were “disappointed” in Biden, having hoped he would “do the right thing” by the workers. Yet in announcing the strikebreaking law, Biden said it “was the right thing to do” to “keep the economy on a stable footing,” fight inflation, etc. The Democratic president “did the right thing” *for the interests of his class* – the boss class. It goes beyond Biden’s posturing and the Democrats’ grandstanding – the fact is that this *capitalist party is a class enemy* of workers. Moreover, the state they are an integral part of is no neutral arbiter but the armed fist of capital. This was laid out by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), which stated that “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie,” that is, the capitalist ruling class.

As for the 500+ historians who called on the rulers of this state to “use the full force of their formal and informal powers” to support railroad workers, V.I. Lenin could have been speaking to them when he wrote, in *The State and Revolution* (1917), of “the petty-bourgeois and philistine pro-

fessors and publicists” who “correct” Marx by trying “to make it appear that the state is an organ for the reconciliation of classes.” On the contrary, Lenin insisted: “According to Marx, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of ‘order,’ which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes.” Any “moderating” of the class conflict is for the purpose of “depriving the oppressed classes of definite means and methods of struggle to overthrow the oppressors.”

Union Bureaucracy: Labor Lieutenants of Capital

This brings us to the role of the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy ... and the reformist opposition. In September, the leaders of all 12 rail unions approved the government-brokered contract that the rank and file is now saddled with. When four unions and the majority of rail workers rejected the pact, it should have been the signal for immediate, although long overdue, preparation for a strike. Instead, SMART-TD president Jeremy Ferguson stated “This can all be settled through negotiations and without a strike. A settlement would be in the best interests of the workers, the railroads, shippers and the American people.”⁵ In other words, he was pleading with the administration to take him off the hook. In toeing the line laid down by the rail barons and banning a strike, Biden, Walsh and Congressional Democrats also gave pro-capitalist labor “leaders” like Ferguson his wish.

⁵ “Split decision: Unions for engineers and conductors take different routes in freight rail contract ratification vote,” SMART, 21 November.



Union leaders Dennis Pierce of the BLET (left) and Jeremy Ferguson of SMART-TD in October video pushing the no-sick-pay contract negotiated under Biden’s Presidential Emergency Board. Days after the Democrats imposed the contract, the BLET membership ousted Pierce in favor of a candidate who campaigned against it.

Even after Biden had signed the no-strike, no-sick-leave law, on December 9, when no trains should have been moving, the AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department stated: “The fight to guarantee paid sick leave for rail workers is not over and we will not back down until we win. We are committed to aggressively pursuing further action by both parties in Congress and the President, including the strategic use of legislation and Administration action....”⁶ Oh, great: more hat-in-hand appeals to the bosses’ politicians who denied rail workers their most basic right – the right to withhold their labor! Instead of preparing the ranks for a fight, these *misleaders* of labor are still seeking to pressure the bosses’ government. This is the model of “business unionism,” in which labor leaders see their role as providing a stable and disciplined workforce for the bosses to exploit.

It is important to stress that the union bureaucracy is not just a bunch of sellouts who are pushovers for the bosses, personally corrupt – or not – but is a petty-bourgeois social layer seeking to balance between the union ranks and the bosses. It is this layer that the U.S. socialist Daniel De Leon referred to in 1900 as “capital’s labor lieutenants.” Although they sit atop the unions, which are workers organizations that they are sometimes obliged to defend (if only to protect their own privileged positions), their fundamental loyalties are to the capitalist system. So when Ronald Reagan targeted the PATCO air controllers union in the early 1980s, the rest of the labor bureaucracy stood by and in many cases even helped break their strike. Ever since, one union gain after another has been destroyed and many unions broken, with hardly any resistance from the union tops.

Moreover, this pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy was put in power by the capitalist rulers, with the Democrats in the forefront, in the “red purge” that ousted communist and socialist union leaders at the onset of the post-WWII anti-Soviet Cold War. This was part of a broader pattern. In his unfinished essay “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay” (1940), Leon Trotsky, who together with Lenin led the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, wrote that, “There is one common feature in the development, or more correctly the degeneration, of modern trade union organizations in the entire world: it is their drawing closely to and growing together with the state power.” Trotsky’s answer was not to write off the unions but to fight for a revolutionary program within them:

“The primary slogan for this struggle is: *complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist state....* The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.”

Unless oppositionists in the unions adopt a class-struggle program based on mobilizing the power of workers and the oppressed in revolutionary struggle against capitalism, they will face the prospect of ending up like the sellout leaders they are seeking to replace. The decaying capitalist system, which is systematically destroying past gains, has no room for enduring

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⁶ “AFL-CIO TTD: Rail labor will not rest until freight rail industry is fixed and rail workers are treated fairly,” SMART, 9 December.

WikiLeaks Founder Faces Life in Prison for Exposing U.S. Imperialist Crimes

U.S. Vendetta Against Julian Assange – Free Courageous Journalist Now, No Extradition!

U.S. Hands Off Edward Snowden!

By T.X. Cain

“The political freedoms, the right of assembly and association, and the freedom of the press – those are our weapons. Are we to sit back and abstain while somebody tries to rob us of them?”

–K.H. Marx, “Apropos of Working-Class Political Action” (1871)

“Imperialism, with its dark plans of conquest and its robber alliances and deals, developed the system of secret diplomacy to the highest level. The struggle against imperialism, which is exhausting and destroying the peoples of Europe, is at the same time a struggle against capitalist diplomacy, which has enough cause to fear the light of day.”

–L.D. Trotsky, “On the Publication of the Secret Treaties” (1917)

It has been over four years – almost 1,500 days – since Julian Assange was snatched by London police from the Ecuadorian embassy on 11 April 2019 and sent to the notorious Belmarsh high security prison. Before that, ever since 2012, the founder of the Internet whistleblower site WikiLeaks was confined to the embassy where he had sought refuge and received asylum from a frame-up “investigation” by Sweden that threatened to deliver him to the clutches of U.S. imperialism. In more than a decade of forced confinement, now in solitary in a tiny prison cell, Assange’s health has deteriorated alarmingly. And since last June 17, this valiant exposé of imperialist crimes is under an extradition order to the United States, where he faces 175 years in prison under the infamous Espionage Act, for exposing the heinous crimes of U.S. imperialism.

The tightly coordinated imperialist persecution of Julian Assange, led by the United States government, has placed him in mortal peril. We demand that all charges be dropped against Assange, that he immediately be set free to be with his wife and

children, that the extradition order be nullified and any restrictions on or prosecution of WikiLeaks lifted. To the working and oppressed people of the world, Assange, along with Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, are heroes to be honored for courageously lifting the cover of secrecy and revealing the bloody crimes of the imperialist would-be masters of the world. His persecutors – including U.S. presidents Obama, Trump and Biden; British prime ministers David Cameron, Boris Johnson, Rishi Sunak and Labour wannabe Keir Starmer; and various Swedish prosecutors and politicians – can all go to hell!

For over a decade, U.S. imperialism, its allies and client states have conspired to isolate, defame, humiliate and permanently silence Assange through endless imprisonment, or otherwise. His crime? Exposing to the public the US government’s war crimes,¹ torture and diplomatic machinations. The almost 400,000 classified documents released by WikiLeaks on the U.S. war on Iraq included the “Collateral Murder”² video documenting the wanton murder by U.S. forces of two Iraqi Reuters journalists, Namir Noor-Eldeen and Saeed Chmagh.³ Thanks

¹ BBC, “WikiLeaks: Iraq war logs ‘reveal truth about conflict’” (23 October 2010).

² See “Collateral Murder,” WikiLeaks, 5 April 2010.

³ See P. Daly, “‘All lies’: how the US military covered up gunning down two journalists in



On 26 July 2010, Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, released 90,000 documents detailing U.S. war crimes in Afghanistan at a London press conference (above). While U.S. imperialism was smarting over the revelations, on September 2 Assange was accused of (but never charged with) “rape” in a frame-up engineered by the Swedish police and the Cold War Social Democrats.

to rulings by the obsequious British courts, the Democratic administration of Joe Biden in Washington may ensnare the WikiLeaks leader on an indictment issued by the Republican administration of Donald Trump. The world working class must defend Julian Assange and his dedicated journalistic work which exposed the innards of the U.S. imperialist beast to the world.

In June 2022, the government of the United Kingdom approved Assange’s extradition to the United States on charges under the 1917 Espionage Act.⁴ The WikiLeaks founder had lost a prior U.S. appeal before the UK High Court on the grounds of mental health that had initially blocked his extradition in January 2021. The U.S. argument, consisting of spurious diplomatic “assurances” of humane treatment that by its own admission could be broken at will, was accepted by the be-

wigged judges as an article of faith. Prior to the indictment of Assange, the Act had never been used against a journalist. The law, which bans “possession” of any “information relating to the national defense” and its transmission “to any person not entitled to receive it,” if applied to journalists, would effectively outlaw any serious reporting on “national security.” No more publication of Pentagon Papers, revelations about My Lai, Abu Ghraib, etc.

On 30 June 2022, Assange’s lawyers presented two appeals, one reiterating the mental health grounds and the second, main appeal, arguing that the decision violated the UK-U.S. extradition treaty barring extradition for a political offense, challenging the U.S. charge of “conspiracy to commit computer intrusion” consisting of “agreeing” to aid in cracking a password, and noting that the indictment misrepresented facts of the case and included allegations based on “evidence” since admitted to be fabricated.⁵ Still confined in Her (now His) Majesty’s Prison (HMP) Belmarsh, dubbed Britain’s Guantánamo, not convicted or even tried for any crime, serving no sentence, under conditions of solitary confinement, Assange has remained determined to resist U.S./UK “justice” to the bitter end.⁶ In October 2021 he had a stroke, and his wife, Stella Assange, recently told BBC that “his physical condition is deteriorating by the day.”⁷

As Washington calls the shots in the vendetta against Julian Assange, both under Democrats Biden and Obama and under Republican Trump, it has enlisted its imperialist allies and semi-colonial satraps. After the Ecuadorian government had granted asylum to

⁵ See T. Haddad, “Assange Defence Files Appeals on 16 Grounds; Granted Time Extension in Case”; K. Gosztola, “Prosecutors’ Password-Cracking Theory Against Assange Unravels At Extradition Trial,” ShadowProof, 26 September 2020; and B. Alexandersson and G.H. Jónsson, “Key witness in Assange case admits to lies in indictment,” Heimildin, 26 June 2021.

⁶ Nils Melzer, the United National Special Rapporteur on Torture, says in his book on the case (discussed below) that during a conversation with Assange “he had made it absolutely clear that he would not be extradited to the United States alive.” After the British government approved his extradition to the U.S., prison authorities placed Assange on suicide watch. With their relentless persecution, U.S. authorities and their British accomplices have been doing everything to push their nemesis to take his life, which would in fact be murder by the state.

⁷ Alan Jones, “Treatment of Julian Assange ‘inhuman and cruel’, wife says,” The Independent, 26 April.



On 3 January 2021, the Internationalist Group and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth joined in a demonstration in New York City against the threatened extradition of Julian Assange.

the WikiLeaks founder for seven years, that changed with the election of right-winger Lenin Moreno as president: upon receiving a \$4.2 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund in March 2019, the next month Ecuador handed over Assange to UK police, who arrested him for “bail-jumping.” The French parliament voted down a resolution calling to grant asylum to Assange, and the European Union parliament scrubbed a mention of his plight from a report on rights. And while Assange’s lawyers appealed in December to the European Court of Human Rights, there can of course be no confidence in that outfit, which has regularly dismissed complaints about “special administrative measures” in U.S. supermax prisons.

A pusillanimous role has been played by the Labor Party government of Australia, Assange’s home country, telling Parliament that it is not party to the case, that it “respects” the U.S. legal system and is pursuing “quiet diplomacy.” Last year, when Assange’s father, John Shipton, went to Parliament, he was told that the book supporting his son by United Nations Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer that he brought to give to MPs was deemed “protest material,” and he and Julian’s brother Gabriel were banned from entering the building.⁸ More recently, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese – in London for the coronation of King Charles III, Australia’s head of state – said of Assange in an Australian Broadcasting Corp. interview that “nothing is to be served by his ongoing incarceration.” Since their election a year ago the talking point on Assange for Albanese and his foreign secretary Penny Wong has been “enough is enough.” As to doing anything about it, not a whisper.

In early May, a cross-party delegation of parliamentarians met with U.S. Ambassador Caroline Kennedy to discuss the issue and presented a petition with thousands of signatures demanding Assange’s freedom. Whether this will have any effect is another matter. In any case, Albanese vows to enforce governmental secrecy in the name of “national security,” deepening Australia’s AUKUS military alliance and “Five Eyes” intelligence-sharing arrangement with Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, along with its role as regional sheriff over the Pacific Islands, and as a staging area for the war drive against China.

Many Assange supporters have looked to journalists unions and organizations for their backing. Britain’s National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and Australia’s Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) have issued statements in favor of Assange, although their calls for union support have not gone very far. Both the NUJ and MEAA are members of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), as is Assange. The IFJ launched a media campaign in support of Assange, noting that “his extradition will have a chilling effect, with *all* journalists and media workers at risk.” But the IFJ, as well, has done little beyond calling on its members to “urge governments to actively work to secure Assange’s release.” And then there are the openly pro-imperialist outfits such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) who refuse to even recognize Assange as a journalist on their index, while the U.S. branch of PEN International has reproduced the vile smear campaign against Assange.

⁸ “Assange family barred from taking book about WikiLeaks founder into Australia’s parliament,” *Guardian*, 5 August 2022.

The imperialist newspapers that eagerly published reams of material from the WikiLeaks release of documents on the (by then unpopular) Afghanistan and Iraq wars, soon soured on Assange. When the bogus Swedish “rape” accusations came out right after the July 2010 release of Afghan War Logs, and particularly as the liberal Democratic Obama administration stepped up pressure, the “free but responsible press” began to back off. The *New York Times* – which notoriously peddled U.S. lies leading to its 2003 invasion of Iraq – joined in the character assassination of Assange and hardly defended him against threats of prosecution for publishing government secrets.⁹ Then, after WikiLeaks published emails of the Democratic National Committee in 2016 showing how it sabotaged Bernie Sanders’ campaign, and in 2017 released the trove of documents known as Vault 7 detailing U.S. malware tools and ability to

⁹ See the lengthy piece by then-editor Bill Keller, “Dealing with Assange and the WikiLeaks Secrets,” *New York Times Magazine*, 26 January 2011. The article, published with an illustration of Assange’s face distorted, declared that Keller regarded the WikiLeaks founder “as a source, not as a partner,” describing him as “arrogant, thin-skinned, conspiratorial,” with “glib antipathy toward the United States.” Keller quoted a description of Assange by *Times* reporter Erich Schmitt as looking “like a bag lady walking in off the street,” with “filthy white socks that collapsed around his ankles,” plus remarks about his personal hygiene. As to the threat of prosecution, all the *Times* editor would say was that it was “chilling to contemplate the possible government prosecution of WikiLeaks for making secrets public” – mainly because that would affect the respectable press.



Andy Rain / European Pressphoto Agency

Julian Assange on the balcony of the Ecuadorean embassy in London, May 2017, where he spent seven years in involuntary confinement to avoid arrest on bogus Swedish inquiry. Even after that “investigation” was dropped, he was still subject to British charge of “bail-jumping” for which he was arrested in 2019.

compromise the operating systems of most smart phones, the “mainstream media” has portrayed Assange as a virtual Russian bot.

The liberal *Guardian* especially went on a tear against Assange for a supposed “long-standing relationship with RT” (the Russian TV broadcaster) and “Assange’s ties to the Kremlin.”¹⁰ Media attention to his case oscil-

¹⁰ The *Guardian* published smear jobs on Assange’s alleged “Russian ties” on 26 March, 18 May, 20 June, 21 September and 26 September 2018. For a dissection of this campaign, see “Guilt by Innuendo: the Guardian campaign against Julian Assange that breaks all the rules,” *The Canary*, 20 December 2018.

lated between effective blackout and stories making him look worthy of contempt. But in 2019, when Assange was arrested and the Trump administration unwrapped its indictment, many editors saw that they were threatened as well. Following the 2020 U.S. elections, some hoped the Biden administration would back off, but the new gang of hardline Cold Warriors wouldn’t have it. So late last year, a joint letter was issued by the editors and publishers of the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Le Monde* in France, *El País* in Spain and *Der Spiegel* in Germany – the five papers that published the original WikiLeaks

The U.S. Espionage Act: All-Purpose Tool for Political Repression

The contours of what became the Espionage Act of 1917 were originally introduced two years earlier by Democratic president Woodrow Wilson to protect the “national defense” and crush what he called “the poison of disloyalty,” namely, opposition to U.S. entry in the imperialist First World War. The legislation was ostensibly to root out spies, but under its vague wording even passing information to journalists – or even reading about it in a newspaper – could be punishable. This was no accident. In the face of public consternation, Wilson brazenly asserted that his “authority to exercise censorship over the press ... is absolutely necessary to the public safety.”¹ Even without an explicit censorship clause, the Act is a permanent “state of exception” to override the First Amendment, and outlaw legal activities in the name of “national security.”

The Espionage Act was immediately put to use in the Red Scare during and after WWI.² It was used to raid labor organizations and jail trade-unionists, notably “Big Bill” Haywood and 100 other members of the Industrial Workers of the World. After being convicted under the act in 1918, Haywood posted bail and fled to the Soviet Union. It was used to jail Eugene V. Debs, who was convicted under the sedition provision

² See “Selling Imperialist War from 1898 to ... WWIII? ‘You Furnish the Pictures and I’ll Furnish the War,’” *Revolution* No. 19, September 2022.

of the Espionage Act for giving a speech opposing U.S. entry into the war. From prison, Debs ran as the Socialist candidate for president in 1920, receiving almost a million votes. The act was the main legal basis for the post-WWI Palmer Raids under which 250 leftists were arrested and deported to Soviet Russia, including anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. After the Supreme Court struck down some of the provisions added in the Sedition Act of 1918, it was seldom used for several decades.

Following World War II, in the anti-Soviet Cold War the Espionage Act was used in 1950 to convict and execute the heroic Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, accused of being Soviet spies and providing the USSR with secrets that aided in developing the atomic bomb. The Soviet bomb broke the U.S. monopoly on nuclear weapons and thus prevented the wholesale slaughter that Pentagon war hawks were planning to unleash against the Soviet bloc. The same year, the McCarran Internal Security Act made the mere possession of classified information a crime. In 1961 that the Act was amended to assert global U.S. legal jurisdiction, when the Senate repealed Section 791 that restricted the Act to “within the jurisdiction of the United States, on the high seas, and within the United States.” That the U.S. asserts such global universality for its laws underscores the reality that imperialist “might makes right.”

In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo were charged under the Espionage

Act for providing the Pentagon Papers, the official U.S. history of the Vietnam War, to the *New York Times*, which published them. A divided Supreme Court turned down the government’s attempt to block publication, and although Ellsberg and Russo were not acquitted, a mistrial was declared due to many irregularities in the government case. Beginning in 2010 under the Democratic administration of Barack Obama, the Espionage Act has been used against a number of whistleblowers who gave information about U.S. military and espionage activities to journalists, notably Chelsea Manning, who provided the material in the Afghanistan and Iraq War Logs to WikiLeaks. Edward Snowden, the former CIA computer consultant and later contractor for the National Security Agency (NSA) who revealed the vast global surveillance apparatus of the NSA and other U.S. intelligence agencies, has also been charged with violation of the Espionage Act.

While this all-purpose tool for political repression had been used against leakers, before it was used to indict Julian Assange in 2019 (and the charges expanded in 2020) it had not been used against journalists who published the information. That indictment has now opened the door to a wholesale attack on press freedom. ■

stories – saying “The U.S. government should end its prosecution of Julian Assange for publishing secrets.”¹¹

But just because pillars of the imperialist establishment press have published an open letter is no indication that the vengeful spymasters and war hawks in Washington will drop their vendetta against the man responsible for the biggest involuntary release of imperialist secrets in history. Or at least since 1918, when Leon Trotsky, as Soviet commissar for foreign affairs after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, published the World War I secret treaties carving up the world between the “democratic” Allied powers. After the 9/11 files (570,000 messages from 11 September 2001) were released in 2009, then came WikiLeaks’ Afghanistan and Iraq war files (90,000 and 400,000 documents) in 2010, State Department cables (250,000 documents) in 2010-11, and DNC emails (22,000) in 2016. These revelations are a service to humanity, shining a glaring light on U.S. war crimes as well as the coup-mongering, economic blackmail and everyday skullduggery of spy agencies, diplomacy and bourgeois politics in the U.S.-dominated world order.

While the U.S. government continues its stonewalling, there have been several recent events calling for Assange’s freedom. On January 20, a session of the Belmarsh Tribunal¹² at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., co-chaired by Amy Goodman of Democracy Now, included figures such as Katrina van den Heuvel, Jeremy Corbyn, Noam Chomsky and Daniel Ellsberg, whose release of the Pentagon Papers on the Vietnam War inspired Assange to found WikiLeaks.¹³ On May 3, “World Press Freedom Day,” there were actions including disrupting a *Washington Post* chat with U.S. secretary of state Antony Blinken (co-hosted by RSF!) by holding up signs calling to free Assange, and in the San Francisco Bay Area a protest calling for the NPR (National Public Radio) and PBS (Public Broadcasting System) networks to support freedom for Assange and Mumia Abu-Jamal. Appeals by left-liberal luminaries may get attention, but that and calls on U.S. government-, corporate- and foundation-funded entities won’t win freedom for Assange.

Julian Assange and WikiLeaks, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning and others are persecuted because they courageously exposed some among the innumerable crimes by imperialism. In revenge, the imperialists are out to get them. In today’s climate of war hysteria, with the media acting as PR flacks for the U.S./NATO imperialists and their Ukraine client regime, shamelessly “reporting” whatever war propaganda and disinformation they are fed by the State Department or the media operation of the fascist-infested regime in Kiev, appeals to liberals will likely go nowhere. More in tune with the times is the role the media played when a National Guard airman uploaded hundreds of U.S. military and CIA documents with

¹¹ “An Open Letter from Editors and Publishers: Publishing Is Not a Crime,” *New York Times*, 28 November 2022.
¹² The Belmarsh Tribunal, named after the prison where Assange is incarcerated, was launched in 2020 by the Progressive International, a lash-up of the bourgeois “left” sponsored by the (Bernie) Sanders Institute in Vermont and Yannis Varoufakis, the former finance minister of Greece under the SYRIZA government.
¹³ See “What’s Assange Charged With? Telling the Truth!” *CovertAction Magazine*, 25 January for a video of the event.



Belmarsh high-security prison, known as “Britain’s Guantánamo,” where Assange has been incarcerated for the last four years as the British government tries to hand him over to U.S.

immediately actionable intelligence to an online war game chat group on the Internet. Rather than digging into what the material showed about the U.S./NATO proxy war against Russia, the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* acted as junior G-men in trying to track down and arrest the leaker (a fascist/racist gamer).

Protest Against the Imperialist System Whose Crimes Assange Exposed

To fight the witch hunt against Assange, Snowden and Manning it is necessary to take on the imperialist system that is victimizing them. That includes making use of whatever limited legal openings there are in the capitalist “justice” system, but above all looking to the forces that have the power and class interest to stop the witch-hunters and warmongers, who are one and the same. It was the civil rights movement for black rights and protest against Washington’s (losing) imperialist war on Vietnam that broke the stranglehold of McCarthyite witch-hunting and ideological regimentation of the early years of the anti-Soviet Cold War. Today, the deepening domestic consequences of the war drive against Russia and China, as imperialist sanctions fuel inflation and looming recession in the West, will increase war weariness. Calling to mobilize the power of the working class against the U.S./NATO war while fighting for freedom for Assange and Mumia points the way to victory against those who seek to keep their bloody crimes hidden behind a firewall of official secrecy.

The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International have fought against the persecution of Julian Assange from the beginning, denouncing the “Sinister Attack on WikiLeaks to Cover Up Imperialist Crimes.” As the IG/LFI wrote at the time:

“It is urgent that all defenders of civil liberties and opponents of imperialist war stand up in defense of Julian Assange, demanding that he be *immediately freed* and that *all charges against him be dropped*, including those that are in the works. It is also necessary to defend his comrades who are at risk for their dedication to shining a light into the dark corners where the capitalist rulers hide their dirty secrets. And we must oppose all efforts by the U.S. and its allies to enact gag laws to enforce police-state controls. We demand: *Hands off*

WikiLeaks!”

–“Free Julian Assange! Drop All Charges!” (9 December 2010) in *The Internationalist* No. 32, January-February 2011

The article noted that the sinister Democrat Diane Feinstein, head of the Senate intelligence committee (who knew all about CIA waterboarding and other tortures), called to prosecute Assange under the 1917 Espionage Act, as Republican Trump later did. It pointed out that Obama’s attorney general, Eric Holder, wanted new laws infringing on free speech, and how “[t]hey yearn for an Official Secrets Act like in Britain, so they could stop publication of anything by slapping a “D Notice” on it.” It dissected the bogus “rape investigation” against Assange and its manipulation by social-democratic politicians complicit in the CIA’s “extraordinary rendition” program.

In early 2021, as the prospect of deportation to the United States loomed, the IG/LFI again called to “Free Julian Assange – No Extradition, U.S. Hands Off Edward Snowden!” (*The Internationalist* No. 62, January-March 2021). The article stated, “The fate of Julian Assange hangs in the balance. The founder and publisher of Wikileaks, which deeply wounded the imperialist beast, is in the clutches of the capitalist ‘justice’ system. Whether he will ever walk free again is unknown.” At the same time, the IG/LFI warned, as it did in 2010, that even if he were freed – as defenders of democratic rights hope and fight for – his life would still be in danger from “the biggest mass murderers in the world, the United States government.” It turns out that assassination of Assange was actually one of the options being considered by U.S. authorities (see below). And in the hands of the crazed war hawks of the Biden administration, which blew up the Nord Stream pipeline and is constantly escalating its provocations against Russia and China, this is no abstract danger.

In the meantime, on the substance of the case, there have been two important developments. One is the publication of an extensive book by Nils Melzer, *The Trial of Julian Assange: A Story of Persecution* (Verso, 2022), that examines in detail the political and legal manipulation of the whole affair and the frame-up accusations against him. From 2016 to 2022, and at the time he visited Assange in Belmarsh Prison in 2019 a few weeks after he was jailed there, Melzer was the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other

Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Melzer recounts that he had initially shelved a request for aid from Assange’s lawyers; his perception distorted by prejudice induced by media headlines, he saw Assange as “a hacker, rapist, spy, and narcissist.” But once he started looking into the case in detail, and after medical examination of Assange, he came to the conclusion, as expressed in official letters to Britain, Ecuador, Sweden and the United States, that:

“[S]tarting from August 2010, Mr. Assange has been, and currently still is, exposed to progressively severe pain and suffering, inflicted through various forms and degrees of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the cumulative effects of which clearly amount to psychological torture.”

Melzer’s book includes a painstaking examination of the rape allegations against Assange and the way that this was manipulated by prosecutors, police, politicians and the press. His account, details how the police invented the rape allegation; how this was immediately leaked to the press at a party of the political elite; how the police inspector and one of the two women involved (Anna Ardin, a feminist activist) were Facebook friends and members of the Social Democratic Labor Party (SAP); how within a day, Stockholm’s chief prosecutor canceled

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Still Boiling...

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following the overthrow of the monarchy in 1918, Kautsky advocated integrating workers councils (soviets) into parliamentary democracy, in order to defang them. But in the recent articles by the RP on the mobilizations against the attack on pension rights, it’s simply about (bourgeois parliamentary) “democracy from below.”

In reality, all the theorizing is just a smokescreen. Four years ago, the RP/FT, when it was still a faction within the NPA, impressionistically declared France in a prerevolutionary crisis⁶ over the Yellow Vest protests. At the time, it put forward the same “radical democratic” program as now, claiming to draw on Trotsky’s June 1934 “Program for Action in France.” As we have explained, while Trotsky raised some democratic demands, this was in the context of his call for workers militias to crush the fascist leagues, for “Down with the Bourgeois ‘Authoritarian State’! For Workers and Peasants Power!” and for a “workers and peasants commune.”⁷ But rather than looking to the Paris Commune of 1871, “the first attempt by a proletarian revolution to smash the bourgeois state machine” (Lenin, *State and Revolution*), the RP/TF calls today to “abrogate the Fifth Republic” (by whom?) and to install a single (bourgeois parliamentary) assembly. Radical? Hardly, and certainly not revolutionary.

Bringing up the rear in the parade of

⁶ Under fire from pro-Mélenchon elements, RP, in another turgid article, has now backed off from its position that Macron’s use of 49.3 opened a “pre-revolutionary moment.” See “Onze nuances de scepticisme et d’électorisme” (Eleven Shades of Skepticism), *RP Dimanche*, 15 April.

⁷ See our article “The Opportunist Left Hitched to the Yellow Vests,” *The Internationalist* No. 56, May-June 2019; and “Trotskyism vs. ‘Constituent Assembly’ Mania” (October 2007), in *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008.



Thousands of dock workers lead protest in Le Havre against anti-worker “reform” of the French pension system, February 16.

pseudo-Trotskyists, *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO) basically echoes the union bureaucracy, calling for more of the same. Along with banners with such generalities as “What the government can do, the working people can undo,” and stickers saying “Workers make society run, it’s up to them to lead it,” LO declares in an editorial by Nathalie Arthaud: “Each additional day of mobilization grows and strengthens our camp. Each strike and every demonstration is a step forward by millions of workers. So, let’s be there again, as many of us as possible, to continue the struggle!” (*Lutte Ouvrière*, 14 April). And what then? Strike action, a general strike? LO’s magazine, *Lutte de Classe* (April 2023) asks if things are heading “Toward a generalization of the strikes?” Its answer: “Nothing indicates so far that we are moving towards this change,” adding that “radicalism isn’t setting trash on fire.”

It’s going to take a lot more than just “being there” to defeat this government at the head of the semi-bonapartist Fifth Republic and backed up by the full force of French capital.

Against the Anti-Democratic Capitalist Fifth Republic, For a Workers Government Based on Workers Councils

The struggle over pensions didn’t start with Macron, and it won’t be settled by more demos, more strikes and more banging pots and pans. The origins of the current pension system go back to 1945 when the post-WWII popular-front government including the Communist Party (PCF) enacted social security measures aimed at heading off the danger of a revolution. For the last 30 years, the French bourgeoisie has been trying to “reform” the system by cutting back workers’ rights. In 1993, Prime Minister Édouard Balladur sought to cut pensions and raise the number of years of employment for eligibility for a full pension. In 1995, Prime Minister Alain Juppé tried to eliminate the “special regimes” of public employees in key industries, but had to withdraw in the face of massive strikes. This was followed by further anti-worker “pension reform” plans in 2003, twice under President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007 and 2010, again touching off huge protests)⁸ and Macron’s first try, in 2020.⁹ *This extended battle is a*

⁸ See our articles, “France: May in October? The Spectre of a New ‘68,” “To Drive Out Sarkozy & Co., Fight for Power to the Workers,” and several on-the-spot reports in *The Internationalist* No. 32, January-February 2011.

⁹ See “French Strikers Challenge Attack on Pensions,” in *The Internationalist* No. 58, Winter 2020.

showdown of labor vs. capital.

And resorting to police-state measures is hardly limited to interior minister Darmanin’s riot cops charging into crowds to savagely beat demonstrators protesting the pension law. Next on Macron’s 100-day pacification plan was the “Darmanin law” on immigration, which foresees mass expulsions of thousands of undocumented (*sans-papiers*) immigrants. On April 29, there were protests in Rennes, Paris, Marseille and elsewhere against the reactionary bill. A foretaste of what the law would mean is the “Opération Wuambushu” being carried out in the “overseas department” of Mayotte (off East Africa), where in the name of “fighting crime,” some 24,000 “irregular” immigrants are being expelled by special units of riot police who days beforehand were beating pension protesters in Rennes. Revolutionary Marxists call for *all French military and police forces to get the hell out of Mayotte, and for full citizenship rights for all immigrants.*

As decaying capitalism systematically destroys past gains of workers’ struggles, ripping up vital social programs and criminalizing immigrants, Macron has the full support of French capital – now sporting the richest man in the world (Bernard Arnault, whose fortune is estimated at \$211 billion) and the richest woman in the world (Françoise Bettencourt-Meyers, \$80.5 billion). Against this it is necessary to mobilize the force of the working class, in an unlimited *general strike, to defeat the attack on workers’ pension rights, to drive Macron out of the Élysée presidential palace and bring down the anti-democratic Fifth Republic.* This can only be done by fighting for a *workers government, based on workers councils* formed in struggle, not on the institutions of the capitalist state. The prospect of such a revolutionary struggle strikes fear in the hearts of the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy. That’s why they can’t win this fight.

A “general strike” for more “democracy,” for a referendum on anti-worker reforms or awaiting a new “popular front” coalition – as the PCF is now calling for – will go nowhere. As the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky wrote of a general strike against the austerity measures of a popular-front “left” government in the late 1930s:

“The general strike is, by its very essence, a revolutionary means of struggle. In a general strike the proletariat assembles itself as a class against its class enemy. The use of the general strike is absolutely incompatible with the politics of the Popular Front, which signifies alliance with the bourgeoisie, that is to say, the submis-

sion of the proletariat to the bourgeoisie. The miserable bureaucrats of the Socialist and Communist parties as well as of the trade unions consider the proletariat as a simple auxiliary instrument in their combinations behind the scenes with the bourgeoisie. They propose that the workers pay for a simple demonstration with sacrifices which cannot have any meaning in the workers’ eyes unless it is a question of a decisive struggle.”

–L.D. Trotsky, “The Decisive Hour in France” (December 1938)

Today, as the U.S., EU and NATO imperialists hurtle toward World War III with their proxy war against Russia over Ukraine, the League for the Fourth International holds that key to winning the all-sided attack on the working class and defending all social sectors under attack is to forge the core of a genuinely communist, internationalist workers party, on the Bolshevik program of Lenin and Trotsky, to lead the fight for socialist revolution. Jupiter-Caligula-Macron can be defeated. We have the power, what’s needed is the revolutionary leadership with the program and determination to use it. ■

French Dockers...

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The Internationalist: We talked some earlier about the perspectives that our comrades put out in a leaflet, expressing no confidence whatsoever in bourgeois “justice” and putting forward the perspective for expansion of the struggle towards an unlimited general strike.

Tétard: In fact, the perspective for this has been there, the idea for an unlimited general strike. One doesn’t start out by just decreeing an unlimited general strike; before declaring an unlimited general strike, it is necessary to have built the strike in the workplaces. Many important sectors have participated with renewable strikes (*grèves reconductibles*).

For example, in our case, at first we struck for 24 hours [January 31], then 48 hours [February 7-8], then three days’ strike [beginning March 14-16] per week. Now on all six workdays in the week, we are striking for four hours. It’s on the basis of struggles like this. There is also the financial side, *le nerf de la guerre* [the crux of the matter]. If it’s not *tous ensemble* (all out together), the struggle will take a long time. As for blocking the economy, it is strikes in the enterprises that make the economy grind

to a halt, and for now things can continue on this basis. Meanwhile, there is little hope that bourgeois justice, as you referred to it, will come down on our side.

During the interview, we spoke of the history of Jules Durand, a trade-unionist framed by the bourgeois “justice” system in the early years of the 20th cen-

ture whose memory is celebrated by dockers to this day. A plaque in the port refers to his case as the “Dreyfus Affair” of the workers movement. (In the period from 1894 to 1906, France was polarized by the frame-up trial and imprisonment of Albert Dreyfus, a military officer targeted by an anti-Semitic witch hunt.) We asked about the connection between the present-day struggles and the battles that established the power of the dockers’ union.

Tétard: Jules Durand was a unionist here in Le Havre, the representative of the coal porters on the docks at the beginning of the last century. He was trying to defend dockers’ jobs at a time when mechanization was on the rise, and this led to a strike [in 1910]. The local bourgeoisie put together a frame-up against him. A foreman got into a fight and was killed, and Jules Durand was falsely blamed for this. On the basis of false testimony, with a very young and inexperienced lawyer, Jules was tried and condemned to death in 1910.

In our history, in our memory as dockers, this gave rise to the first international solidarity struggle that we experienced and that we learned about. There were mobilizations by American longshoremen, and in other countries around the world, in defense of Julian. He was not executed and was subsequently found not guilty in a second trial. But unfortunately, what was done to him caused a lot of harm, and he wound up going mad. This was a flagrant example of anti-union repression, and we see that the bourgeoisie is capable of carrying out plots like this against the unions, worthy of the kind of frame-ups known in France or the U.S.

The Internationalist: There are striking parallels between the Jules Durand case and the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal, with a frame-up, false testimony and the rest. For us the fight for Mumia’s freedom is part of this whole international history of struggles in defense of the working class.

Tétard: Yes, and we in the CGT at the national level have participated and come out regularly. We are part of the Collective for the Defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal, and there have been protests [demanding freedom for Mumia] by associations in defense of human rights and others here in France. (See the June 2018 CGT declaration “Mumia Abu Jamal doit être libéré!”) ■



Flag with picture of Le Havre dock worker Jules Durand, in 2010 protests over pension reform. Durand led strike in 1910, and was then framed by the bourgeoisie who condemned him to death for a murder he did not commit. International solidarity helped win his release.

Bay Area ILWU Shuts Ports Demanding Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal

“An Injury to One Is an Injury to All – Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!” chanted union marchers on San Francisco’s Embarcadero on February 16. They were marching as International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 shut down Oakland and San Francisco ports to demand freedom for the former Black Panther and world-renowned radical journalist who has spent over four decades in Pennsylvania prisons on frame-up charges. With a Philadelphia judge denying motions filed by Mumia’s lawyers after “misplaced” boxes of evidence were found in the district attorney’s office (see article below), the dock shutdown underlines the need for widespread *workers action in the U.S. and internationally to free Mumia*.

That there is no justice in the capitalist courts is a bitter reality that Mumia’s case has come to symbolize. Almost three years after the largest sustained protests in U.S. history erupted in the summer of 2020 over Minneapolis cops’ murder of George Floyd, racist police terror continues unabated – as shown yet again when cops from the elite SCORPION unit of the Memphis police beat Tyre Nichols, an African American FedEx driver, to death in January (see article page 1). Importantly, members of Nichols’ family participated in the February 16 Bay Area action, speaking to the union rally that

was part of the ILWU shutdown.

Plans for the February 16 Bay Area longshore action grew in conjunction with the trip by a delegation of ILWU Local 10 members to South Africa, where longtime longshore militant Jack Heyman together with David “Newt” Newton – a Local 10 activist who is the nephew of Black Panthers co-founder Huey P. Newton – met with Irvin Jim, secretary general of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa. NUMSA is the largest union in South Africa – and on the African continent. On the eve of the ILWU shutdown, the NUMSA leader issued a video announcing that the South African union was launching a month-long international solidarity campaign for Mumia’s release. On March 10, NUMSA members carried out a militant march on the U.S. embassy in Pretoria, demanding “Mumia must be set free!”

The Bay Area port shutdown – which stopped the movement of cargo – harks back to the first labor actions for Mumia’s freedom, held on April 1999 when Brazilian teachers shut down schools in the state of Rio de Janeiro demanding *Liberdade para Mumia Abu-Jamal!* This sparked and was coordinated with the ILWU shutting down ports all along the West Coast the next day to demand his freedom (see “Brazil Education Workers Demand: Freedom for



Internationalist photo

Internationalist contingent in San Francisco march in conjunction with February 16 Bay Area port shutdown demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Mumia Abu-Jamal!” at internationalist.org, May 1999).

This year, on April 24 – Mumia’s 69th birthday – a labor rally for Mumia’s freedom is being held in Portland, Oregon at the initiative of the painters and stagehands unions (IUPAT Local 10 and IATSE Local 28). This was sparked by the resolution that the Portland

Painters union passed last October calling for “coordinated workers action on a national and international scale” for “workers of all countries to use their power to free our brother Mumia Abu-Jamal.” (See “Portland Painters Call for Workers Action to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal,” *The Internationalist* No. 67-68, May-October 2022). ■

There Is No Justice for the Oppressed in the Capitalist Courts Judge Slams Door on Mumia Appeal

“Defendant’s Petition is Dismissed Without a Hearing.” With those words, on March 31, Judge Lucretia Clemons slammed a steel door on Mumia Abu-Jamal’s appeal for justice after 41 years of incarceration for a crime he didn’t commit. Jamal, a former member of the Black Panther Party, is the foremost class-war prisoner in the United States. In a trial saturated with judicial misconduct and prosecutorial racism, Jamal was convicted of the 1981 shooting death of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner.

The capitalist “justice” system has been trying to execute Jamal ever since that night in Philadelphia’s Center City when Faulkner was killed. The cops shot Mumia and savagely beat him. The trial was presided over by the notorious “hanging judge” Albert Sabo, who had sentenced more prisoners to death than any other sitting judge in the U.S. and was a life member of the Fraternal Order of Police. During the proceedings, Sabo was overheard by a court stenographer telling prosecutors that he was going to help them “fry the n....r.” Nevertheless, in 1995, Sabo presided over Mumia’s post-conviction appeal, ruling on the trial he himself had conducted!

In 2011, after almost 30 years in prison, the first 20 in solitary on death row, and following massive international protests,

Pennsylvania backed off trying to kill Mumia via lethal injection and substituted “slow death row” (life imprisonment without parole) abetted by medical neglect. As Mumia is now 69 years old, has been deathly ill with hepatitis C and has undergone open heart surgery, Judge Clemons’ ruling amounts to carrying out Sabo’s intention in 1982 by other means.

Clemons’ ruling concerned defense attorneys’ submission that six boxes of evidence, labeled “Mumia” or “Abu-Jamal,” which were “found” in 2018, contained crucial proofs of the frame-up nature of Mumia’s trial and of his actual innocence. These include handwritten notes detailing the prosecution’s determination to exclude blacks from Mumia’s jury and evidence that its key witnesses received promises of money and leniency in pending court cases – in other words, that their testimony incriminating Mumia was bought with a *quid pro quo*, exchanging favors.

Mumia’s lawyers pointed to a newly discovered letter from a prosecution star witness, cab driver Robert Chobert (prior conviction for tossing a firebomb into a school yard), who, after falsely testifying that he saw Mumia shoot Faulkner, wrote to assistant district attorney Joseph Mc-

Gill: “Where is the money that is owed to me?” It was payment for services rendered. The defense also cited new evidence, including correspondence from former employees of the D.A.’s office, that the testimony of prostitute Cynthia White, who like Chobert testified that she saw Mumia shoot Faulkner, was given in exchange for promises of special treatment.

Judge Clemons ruled that Mumia’s lawyers’ “Brady claim,”¹ that information discrediting the testimony of prosecution witnesses was withheld from the defense, was “immaterial,” as the witnesses’ credibility had previously been challenged. Clemons ruled that Mumia’s “Batson claim”² was “time-barred and waived”:

¹ Referring to the historic decision in the case of *Brady v. Maryland*, 373 U.S. 83, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1963 that the prosecution must turn over to the defense any exculpatory evidence that could potentially exonerate the defendant, and that failure to do so could be grounds for overturning a conviction.

² Referring to the landmark case of *Batson v. Kentucky*, 476 U.S. 79, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1986 that prosecutors’ peremptory challenges (to dismiss potential jurors without cause) could not be used to exclude jurors solely on the basis of their race, and that this could result in throwing out a conviction.

supposedly time-barred because it was not appealed by 1991 but only in November 2021; supposedly waived because his defense did not ask for the notes (which it did not know existed) in Mumia’s 1995 appeal; and besides, the *Batson* rules did not exist at the time of his 1982 trial.

These rulings are *prima facie* (self-evident) proof of how the whole capitalist legal system is rigged against poor, oppressed and working people, and anyone who cannot afford high-priced lawyers with abundant resources. Procedural rules are used to exclude evidence of bribed testimony and intentional exclusion of black people from a jury. These elaborate rules exist not to protect the right of defendants to prove innocence but in order to protect the courts, from evidence of their racism being considered and from having their rulings overturned.

For 41 years, there has never been justice for Mumia in the capitalist courts, and there is none today. In the 1982 trial he was denied the right to represent himself and was even excluded from the courtroom. It was a classic racist frame-up that, in addition to jury-rigging and coerced witnesses, included an alleged confession by Mumia
continued on page 37

South Africa: NUMSA Launches Campaign to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

On the eve of the shutdown of ports in the San Francisco Bay Area by International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 calling to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) announced a campaign for Mumia's freedom. NUMSA is the largest, most powerful and most militant trade union in South Africa, and the entire African continent. It has been active for many years in the fight to liberate Mumia, including a powerful letter in 2016 to the governor of Pennsylvania demanding that Mumia and other prisoners infected with hepatitis C be provided life-saving drugs. After an international outcry, the medications were provided to some 5,000 prisoners in the state's jails.

In announcing the campaign, NUMSA general secretary Irvin Jim issued a February 16 video proclaiming solidarity with Mumia as a "soldier of freedom and love" who had been wrongly imprisoned. He noted that the union had waged this campaign "over many years, separated by rivers and forests, with the people of the United States." A letter by NUMSA to the judge in Philadelphia noted that "Mumia Abu-Jamal's situation has long struck a chord in light of the history of our own freedom struggles in South Africa." It recalled that "many innocent people have been murdered by the police – people like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor," and more recently Tyre Nichols in Memphis.

As part of the campaign, on March 10 NUMSA held



National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa

NUMSA march on U.S. embassy in Pretoria, South Africa demanding freedom for Mumia, March 10.

a march on the U.S. embassy in Pretoria calling for Mumia's freedom. The union's open letter to the Philadelphia court was handed over, for forwarding to the judge. Speaking to the crowd outside the embassy, NUMSA national spokesperson Phakamile Hlubi-Majola recalled the civil

rights movement, when "figures like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Junior, and Malcolm X ... fought and died for human justice." NUMSA's solidarity campaign should be a clarion call to labor internationally to mobilize its power in *workers action to free Mumia!*

In Solidarity with Bay Area Dock Shutdown

NYC Teach-in: "Mumia's Freedom Is Labor's Cause"

Teamsters, subway and health workers, immigrant worker organizers, education unionists and other labor, anti-racist and left activists joined students from New York-area campuses in a Black History Month teach-in for workers action to free Mumia Abu-Jamal on February 16. Held in solidarity with that day's Bay Area longshore workers' port shutdown for Mumia's freedom (see article on facing page), the event brought out 85 in person to a theater in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen neighborhood, with others participating via Zoom. When Mumia himself phoned live from the state prison in Mahanoy, Pennsylvania to convey his greetings to the teach-in and

to salute the longshore workers, the theater rang with the chant, "Brick by brick, wall by wall, we're going to free Mumia Abu-Jamal!"

Those attending the event were made up, in roughly equal parts, of activists who have participated in efforts to free Mumia for some time, and trade-unionists and students who have recently learned of the case. This reflects the reasoning behind the teach-in, organized on short order after plans for the February 16 longshore shutdown came together.

Organizers from the Internationalist Group (IG) and Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW) contacted NYC-area unionists on the need for a local labor-centered event in solidarity with the Bay Area dockers' action. Noting that many younger workers are unfamiliar with Mumia's case, Teamsters Local 808 secretary-treasurer Chris Silvera suggested a teach-in; Charles Jenkins of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) New York chapter, added that Black History Month



Internationalist photo

February 16 teach-in for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal. Labor is in the house.

was a prime time for such an event.

In view of the police frame-up of Jamal and continuing judicial vendetta against him, the IG and the League for the Fourth International have emphasized the need for international *workers action to free Mumia*. Highlighting the scope of the struggle was the announcement, on the eve of the internationally coordinated February 16 events, by Irvin Jim, general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), of a campaign fighting for Mumia's freedom.

(See "NUMSA Launches Campaign to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal," above.)

Subsequently, on March 31, Judge Lucretia Clemons in Philadelphia dismissed the request by Mumia's lawyer for a court hearing on evidence from boxes of papers on his case, belatedly "discovered" by the district attorney's office, showing how key to his conviction were witnesses who were paid or promised leniency for testifying against him and how black jurors were systematically stricken from the lists (see article on facing page). While many have

Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution

For
Workers
Action to
FREE
MUMIA
ABU-JAMAL!

The Internationalist

Fight to free the U.S.' foremost class-war prisoner. To order buttons, go to www.internationalist.org and click on "Order Now" link. Cost: US\$2 per button, including mailing.

looked to the courts for Mumia’s salvation, this shows once again that *there is no justice for the oppressed in the capitalist courts*, and underscores the importance of mobilizing workers power to free him.

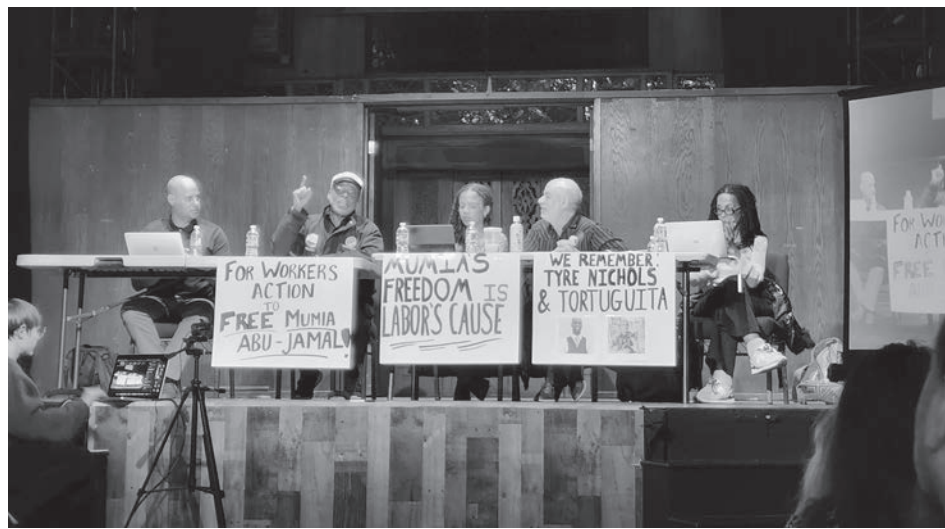
On the speakers list at the New York City event, along with brothers Silvera, Jenkins and Sándor John for the CSEW, were Cleo Silvers (formerly of the United Auto Workers, SEIU health care workers union 1199, the Black Panthers and Young Lords); Virgilio Aran (Laundry Workers Center and National Domestic Workers Alliance); and City University of New York historian Johanna Fernández (writer and producer, *Justice on Trial: The Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal* and author of *The Young Lords: A Radical History*). Anchoring the event as moderator was Kaitlan Russell of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs.

Mumia and Workers Struggle

A notable aspect of the NYC teach-in was the presence of several dozen trade-unionists. When the chair asked that members of the labor movement present in the hall stand and give the names of the unions they were from, there were a dozen Teamsters, mainly from Local 808 (Metro-North Railroad), but also from Locals 804 (UPS in NYC) and 25 (Boston). There were also members of TWU Local 100 (NYC transit), 1199 health care workers, DC37 city workers and other parts of AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees), United Federation of Teachers, Professional Staff Congress-CUNY and others. Also attending were three leaders of Student Workers of Columbia, which won a strike in December 2021.¹

The presence of Teamster activists was especially important given the looming labor battle between the union and UPS – the contract covering over 340,000 Teamsters delivery and warehouse workers there expires on July 31. Also notable was that various left and labor activists helping build the teach-in had spoken at a 7 December 2022 rally in front of Grand Central Station to protest government strikebreaking against the railway workers by the Democratic Biden administration and Congress (including the “Squad” of Democratic Socialists of America and other Con-

¹ The ten-week strike defeated the haughty anti-union employer with a “Shut It Down” action of hundreds of strikers and supporters (see Class Struggle Education Workers, “Columbia Strike Wins, More Struggles Ahead,” January 2022).



Charles Jenkins (second from left) of Transport Workers Union Local 100 and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists speaks at the February 16 teach-in.

gressional “progressives”).

Kicking off the event was Jack Heyman, longtime class-struggle activist in ILWU Local 10, speaking live online from San Francisco, where the union was shutting down Bay Area ports demanding freedom for Mumia. “What does Mumia mean for us as workers?” he asked. “When you hear him speak on recordings from prison, you know why they call him ‘the voice of the voiceless.’ That’s why the capitalist rulers have kept this innocent man in the dungeons of this racist system for 41 years now to try to silence his voice and stop his writings and bury his living example. In fighting for his freedom, we’re fighting for the rights and freedom of all of us.”

Heyman noted that Mumia has devoted his life to solidarity, embodying the inseparable connection between the struggle of labor and the fight for black freedom. He cited the famous words of Karl Marx on slavery in the United States: “Labor in white skin cannot emancipate itself where in the black it is branded.” Key to the ILWU becoming strong in the Bay Area, Heyman said, “was consciously taking on and breaking down the color barrier, fighting against racist oppression and all forms of discrimination.”

“Our union emerged from the big maritime and general strike of 1934 in which the San Francisco cops killed two of our union brothers and wounded hundreds of strikers on Bloody Thursday. Today, the fight against racist police terror is key and on Juneteenth 2020, amid the huge nationwide protest over the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many others, we shut down all 29 West

Coast ports against police brutality and systemic racism.”

Heyman, who has played a leading role in organizing powerful solidarity actions by the ILWU for decades, emphasized this is not something that just happens spontaneously. “Back in 1999 I got a call from the Internationalist Group with the news that in Brazil, teachers were going to shut down the schools to demand freedom for Mumia,” he said. “We set to work to bring out longshore workers here and shut down the ports – and that’s what we did,” on Mumia’s birthday in April 1999. Nine years later, he noted, “on May Day 2008, the ILWU shut down all 29 West Coast ports against the U.S. imperialist war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Explaining why we call Mumia “America’s foremost class-war prisoner,” Heyman noted that the term goes back to the Industrial Workers of the World, the International Labor Defense led by James P. Cannon (who later founded the Trotskyist movement in the U.S.) and others who fought to free Joe Hill, Sacco and Vanzetti and the Scottsboro Nine – a few of the names of those we remember today for their fight against the capitalist injustice system. “The tradition of class-struggle defense taught us that while using every legal possibility, we must put no faith in the capitalist courts but rely on the power of our class, the working class, and all the oppressed.”

Next up was Teamsters Local 808 leader Chris Silvera, who sent a video pointed out that, “It’s been 41 years since Mumia has been imprisoned and we need to educate new people while we continue to struggle for justice for Mumia.” Silvera noted that “we now have evidence that there was suppression of evidence that was kept away from the defense” in Mumia’s 1982 trial, referring to revelations from materials in boxes “found” in the Philadelphia DA’s office. “We continue to struggle globally,” he added, pointing to “my brother and sister railroad workers in Japan” of the Doro-Chiba union who are standing up for Mumia’s freedom.

A solidarity message was read from Germany’s Metalworkers Union Working Group for Internationalism, that also called for freedom of Leonard Peltier, the Native American leader who has been in prison for 46 years as the result of yet another classic frame-up trial. It was reported that stagehands union (IATSE) Local 28 in Portland recently passed a motion calling for workers action to free Mumia.

The teach-in also watched a video greeting sent from Brazil, in which members of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil and the Class Struggle Committee

spoke about the resonance of Mumia’s case in Latin America’s largest country, which has the largest black population in the world after Nigeria. They explained the history of actions for Mumia’s freedom there going back to 1995, when South America’s first “Free Mumia” rally was held in Brazil’s “Steel City,” Volta Redonda. The next year, Mumia wrote a powerful piece defending the Brazilian comrades facing state repression in their fight to remove police from the municipal workers union.

Also played were recorded messages on the meaning of Mumia’s case for black freedom struggles by former Black Panther Assata Shakur (sent in 2021 from Cuba, where she has taken refuge since 1977); and Angela Davis’ greetings to the February 16 Bay Area port shutdown.

Mumia Addresses the Teach-In

The highlight of the event came with messages from Mumia himself, which were arranged by Prof. Johanna Fernández. In a recorded greeting he said he wanted to “thank you all for organizing this teach-in, in support of collective protest by the ILWU – the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and NUMSA, the brother union of metal workers in South Africa,” also mentioning several of the union and education groups at the teach-in. “Why should this wide swath of labor groups unite in protest? Because an injury to one is an injury to all.” Emphasizing the centrality of labor’s power, in a separate written message to union supporters Mumia stated: “When workers unite, the earth trembles and the heavens shake.”

But then a live phone call came in, electrifying participants. Mumia’s voice came on the line, saying “Let’s call this a teach-in for freedom – how about that?” only to be interrupted by the mechanical announcement: “This is the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution – Mahanoy; this call is subject to recording and monitoring.” Mumia went on to say that he was calling from “slow death row,”² a/k/a “Death by Incarceration, or DBI – life sentences.” He continued:

“That makes that phrase, ‘mass incarceration,’ into a grim, ignoble reality. Pennsylvania is one of the states with some of the highest numbers of lifers – people under DBI sentences. “If I’ve learned anything in here, it’s this: movements, social movements, change society. It’s the only thing that ever has. When we gather together, when we work together, when we breathe together, we can truly transform society. So let us gather together. Let us build a movement that resonates like thunder in summer.”

The next speaker was Cleo Silvers. Appearing via Zoom live from Memphis,

² Mumia was on death row from 1982 to 2001, when – in the wake of a worldwide campaign to save Mumia’s life and win his freedom – a federal judge vacated the death sentence, citing irregularities in the penalty and sentencing aspects of the 1981 trial but not the frame-up conviction itself. Mumia’s first book, published in 1995, was titled *Live from Death Row*. Attempts by Philadelphia DAs to reinstate the death penalty were dropped ten years later (see “Redouble the Fight to Free Mumia Now! Death Sentence Dropped Against Mumia Abu-Jamal!” *The Internationalist* supplement, January 2012. In 2021, Mumia’s life was threatened yet again due to medical neglect by prison authorities (see “Don’t Let Them Silence ‘The Voice of the Voiceless’: No Execution by COVID – Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Now!” *The Internationalist* No. 62, January-March 2021).

BLACK HISTORY MONTH TEACH-IN
MUMIA’S FREEDOM IS LABOR’S CAUSE

In solidarity with the February 16 Bay Area dock workers port shutdown for Mumia’s freedom
“An injury to one is an injury to all – Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!”

With special messages from Mumia Abu-Jamal; from the Bay Area docks, on the port shutdown for Mumia’s freedom; from Chris Silvera (Secretary-Treasurer, Teamsters Local 808*); and from Cleo Silvers (formerly of UAW, hospital workers union 1199, and the Black Panther and Young Lords parties). Presentations by Charles Jenkins (TWU Local 100,* President, NY chapter, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists) • Virgilio Aran (Laundry Workers Center and National Domestic Workers Alliance*) • CUNY historians Johanna Fernandez (writer and producer, *Justice on Trial: The Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal*) and Sándor John (Class Struggle Education Workers). Moderator: Hunter College student leader Kaitlan Russell (CUNY Internationalist Clubs) *affiliation listed for identification purposes

On February 16, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 will shut down the ports of Oakland and San Francisco to demand freedom for MUMIA ABU-JAMAL. Mumia, a world-renowned journalist, unionist and defender of labor rights, is a former Black Panther who has been behind bars in Pennsylvania prisons, on frame-up charges, for more than four decades – 30 years of this on death row. In Africa, the continent’s largest union, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, is going to protest at the U.S. embassy demanding “Free Mumia!” In Portland, Oregon, Painters Union (IUPAT) Local 10, and here in New York, Teamsters Local 808 have passed resolutions highlighting the need to bring out labor’s power in action, in the fight for Mumia’s freedom. At a December 16 hearing on Mumia’s case, the judge gave his lawyers 60 days to go through 200 boxes of materials held by the DA’s office – some of them only recently “discovered,” containing evidence of prosecutorial misconduct (including buying false testimony) and racist exclusion of jurors. Today, the life-and-death urgency of the struggle against racist repression has been highlighted yet again by the police murder of Tyre Nichols. It never stops. As we observe Black History Month, a swathe of states are censoring the teaching of this crucial subject in public schools. Black History means to not only study and teach about history – as Mumia does so powerfully – but to help make it today. Come join us at the teach-in on labor and the historic struggle to free our brother Mumia Abu-Jamal!

When: Thursday, February 16, 6:00 p.m.
Where: Actors Temple Theatre, 339 West 47th Street
(Between 8th & 9th Avenues, Manhattan. Nearest subway station: 50 St on C/E trains.)

For more information: cs_edworkers@hotmail.com Labor donated

Flier for the February 16 teach-in.

she based her remarks largely on the statement she had sent to the January 31 Hunter College speak-out on the police murders of Tyre Nichols and Atlanta activist Tortuguita (see page 10 of this issue). Comrade Silvers also called attendees' attention to the death of former Black Panther Eddie Conway, who spent 44 years in Baltimore prisons on frame-up charges. She concluded:

“About the time I joined the Panthers, a young brother in Philadelphia, my home town, did the same thing. His name is Mumia Abu-Jamal.... Tyre and Mumia, despite difference in age and residence do, or did, share one fundamental thing: being black men in a racist society.

“The media keeps talking about how we need a ‘new conversation’ about race. We’ve *been* having a conversation – after each of these deadly horrors – and nothing has changed. What *could* change things? What force can stand up to the institutions of capitalism backed up by their armies of police? Look to the Bay Area today, February 16. The dock workers there have voted to shut down the port of Oakland demanding freedom for Mumia. That’s what we need here, and in every city.”

“Labor Is in the House”

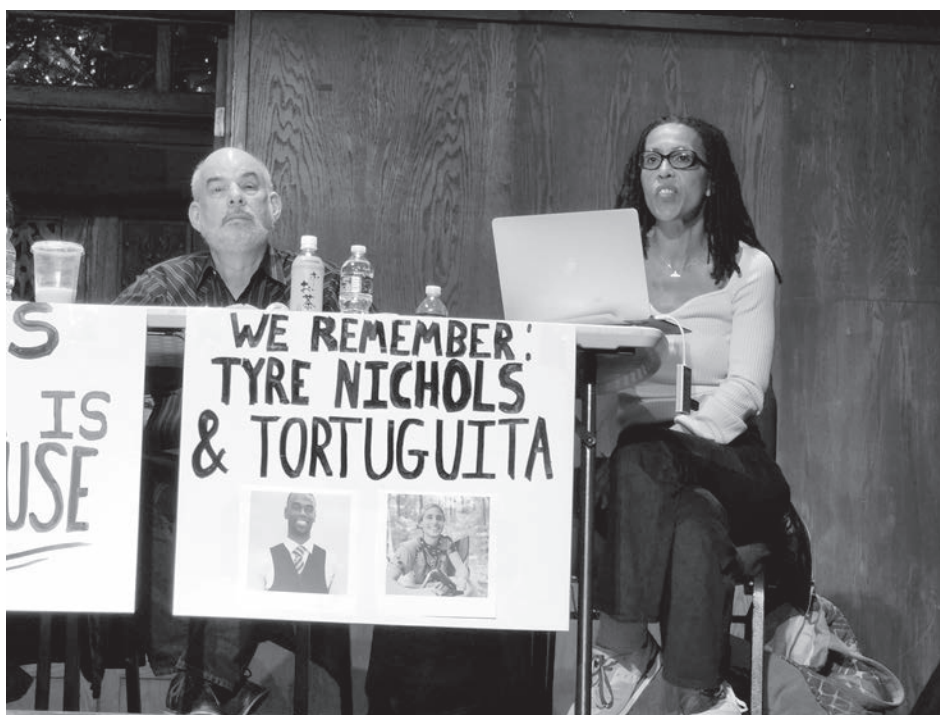
Charles Jenkins of the New York subway and bus workers union (TWU Local 100) and the CBTU began his remarks by asking, “Is labor in the house?” Answered by cheers and applause, he said:

“So we know that labor is in the house and we know that it’s not the top but it’s the base.... We’ve seen the outrage across this country, on Eric Garner, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tyre Nichols that we just saw murdered in these streets – and for the last 41 years, Mumia on slow death in prison. This evening we are here in solidarity with the dock workers holding back their labor. It should tell us the power we have – it is clear: nothing moves, nothing gets accomplished without us.

“I see some TWU members here. I want to talk about what happens to our leaders in the movement. They jail us. I remember in 2005, when Transport Workers Union Local 100 went on strike. One of the penalties was jailing our president, to teach us a lesson not to go against the capitalist system.... Until we break the system, comrades, it won’t change. We will continue to talk about those lives that were cut down, far too soon, at the hands of the system, be they black or white, they hide behind a system which we have to dismantle.”

From Portland, Oregon, Wyatt McMinn then addressed the teach-in, explaining how his union, Painters (IUPAT) Local 10, passed its resolution last October calling for workers action nationally and internationally to free Mumia.

“Our union’s anti-racist mobilization committee, which came out of the organizing to stop the white-supremacist and Nazi provocations of 2016, introduced the resolution for Mumia after screening a documentary about his case. In 2017, as part of the Portland Labor Against the Fascists mobilization, we helped mobilize hundreds of workers to stop the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer from marching through the streets of Portland just days after the infamous MAX train stabbing in which one bystander was injured and two others were murdered by a racist who was threatening two young women.



Professor Johanna Fernández speaks at the Mumia teach-in.

“This experience, as well as our participation in mass anti-racist protests in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, underlined the need for labor to mobilize for Mumia’s freedom. Experiencing first-hand the violence of the police as they attacked anti-fascist and Black Lives Matter protestors with tear gas, flash grenades and batons, clearly demonstrates the role of the police in enforcing racism in our society. For us, the class line is clearly drawn and Painters Local 10, as our resolution concludes, ‘call[s] for a policy of working-class struggle through agitation, publicity, protest, and continued coordinated workers action on a national and international scale to free Mumia Abu-Jamal.’”

This was followed by a recording of Mumia’s remarks on the Painters resolution (see “Message from Mumia: Workers of the World, Unite!” *The Internationalist* No. 67-68, May-October 2022). Video footage from the day’s port shutdown was shown together with a brief statement by ILWU Local 10 activist “Newt” Newton saying, “We’re shutting down the ports of Oakland and San Francisco – no ship, no cargo will move, to show our solidarity with these fallen comrades and with this living comrade.” Newton recalled the “long wrongful incarceration of Geronimo Pratt,” the Los Angeles Black Panther leader who spent 27 years in San Quentin before being released and exonerated in 1997 after the frame-up against him was exposed.³

Roots of a Ruling-Class Vendetta

The vendetta of the U.S. ruling class against Mumia must be understood in the historical context of frame-ups and legal lynchings against labor martyrs, CUNY historian Johanna Fernández emphasized in her presentation. The “Haymarket Affair” of 1886; IWW leader Joe Hill; immigrant anarchist workers Sacco and Vanzetti in the 1920s; Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in the ‘50s – all followed periods of working-class upsurge. In the 1960s and early ‘70s, Angela Davis, Huey Newton and others who were fighting against racism were imprisoned – and later came the frame-up against Mumia Abu-Jamal “to send a mes-

³ On Geronimo’s case, and its relation to the government’s COINTELPRO campaign of frame-ups and murder against Black Panthers and other fighters against capitalist racism, see “Geronimo Is Out! Now Free Mumia!” (*The Internationalist* supplement, June 1997).

sage to black people of what’s going to happen if you dare stand up and fight.”

Fernández underlined that the state targeted the Black Panthers, “as a danger to U.S. empire and ‘national security,’” by “standing up to police lynchings, upholding the right of self-defense.” As they explained, capitalism is the historical cause of racism. The ruling class went all out to silence the Panthers. In addition to Geronimo’s case in L.A., a crucial point of reference is the police murder of Chicago Panthers Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in 1969. Fernández detailed key aspects of how, in 1982, Mumia was “railroaded in the courts,” which handed down a death sentence. In 1995 this was all set to be carried out – it was only stopped by intensive protest on an international scale.

“So we stand here today because we have the right to defend ourselves from the predations of capitalism; we have the right to defend ourselves from police lynchings, and to defend our most basic human needs – but when we do so, the government imprisons us. We will not stand for them imprisoning our leaders.... We need to free our brother Mumia Abu-Jamal. We couldn’t save [the lives of] Malcolm X or Medgar Evers or the Rosenbergs or Sacco and Vanzetti, or the Haymarket martyrs. We have to do that with this American revolutionary Mumia, that’s why we’re here.”

Next to speak was Virgilio Aran of the Laundry Workers Center, who has played a key role in immigrant workers organizing drives including those at the Hot and Crusty restaurant, B&H Photo, Wash Supply laundry and in the ongoing campaign of immigrant indigenous construction workers in New York (see “Cabricanecos: Indigenous Immigrant Workers Fight Deadly Conditions in NYC,” *The Internationalist* No. 67-68, May-October 2022). Saluting Mumia’s call to the teach-in, Aran said: “We want Mumia to speak to us in person – not just by phone. We want him free. As we organize, we must connect our struggles to this issue, just as he always [speaks about] the connections between our everyday struggles.”

Behind the Persecution of Mumia: the Democratic Party

Summing up a number of themes addressed in the teach-in, CSEW speaker Sándor John said, “This is an international struggle, part of the struggle for revolutionary internationalism. It means

fighting for workers of the world to unite and use their power, against every form of oppression, against the capitalist system, which is threatening humanity with thermonuclear war in U.S. imperialism’s drive toward World War Three.” He went on: “Among those we are remembering tonight, we remember Mumia’s wife Wadiya Jamal, who died on December 27. He is grieving for her under circumstances few of us can imagine. He could not attend her funeral; he was behind bars, as he has been for 41 years.”

John noted that, “The port shutdown for Mumia here in the U.S., a society born from slavery and from genocide against Native Americans, strikes a chord in Brazil, a society also founded on slavery, where there is a powerful working class chained to capitalism through its reformist leaders in their popular-front alliance of class collaboration. In South Africa, black workers waged massive, heroic strikes to bring down apartheid. Now there is neo-apartheid under the African National Congress government – but the most powerful union on the continent of Africa, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, is raising the banner of Mumia’s freedom, which evokes hopes and aspirations for the working class.”

John underlined that “The Democratic Party, its politicians and frame-up artists are the ones at each level that framed up Mumia Abu-Jamal and have kept him imprisoned all these years, despite all the evidence, both old and newly revealed.” The role of the Democrats is central too in the racist police murder of Tyre Nichols, he added. He pointed to the 1985 police bombing of the MOVE commune in Philadelphia, who Mumia had defended for years. This was “deliberate racist murder by the capitalist government of eleven black people, five of them children. An incendiary device was dropped from the sky on their house; it was provided by the FBI. Black Democratic mayor Wilson Goode ordered the bombing.”

“We had an experience here not long ago with capitalist state repression, and hypocrisy,” John added. “The Democratic Party, including ‘the Squad,’ used the Railway Labor Act for strikebreaking against the railway workers.” This underscores that “the most fundamental rights of labor, connected so closely to the struggle for black freedom and against all forms of oppression, require a radical break with the Democratic Party and all capitalist parties and the forming of a revolutionary workers party to fight for a workers government. That’s a fundamental part of what genuine socialism means. Such a party would uphold the struggle for black freedom. It would fight for free abortion on demand. It would defend the rights of gay, lesbian and transgender people against bigotry and discrimination. It would fight against the imperialist war drive and it would bring internationalism into the scene on a world scale, fighting to abolish capitalism all across the face of this planet and to inaugurate a genuine classless society.”

The CSEW speaker concluded with an appeal: “As we fight for the freedom of our imprisoned brother Mumia Abu-Jamal, and all of the inspiration he gives us, let’s bring this message to our coworkers and into our unions. We need *workers action to free Mumia Abu-Jamal* – because *Mumia’s freedom is labor’s cause.*” ■

For Workers Action Against the U.S. / NATO / AUKUS Imperialist Axis

Australia Spearheads Anti-China War Drive in the Pacific Islands

SYDNEY, Australia – Ever since World War II, Australia has acted as deputy sheriff for the United States in the Pacific. This was formalised in the 1951 Australia-New Zealand-U.S. (ANZUS) security treaty, and from the beginning was directed at the “Communist threat” from the 1949 Chinese Revolution. But the loose coordination of ANZUS was replaced in 2021 with the formation of the trilateral Australia-U.K.-U.S. (AUKUS) military treaty explicitly targeting Beijing.¹ Recently there has been a flood of warmongering rants from Western political/military leaders and media mouthpieces foreseeing war with China in the very near term, with the Australian military slated to act as a spearhead in the strategic Pacific Islands region. And following the threats has come action.

In a special three-part series in March titled “Red Alert,” the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Age* assembled a team of “expert” China hawks threateningly warning that “Australia faces the threat of war with China within three years – and we’re not ready” (“Australia’s holiday from history is over”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 March). Six days later, Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese stood on the pier at the U.S. naval base in San Diego together with U.S. president Joe Biden and British prime minister Rishi Sunak where they announced a deal under which Australia would buy nuclear-powered submarines of British design and U.S. technology. This was accompanied by an agreement that U.S. attack subs (typically armed with nuclear missiles) would rotate through Perth, Western Australia.

There is only one possible purpose for Australia acquiring nuclear subs: war on China.

The “Red Alert” authors champion breaking “taboos” by reviving military conscription and acquiring nuclear weap-

¹ See “Biden Escalates Anti-China War Plans,” *The Internationalist* No. 64, July-September 2021.

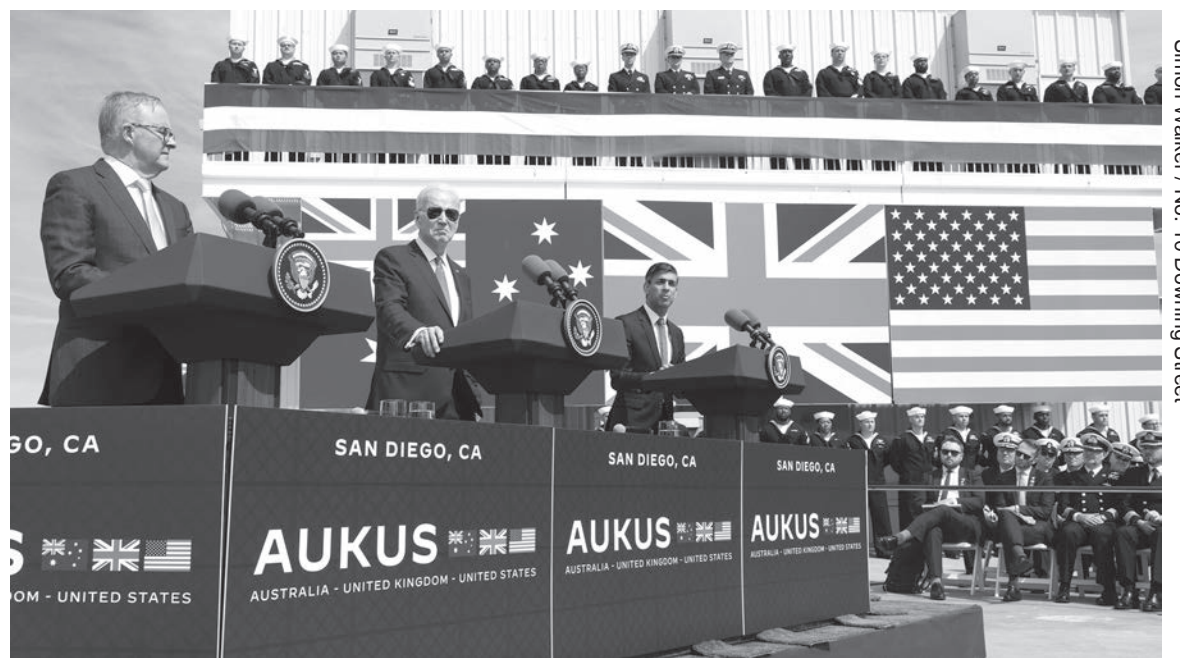
ons to meet the China “threat”. They insist that Australia needs to double its defence spending to preserve peace. One of the these “experts,” former Australian Defence Department deputy secretary Peter Jennings, said: “I want us to think about what can we do which gives us a capacity, at the furthest projection from our shores, to be able to sink the Chinese Navy and to bring down their aircraft?” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March). Meanwhile, this warmongering verbiage is accompanied by ominous statements by U.S. military leaders. NBC News (28 January) reported:

“Four-star Air Force General Mike Minihan, head of Air Mobility Command, sent a memo on Friday to the officers he commands that predicts the U.S. will be at war with China in two years and tells them to get ready to prep by firing ‘a clip’ at a target, and ‘aim for the head.’ In the memo sent Friday and obtained by NBC News, Minihan said “My gut tells me will fight in 2025’.”

Another segment of the “Red Alert” series stated:

“Former chief of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Philip Davidson, has said China may try to attack Taiwan by 2027. Last October, Admiral Michael Gilday, chief of US naval operations, said an attack could come as early as this year.” –“Australia’s holiday from history is over,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 March

These are not merely the hysterical ravings of a lunatic fringe. They reflect official



Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese (left) together with U.S. president Joe Biden and British (U.K.) prime minister Rishi Sunak at naval station in San Diego, California on March 14 announce plan to build nuclear-powered submarines for Australia. Target: China.

U.S. policy. Amid the escalating imperialist war on Russia over Ukraine, the latest U.S. *National Defense Strategy* (October 2022) declares the People’s Republic of China (PRC) the main enemy: “The PRC presents the most consequential and systemic challenge, while Russia poses acute threats – both to vital U.S. national interests abroad and to the homeland.” China tops the list of military priorities: “Defending the homeland, paced to the growing multi-domain threat posed by the PRC,” and again, “being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary – prioritizing the PRC challenge in the Indo-Pacific region, then the Russia challenge in Europe.”

Recently the Albanese cabinet in Canberra (Australia’s capital) has followed suit with its own *Defence Strategic Review* (April 2023) declaring that “Intense China-United States competition is the defining feature of our region and our time,” and more specifically that “China’s assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea threatens the global rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific in a way that adversely impacts Australia’s national interests.” This “new strategic reality,” it declares, requires “enhancing United States Alliance force posture arrangements in Australia” and adopting a “whole-of-government and whole-of-nation approach to security” – meaning that preparation for war is to be the top government and national priority, eclipsing all others.

Meanwhile, the *New York Times* (26 March) writes, the U.S. has now declared “the Indo-Pacific – ‘the priority theater’ for global security, according to the Defense Department, which has stationed 300,000 troops in the region.” Thus, “The Philippines, Japan, Australia, Palau, Papua New Guinea and U.S. territories across the Pacific are all working with Defense Department officials on expanding military access and facilities.” In Guam, where 22,000 U.S. troops are already stationed, another 5,000 Marines will soon be added in a new

base on the island, and “a pier for nuclear-powered submarines is being upgraded. More than a dozen sites have also been identified as potential locations for missile defense systems, while Andersen Air Force Base has plans for a new weapons complex” (*New York Times*, 14 April).

Beijing is not blind to such threats. Chinese president Xi Jinping said in a March 7 speech that “Western countries – led by the U.S. – have implemented all-round containment, encirclement and suppression against us, bringing unprecedentedly severe challenges to our country’s development.” Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang likewise warned that Washington is pursuing a “hysterical neo-McCarthyism,” and that its “so-called ‘competition’ means to contain and suppress China in all respects and get the two countries locked in a zero-sum game.” And in March, Xi met in Moscow with Russian president Vladimir Putin, strongly reaffirming solidarity against the U.S. menace.

As revolutionary Marxists – Trotskyists – the League for the Fourth International defends the gains of the 1949 Chinese Revolution. China’s collectivised economy – although saddled with a conservative Stalinist bureaucracy and endangered by huge capitalist inroads – enabled it to successfully contain the COVID pandemic for three crucial years, preventing what would likely have been millions of deaths, and has lifted hundreds of millions of Chinese out of extreme poverty and imperialist subjugation. As Democratic administrations in Washington escalate its “pivot to Asia” and confrontation with China, while waging an escalating “proxy war” against Russia, the League for the Fourth International declared last October:

“[I]n the present situation, proletarian revolutionaries’ call to *defeat the imperialists’ war drive against Russia and China* (a bureaucratically deformed workers state) means standing for the *defeat of the U.S./NATO proxy regime in Ukraine*,



In an orchestrated campaign, leading Australian newspapers beat drums for war against China with anti-communist “Red Alert” series. Two days after the first installment was published, Australian prime minister meets with U.S. and U.K. leaders (above) to announce AUKUS alliance plans to expand nuclear war fleet.



U.S. plans for imperialist war against China focus on fighting in the Pacific Islands, particularly the “second island chain” and further south.

and for *military defense of Russia* (a regional capitalist power) while giving no political support to, and calling for workers struggle against, the reactionary bourgeois nationalist Putin government.”
 –“Defend, Russia, China Against War-Crazed U.S. Rulers,” *The Internationalist* No. 67-68, July-October 2022

While the bulk of the Australian left, driven by visceral anti-communist hatred of China, is mired in the Anti-AUKUS Coalition with its social-imperialist “butter not guns” program, the LFI fights to *smash imperialism through international socialist revolution*.

The AUKUS Imperialist Alliance

The AUKUS alliance was accurately described upon its launch by a BBC (16 September 2021) headline: “UK, US and Australia launch pact to counter China.” When in early March of this year, the leaders of the three imperialist powers – with Australia definitely the junior partner – gathered at the U.S. naval station in San Diego harbour, amidst blaring military bands and plenty of red, white and blue bunting, they showed where this anti-China axis is headed. It’s not just about economic “competition”: the Australia-Britain-U.S. military alliance is *gearing up for nuclear war* against the largest remaining deformed workers state in the world, which already has a larger naval fleet (623+ ships) than the combined active duty and reserve fleets of Australia, Britain and the U.S. combined (593 ships).

Under the deal announced in March,

Canberra will acquire eight nuclear-powered subs. Initially, three second-hand U.S. Virginia-class nuclear submarines will serve as a stopgap from approximately 2033 (still ten years out). Britain will construct and operate the first AUKUS submarine from the late 2030s and acquire up to 12 more. Four American nuclear-powered submarines and one British vessel will begin rotating through Western Australian naval bases from 2027 onward to boost Australia’s ability to operate its own vessels in the 2030s and 2040s. Since Australian law formally prohibits foreign bases on Australian territory, these forces will be on “permanent rotation” and include nuclear-ready American B-52 bombers stationed in northern Australia, and new B-21 stealth bombers when they come on line.

Placing U.S. bombers in Australia’s north is supposed to ensure that the Pentagon’s strike capabilities will be beyond the range of most Chinese missiles (for now). In a statement to the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) on the B-52s, Richard Tanter, a senior research associate at the Nautilus Institute, warned: “It’s a great expansion of Australian commitment to the United States’ war plan with China. It’s a sign to the Chinese that we are willing to be the tip of the spear. It’s very hard to think of a more open commitment that we could make. A more open signal to the Chinese that we are going along with American planning for a war with China.”

The nuclear submarines deal will cost Australia up to US\$368 billion, more than twice the original projected price and not

counting the inevitable bloated cost-overruns that are the norm for private military contractors. (The AUKUS agreement replaced a contract under the previous Turnbull government to be supplied by France for \$90 billion.) This is by far the single largest government expenditure of any kind in Australian history. Even the bellicose editors of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (14 March) wrote: “The numbers are so big they make your eyes wince and your breath catch in your throat.... It turns

out all the impressive-sounding figures the experts have been using to estimate the cost of acquiring a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines...were low-balling it.”

Australia is also acquiring over 200 new-generation Tomahawk cruise missiles to the tune of US\$895 million and additional space-based satellite infrastructure (price unknown) to support the AUKUS subs’ navigation, targeting and other intelligence purposes. This is in addition to beefing up the longstanding U.S./Australian spy and communication satellites maintained in the ultra-secret base at Pine Gap, part of the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance between the US, England, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which is an extension of a UK-U.S. agreement dating back to WWII.

Although the AUKUS deal has received broad bipartisan support from the main political parties, former Labor (ALP)² prime minister Paul Keating kicked some chairs over in a sharp-tongued address to the National Press Club on March 15. Keating labeled the AUKUS submarine acquisition “Labor’s worst decision in government” since World War I. Despite Keating coming from Labor’s right wing, while Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Foreign Minister Penny Wong’s roots are in the party’s “left,” Keating maintained that the current government makes him and other former ALP leaders “look like Bolsheviks.” Keating stated that China, which is Australia’s largest trading partner and heavily dependent on Australia’s iron ore for its steel production and construction industry, has no reason to threaten Australia and that AUKUS is solely in the service of a dubious alliance with the U.S.

Keating ridicules the idea that eight Australian submarines would have any bearing on “defending” Australia. He points out that the projected AUKUS subs are far too large to remain undetected in Australia’s shallow coastal waters, but instead are well-suited to be part of a U.S. first-strike military assault on the Chinese mainland, where they would lie in deep water just off China’s coastal seas and attack Chinese surface ships and subs. As for China, Keating lambasted Albanese’s government for “copying the nonsense coming from the Americans that the Chinese should live forever under their [U.S.] strategic command.” He predicted a “big reaction” from the Labor Party ranks against the deal.

² The Australian Labor Party is a historic example of what V.I. Lenin called a “bourgeois workers party”; the ALP arose from and built its base in the union movement but with a bourgeois program, including grotesque promotion of racist and anti-immigrant “White Australia” policies.

Keating’s nationalist response to the American “big brother” reflects widespread unease in the population. A recent Guardian Essential poll (21 March) suggests Australians are at odds with the AUKUS deal, with just one in five voters labelling China a “threat to be confronted” and only one quarter in favour of paying the price tag of \$368 billion. And this apprehension goes far beyond the AUKUS submarines. According to a recent Lowy Institute poll, 77% of Australians agree with the statement: “Australia’s alliance with the United States makes it more likely Australia will be drawn into a war in Asia that would not be in Australia’s interests” – up eight points since 2019. Moreover, 51% said “Australia should stay neutral” in any war between US and China.”

The pacifist/nationalist Anti-AUKUS Coalition (which includes a number of Australian unions such as the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union, National Tertiary Education Union, Unions New South Wales, Unions ACT, New South Wales and Queensland Teachers, Maritime Union of Australia and others) does not oppose Australian imperialism per se but calls for a more “independent” foreign policy. Australian alignment with the U.S. is not merely a matter of “mistaken policy” as the coalition and former prime minister (PM) Keating assert. Instead, as a middling imperialist power, Australia has consistently aligned itself with the dominant imperialist power of the day, first Britain and then, early in World War II as the British empire collapsed in Asia, with the United States. The *quid pro quo* is that the U.S. will support Australian imperialism’s predatory activities in the Pacific, in exchange for Australian participation in U.S.-led wars and military interventions around the world.

The Pacific Islands: From “Benign Neglect” to Big Stick Threats

In the run-up to the Australian federal elections in May 2022, which saw the ALP defeat the decade-long rule of the conservative Liberal/National Party coalition government, “national security” became a red-hot issue. In early April, the leader of the Solomon Islands, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare, announced that his government had concluded a long-term security treaty with China, including military and police training. Australian politicians went nuts.

Most Australians and Americans could not locate the Solomons on a map if their lives depended on it. If they have some knowledge of the course of WWII in the Pacific, they will have heard of the Battle of Guadalcanal, the largest island in the Solomons, which was the first U.S. counterattack in the island-hopping campaign against Japan. The Solomons’ security deal with China was a rude awakening for Canberra and Washington. But it’s not like they didn’t have any warning: Sogavare formally severed ties with Taiwan in 2019 and established relations with Beijing. Of the 14 countries that still recognise Taiwan, four are small Pacific Island nations (the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau and Tuvalu), reflecting declining U.S. aid, growing ineffectiveness of Taiwan bribe money and increased influence from China.

The Solomons are among the poorest of the Pacific Island nations, with per capita income about half that in Fiji, about one-fifth of that in American Samoa and 1/15th



Virginia class submarine USS Mississippi at berth in Perth, Australia. U.S. escalating war plans call for rotating nuclear-armed subs through Australia’s western port. These warships now routinely carry tactical nuclear weapons.

of that in Guam. Ethnic tensions (e.g., against the Chinese in the Solomons, Indians in Fiji) have long been fueled by imperialist pressure in the region. Australia and New Zealand sent “peacekeeping” forces to the Solomons in 2003, which continued to occupy the country until 2017. Following the establishment of relations with the People’s Republic of China, there were anti-Chinese riots in 2021 sparked by leaders of the rebel Malaita province who were financed by massive aid (US\$25 million) from Washington.³ In response, Sogavare appealed to Beijing for assistance in policing, and the April 2022 security treaty with China contained a clause permitting deployment of PRC forces to the Solomon Islands “to assist in maintaining social order.”

When the news broke of the Solomons/China deal, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison belligerently stated that he would not allow a Chinese military base in the Solomons “on Australia’s doorstep,” declaring it a “red line” that would trigger a military response. (The Solomons are in fact 2,000 kilometers [1,500 miles] from Australia.) This was despite the repeated assurances by Solomons’ leaders that no Chinese military base was included in the agreement. The Labor Party pledged, if elected, to counter China’s growing influence by establishing an Australia-Pacific Defense School to provide training for the military and police forces of Pacific nations and to step up Australian aid to the region. And as soon as it took office, the new ALP government launched a whirlwind campaign of visits to the Pacific islands to escalate the anti-China pressure.

A U.S. delegation rushed to the Solomons in late April 2022 and issued barely veiled military threats. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink told the media: “We’ve outlined the specific concerns that we have regarding the potential for a permanent military presence or power-projection capabilities or a military installation, and we’ve indicated that should those events come to pass, that the United States would respond accordingly. And I think it’s best if I leave it at that and not speculate on what that may

³ Malaita is the Solomons’ second largest island after Guadalcanal. Following the diplomatic switch from Taiwan to China, Malaita’s premier protested, banned Chinese companies and continued to accept aid from Taiwan and the U.S. In November 2021 rioters led by “Malaita for Democracy” attempted to depose Sogavare and burnt and looted much of the Chinatown district of the Solomons’ capital Honiara.

or may not mean” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 April 2022). Solomon’s leader Sogavare protested: “We find it very insulting to be branded as unfit to manage our sovereign affairs, or [to] have other motives in pursuing our national interests.” Sogavare later refused to sign an agreement drafted by the U.S. for a September 2022 Pacific Island Forum meeting.

Amid all the hullabaloo about putative Beijing plans for military bases in the Pacific Islands, it is worth noting that as the world’s largest and most belligerent imperialist power, bent on “projecting power” just about everywhere on the globe, the U.S. maintains some 750 military bases around the world. China, however, has exactly one (1) foreign base: a naval facility in Djibouti. This is a choke point between the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden where Germany, Japan, Spain, Italy and the U.S. also have military bases, the U.S.’ being the largest.

Days after the May 2022 elections, Australia’s new PM Albanese and foreign minister Penny Wong had the governor-general (representative of the British monarch) quickly swear them into their positions so they could fly to Tokyo for a meeting of the Quad alliance (U.S., Japan, India and Australia). Having received marching orders from the U.S., Wong visited Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and then the Solomons. Later, in December, Wong and defence minister Richard Marles held meetings in Washington with U.S. secretary of state Antony Blinken and defence secretary Lloyd Austin, to “advance cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region and globally.” Just before Christmas, Wong led an Australian parliamentary team to visit Vanuatu, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia, and signed a security pact with Vanuatu which promised an increased Australian Defence Force presence on the island.

Washington, and hence Canberra, have worked themselves into a lather over spreading Chinese influence in the regions of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, as Beijing has signed economic cooperation agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative with ten Pacific Island nations. The imperialist press reflects the panic, as in the *New York Times* (23 January) article on the Solomon Islands headlined, “China’s Mad



Imperialists are gearing up for war with China in near term. Above: South Korean marines practice beach landing during joint U.S.-Philippine military exercise north of Manila, April 2023.

Basilio Sepe/ZUMA Press

Dash into a Strategic Island Nation Breeds Resentment.” As the U.S. mandates Australia to tighten control of the region with neocolonial mechanisms, Trotskyists call for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist-imperialist domination, as well as for the independence of New Caledonia (a French colony) and French Polynesia (including Tahiti), and the creation of a voluntary Socialist Federation of the Pacific Islands.

Australia’s Role in the “Pivot to Asia”

The recent book by former Australian army intelligence officer turned academic-Clinton Fernandes, now a professor at the University of New South Wales, *Sub-Imperial Power: Australia in the International Arena* (2022) refers to Australia as part of an “unbroken chain of U.S.-armed sentinel states,” which includes Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and India. While certainly no Marxist, Fernandes argues in an interview in the Melbourne newspaper *The Age* (31 December 2022) that as what he calls a “sub-imperial power,” Australia is dedicated to upholding the dominance of the United States: “the biggest lie at the moment is that we are doing ‘freedom of navigation operations’ in the South China Sea. We are not doing freedom of navigation operations, we are dropping sonar buoys in order to identify the acoustic signature of Chinese submarines, in order to attack them with the United States.”

But the Australian bourgeoisie have contradictory interests. Former prime minister Keating is a loyal servant of that

power, but his tongue-lashing of Albanese reflects some undeniable realities. China became Australia’s largest trading partner in the years of neoliberal “globalisation” and its “opening up” to the West. As late as 2021, China accounted for eight times more of Australia’s trade than the U.S., and 80% of Australia’s total export value comes from China’s purchase of iron ore. China also became the “workshop of the world” attracting production facilities from imperialist economies with higher wage levels, mainly the U.S. and Europe. The rapid decline of Australian industries like auto and general manufacturing, textiles and footwear began under the ALP governments of Bob Hawke and Keating from 1983 to 1996 that removed Australia’s traditional protectionism. But this hasn’t stopped everything from job losses to high real estate prices being blamed on China.

Australia’s (economic) “pivot to China” was immensely profitable. Moreover, Australia was almost the only wealthy imperialist country to avoid a recession or depression in the decade following the global financial crisis of 2007-09. This was mainly due to the Chinese collectivised economy steaming ahead, feeding increased demand for Australia’s mineral exports. Meanwhile, profit margins in the U.S. and Europe nosedived and then flatlined for a decade. Having carried through a counterrevolution and opened up markets in the former Soviet Union and East Europe at the beginning of the 1990s, U.S. imperialism turned its sights on China. At first it sought to escalate pressures for the restoration of capitalism by increasing imperialist investment

Yao Dawei / Xinhua



Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing in 2019.



Riots target Chinatown section of Solomon Islands capital Honiara, 25 November 2021, instigated by provincial authorities of Malaita island, funded by the U.S. (\$25 million) and Taiwan, to protest government’s recognition of People’s Republic of China.

Facebook

and integrating China into the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, etc. But as Western economies tanked, the U.S. turned to increased confrontation with China, which is the meaning of Barack Obama's 2012 "pivot to Asia."

China became a target of increased competition and trade barriers by Western powers at the same time as military pressure intensified. Despite Washington's professed adherence to a "One China" policy, U.S. support to Taiwan and attempts to seal off the South China Sea escalated. Nancy Pelosi's August 2022 trip to Taiwan was a direct challenge to Beijing.⁴ Taiwan increased its 2023 military budget by 19%, backed by a \$10 billion U.S. increase in military financing over five years plus \$1 billion annually in equipment from Pentagon stockpiles. Cold War hawks, both Republicans and Democrats, want to stop China from recovering its lost province in order to block it from obtaining unrestricted access to the Pacific. "Saner" minds in the Pentagon realize that this is well-nigh impossible and seek instead to make a Chinese takeover as costly as possible. Also unsure about the Philippines, they look to Australia to shore up the "second island chain" (see map on page 25).

Australia's bourgeoisie is caught in a bind. On the one hand, its economy has become heavily dependent on trade with China (particularly commodity exports like minerals), yet strategically it is dependent on its imperialist godfather, the United States. And not just militarily. According to Bloomberg, foreign investors own as much as three-quarters of shares in the top 20 companies on the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX), making up roughly half the market capitalisation of the entire ASX, while U.S.-based investors are the biggest owners of 16 of those 20 companies. If Washington and Wall Street give the orders, Canberra will have little choice but to salute, as Australia's European fellow imperialists have done with anti-Russia sanctions. But should Beijing justifiably retaliate economically for anti-China moves by Australia, as it did in 2021, imposing tariffs on a range of Australian exports, Australian workers would pay the price.

Australia Lays Waste to the Pacific Islands

The western Pacific has long been the scene of "great power" rivalry. The U.S. Navy under Commodore Matthew Perry forced Japan at gunpoint in the 1850s to trade with the West. Already in the 1600s, the Dutch East India Company had begun colonising what would later become Indonesia, formalising control in 1796. The Spanish controlled the Philippines from the 1500s until the U.S. took over in the Spanish-American War of 1898. Britain colonised Australia and New Zealand and established the British Western Pacific Territories to include those island groups that protected the southwest approaches to the main archipelagos of the Philippines and Indonesia to the north. In what became Papua New Guinea and in the Pacific islands, the indigenous peoples were treated like virtual slaves on the large plantations of the European colonisers. Tens of thousands of labourers were kidnapped from the islands to work on land in Australia beginning in the 1840s, a practice infamously

⁴ See "U.S. Anti-China War Provocations Over Taiwan," *The Internationalist* No.67-68, May-October 2022.

known as "blackbirding".

During the inter-imperialist Second World War, the U.S. and Australia needed to enlist Pacific Islanders in the anti-Japanese war effort. The Japanese military never intended to invade the Australian mainland, regarding it as too difficult and not worth the effort. But they were interested in blocking the U.S. supply routes to Australia, which involved control of the southwestern Pacific islands. Bitter battles took place throughout these islands; thousands of islanders were killed. And in the conflict between Japanese and American imperialism, over 3 million Japanese died and Japan became the only nation ever to be attacked with nuclear weapons, by "democratic" U.S. imperialism. After the war, the U.S. largely withdrew from the smaller Pacific islands, the British Empire crumbled and Australia moved in, treating the native populations little better than had the British. Most of the former British colonies achieved independence by the 1970s. An extreme level of poverty gives lie to the haughty claims by the Australian government to be "part of the [Pacific Islands] family."

As a second-tier imperialist power, Australia has laid waste to the Pacific, subjugating its peoples and enforcing their poverty for the better part of a century. This included its colonial rule in Papua New Guinea, and more recently, military occupations in East Timor and the Solomon Islands. The Labor government and the ruling elite for which it speaks is currently bullying the various Pacific states to align with the U.S. war drive against China, while also aggressively pushing the interests of the Australian gas and oil corporations. In addition, the ALP government has recently brought in a new visa policy for farm labourers from the Pacific Islands which will be a backdoor for low-paid labour and racial abuse.

Meanwhile, the ALP upholds one of the world's most racist immigration systems, including the policy of "turn the boats back on the high seas." This murderously violates the right of asylum – as well as United Nations conventions that Australia has signed on to, but, like every other imperialist country, regularly violates. Any would-be migrants that get through are detained in offshore detention prisons on the islands of Nauru and Manus, Papua New Guinea for years while they are "processed." (These hell holes are operated as profit-making enterprises; the U.S.-based operator of the Nauru facility, MTC, has been accused of fraud, profiteering and gross negligence in Texas and California courts.) And, since 2013, all asylum seekers arriving by boat are informed that they will never be allowed to settle in Australia.

The Pacific Theater and the Imperialist Drive to WWII

U.S. military plans for war against China focus on securing the island chains to its east in the Pacific.⁵ The first line – of Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan, the Philippines – is to be fortified to restrict the Chinese navy, and especially its submarines, to the relatively shallow waters from the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea down to the South China Sea. But unsure of its ability to "contain" China behind the first island chain (among other things because there is considerable support for China in Taiwan and the Philippines), imperialist war planners in the Pentagon and

⁵ See U.S. Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* (June 2019).



Australian "peacekeeping" troops patrol streets in Honiara, Solomon Islands in November 2021 after imperialist-provoked anti-China riots. Australian troops out of the Pacific Islands!

U.S. military think tanks are looking to direct military confrontation in the "second island chain" from the Northern Marianas and Guam to the south.⁶ This includes forming new units, such as littoral combat regiments whose recent war games were observed by a half dozen generals (see "With Mock Battles, Marines Prepare for a Pacific Island Fight," *New York Times*, 3 March).

Around the region, Japan, after decades of pseudo-pacifism, has announced it will raise military spending by 60 percent over the next five years, which would give it the third-largest war budget in the world. India has conducted training with Japan and Vietnam, while India and Japan have signed several agreements typifying the region's interlocking defence plans. Malaysia is buying South Korean combat aircraft. U.S. officials are trying to amass a giant weapons stockpile in Taiwan to make it a bristling "porcupine" that could head off a Chinese invasion, and the Philippines is planning for expanded runways, ports and four new bases to host the largest U.S. military presence in decades. Meanwhile, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command doubled its spending in 2022, in part to develop a network of precision-strike missiles aimed at China. And as we have written, "the Pentagon has certainly war-gamed using its own submarine-launched W76-2 'low-yield' nuclear warheads against Chinese atolls in the South China Sea."⁷

But the imperialists do not have free rein. Indonesia, with the fourth largest population in the world and thousands of islands across strategic shipping and naval routes, is recently estranged from the U.S. and has growing links to China. The chief lieutenant of Indonesian president Joko Widodo said of the Chinese in a recent interview, "They never, ever dictate," adding: "I told Washington ... The way you deal with us, forget it."⁸ But while China is looking to regional powers like Indonesia in its quest for a "multipolar" world order, it should be recalled that Mao Zedong courted Jakarta in the 1960s in the name of building a "nonaligned" movement, with the nationalist president Sukarno.

⁶ See article by Rand Corporation analyst Derek Grossman, "America Is Betting Big on the Second Island Chain," *The Diplomat*, 5 September 2020.

⁷ See "Defend Russia, China Against War-Crazed U.S. Rulers," *The Internationalist* No.67-68.

⁸ Quoted in "China and U.S. Are Wooing Indonesia, and Beijing Has the Edge," *New York Times*, 3 February.

The result was the horrific 1965 massacre of half a million to a million Communist Party members, sympathisers, trade unionists and ethnic Chinese at the hands of the Indonesian military and its death squads.

That slaughter was the price of Mao's Stalinist policy of promoting political alliances with bourgeois forces as the counterpart to the illusion of building "socialism in one country." Today, despite a veneer of "reformasi" (reform), military figures from the dictatorship of General Suharto who ruled Indonesia from 1965 to 1998 are still influential under the "democrat" Widodo. And while the Chinese deformed workers state is under siege from imperialist Cold War alliances from NATO to AUKUS, the nationalist bureaucracy headed by Xi Jinping adheres to the disastrous Stalinist policies of class collaboration, threatening the foundations of the Chinese Revolution. To defend them, the Chinese workers must carry out a political revolution to establish the proletarian democracy of workers councils (soviets) and the Leninist policy of revolutionary internationalism – which requires the leadership of a genuine communist (Trotskyist) party.

From Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands to all of East Asia, North America and Europe, the central task facing those who seek defeat the imperialist war drive – and the threat of thermonuclear World War III that it poses – is to build the nucleus of genuinely communist, Leninist-Trotskyist workers parties on the international program of world socialist revolution.

For international workers strike action against the U.S./NATO imperialist war drive against Russia and China! Defend China against imperialism and counterrevolution!

Australian unions: black ban all military shipments to NATO and Ukraine!

Down with Australia's racist, anti-immigrant measures! Close the internment camps at Nauru and Manus – let the refugees in! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!

Not discriminatory temporary work permits but equal rights and equal pay for all workers!

For a workers government and socialist revolution in Australia together with a voluntary socialist federation of the Pacific Islands! Independence for New Caledonia (Kanaky)!

For working-class solidarity and revolutionary internationalism – Reforge the Fourth International! ■

World War III...

continued from page 1

The Watson Institute on the Costs of War at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, reports that just since 2001 (leaving aside the first Iraq war of 1990-91 and two wars on Yugoslavia, in 1994 and 1999) the death toll includes: 176,000 killed in the U.S. war in Afghanistan; 67,000 killed in neighboring Pakistan; 300,000 killed in Iraq; 266,000 killed in Syria; and 112,000 in the U.S.-backed Saudi war in Yemen, for a total of close to a million dead (“Human Cost of Post-9/11 Wars: Direct War Deaths in Major War Zones,” September 2021). Now the same institute has published a new study calculating that an additional 3.6 to 3.7 million indirect deaths due to war-related causes including hunger, disease, economic sanctions and the destruction of economies, public services and the environment (“How Death Outlives War: The Reverberating Impact of the Post-9/11 Wars on Human Health,” May 2023).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, far from being an “unprovoked” attack as claimed by the Washington, was provoked by eight years of war against the Russian-speaking population of the Donbass mining region that rose up against the imperialist-engineered fascist/nationalist coup d’état that overthrew Ukraine’s elected government in 2014;¹ by over a decade of massive annual war games involving tens of thousands of troops and hundreds of planes and ships practicing for invasion of Russia; and capped by the refusal of the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization military alliance to rule out Ukraine joining NATO, or to provide any security guarantees to Moscow. The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International has from the start defended the “people’s republics” in the eastern Donbass region that broke from Ukraine at the time of the Kiev coup, and while opposing both sides in the nationalist Russia-Ukraine war that broke out in February 2022, we warned that it was sparked by the war drive targeting Russia and China, in which the marauding imperialists must be defeated.²

As the war continued through the spring and summer of 2022, Russian advances in Mariupol (May) and Severodonetsk/Lisichansk (July) were met with a constant escalation of U.S. and NATO weapons supplies and military command and control so that by autumn it had clearly become an imperialist proxy war against Russia. The point at which quantity turned into quality was the Pentagon-designed offensives forcing withdrawal of over-extended Russian forces in the Kharkov region in the north (September) and the Kherson region in the south (November). The changed character of the war led the LFI to shift its position from defeatism on both sides, to military defense of (but no political support to) Russia and calling for defeat of the U.S./NATO imperialists and their Ukrainian client regime.³ The Cold

Warriors in Washington, following on the overthrow and dismembering the USSR and the Soviet bloc in 1989-92, want to “finish the job” by devastating post-Soviet Russia and sparking capitalist counterrevolution in China, Cuba and North Korea.

Imperialist War and Dismantling Social Gains

It must be said that the imperialist disinformation campaign of endless atrocity stories – standard operating procedure for U.S. warmongers going back to “Remember the Alamo!” and “Remember the Maine!”⁴ – has been effective in molding public opinion in the West, with little Russian effort to counter it. Not that an attempt to do so would have much effect, as Russian outlets such as Sputnik and RT are banned in the European Union (EU) and subject to a media blackout in the United States. Moreover, Western media are generally kept well away from the front lines in Ukraine, except when accompanied by minders, so that most reporting on actual events is gleaned from the Kiev military authorities’ handouts or Twitter posts. On the Russian side, on the other hand, there are numerous war correspondents and military bloggers in the battle areas, so that any setbacks, such as in Ugedar on a couple of occasions, and on the outskirts of Bakhmut recently – are instantly reported, often with sharp critiques of the Russian *stavka* (general staff).

But wall-to-wall media censorship and message control can only go so far, and as the effects of the war on the population begin to bite, the impact of this “manufactured consent” will start to wear off. Last winter in Europe, which was relatively mild, the sharply increased fuel prices for heating due to anti-Russia sanctions were somewhat offset with government subsidies to consumers. As dozens of steel and chemical plants have shut down, the German government is now planning to subsidize 80% of electricity costs for energy-intensive industries (*Financial Times*, 5 May). This, of course, violates the “free market” rules of the European Union (EU). Meanwhile, in recent weeks farmers in East Europe have been loudly protesting the dumping of cheap Ukrainian grain on their domestic markets, which caused prices to nosedive. This led their governments to “temporarily” ban imports of Ukrainian agricultural products, which EU bureaucrats grudgingly acceded to.

Until now, the imperialist powers have remained united, even though the sanctions insisted on by the U.S. have had a devastating effect on its EU allies’ economies. On the other hand, U.S. energy companies are making record profits exporting liquified natural gas to Europe at sharply higher prices, while Russia’s revenues from gas exports increased by 55% in 2022. At the very least, the U.S. and EU shot themselves in the foot with their anti-Russia economic warfare, if not in the heart. As West European countries count the cost of maintaining millions of Ukrainian refugees, many of whom have no intention of returning to their war-torn country, pressures are mounting on Ukraine to seek some kind of pause in the war. But, as we have said before, there will be no peace negotiations at this point, since there is no mutually acceptable solution.

Russia, China Against War-Crazed U.S. Rulers” (22 October 2022), *The Internationalist* No. 67-68, May-October 2022.

⁴ See “Selling Imperialist War, from 1898 to ... WWII? ‘You Furnish the Pictures, and I’ll Furnish the War,’” *Revolution* No. 19, September 2022.

tion. The war will go on, perhaps eventually becoming a “frozen conflict.”

The excruciating aspect is that a new imperialist war has shaken the European continent, exposing the illusions of a peaceful development of capitalism and barreling down the road to world war – *yet there is no significant leftist opposition to this war*. In fact, most of the left has enlisted as auxiliary troops in the imperialist war on Russia, and China. These “NATO socialists” who preach “solidarity” with Ukraine – i.e., with its government and armed forces – are indeed “social-imperialists” in the truest sense of the expression Lenin coined to characterize those pseudo-socialists who supported “their own” bourgeoisie in the first imperialist world war. It’s “which side are you on” in Ukraine today – and the opportunist left is on the side of imperialism.

Meanwhile, a new global economic crisis looms, potentially on the order of the 2007-08 capitalist crash which led to a decade of economic depression, as central banks raise interest rates in order to fight inflation exacerbated by anti-Russia sanctions. Inequality has reached record heights. Across the West, fascist and outright fascist forces are growing, feeding off a widespread sense of economic and social despair as living standards fall. Capitalists seek to stave off falling profit rates by demanding an end to social welfare programs enacted at the end of World War II in order to stave off the spectre of communists coming to power. This has sparked massive protests in France, where the government of the haughty banker Emmanuel Macron raised the minimum age for retirement by decree (see article on page 5 of this issue). Yet despite millions taking to the streets more than a dozen times in four months, Macron has so far been successful, because *there is no revolutionary leadership prepared to take on the decaying capitalist system which is producing this social destruction*.

Evolution of the Imperialist Proxy War Against Russia

Throughout the war, there has been a systematic mystification and distortion of every aspect of it by the imperialists and their servile media mouthpieces. U.S. president Joe Biden and the other superannuated Cold War leftovers running the Democratic administration are pushing conspiracy theories no less fanatical and crazed than those of Republican Donald Trump and his rightist culture warriors. For the liberal imperialists, Putin is a demonic embodiment of pure evil, a “new Hitler,” capable of any crime, however illogical. The Russian president might blow up a Russian pipeline, or shell a nuclear power plant that Russia controls – who knows? Putin supposedly steals (Russian-speaking) Ukrainian children to turn them into Russians – why? It is hard to tell if the war planners in the Pentagon actually believe the nonsensical *desinformatsiya* the administration churns out. If they did it would be quite worrisome for the future of the world, to put it mildly, for it could lead to a nuclear miscalculation.

In a monster multimedia article on “Putin’s War,” the *New York Times* (18 December 2022) purported to chronicle “the inside story of historic Russian failures.” They don’t mention that this supposed colossal failure has led to Russia incorporating roughly one-fifth of pre-2014 Ukraine. In the *Times*’ recounting, the Russian military “expected to sprint hundreds of miles across Ukraine and triumph within days,”

with “anticipation of military parades in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.” The Russian army did arrive on the outskirts of Kiev within days, while sweeping through the south, and then it stopped. It never intended to take the capital, or to overthrow the government, but rather to encircle it in order to put pressure on for negotiations. And it had some success in that: as by late March there were preliminary peace talks in Minsk, Byelorussia, which then moved to Istanbul, Turkey. Kiev’s negotiators put forward a 15-point plan to declare Ukraine permanently neutral and give up the goal of joining NATO.

Then suddenly, the Ukrainians withdrew their plan. This followed an April 9 surprise visit to Kiev by British then-prime minister and war hawk Boris Johnson, with a message from “the collective West” (i.e., Biden): “no agreements.”⁵ So after pulling back forces from around the Ukrainian capital (where they were sitting ducks for anti-tank missiles) as a gesture to facilitate talks, Putin declared the talks at a “dead end,” and said Russia’s “special military operation” (SMO) would return to “the plan that was initially proposed by the general staff,” focusing on the Donbass.⁶ This underscores Putin’s major miscalculation: the Kremlin leader underestimated the U.S.’ determination to destroy Russia (as well as the powerful pull of Ukrainian nationalism backed by imperialism). When Putin declared the “SMO” in Ukraine, it was a fairly accurate description: Russia only sent in 150,000 troops, far from enough for a full-scale war. It was a tactic to pressure Kiev and NATO, but the hardline war hawks were adamant: no concessions.

Then came the introduction of a series of Western weapons that were supposed to be “game-changers.” First was the M777 light howitzer, introduced in the U.S./NATO war in Afghanistan. However, they are easily spotted and the machinery turns out to be so sensitive that by now 40% of them have been knocked out, or are out of commission for repairs. Then came the famous HIMARS rocket launchers, which can send “smart” (satellite-guided) missiles up to 40 miles. This put Russian ammunition dumps and battalion headquarters close to the battle front at risk. Their use in bombing the bridges across the Dnipro River risked isolating Russian forces on the west bank, forcing their withdrawal. By now the Russians have figured out countermeasures, so the HIMARS’ efficacy is not what it was. The latest of these *Wunderwaffen* (super-weapons), as the Germans referred to V-2 rockets in World War II, are the Leopard 2 tanks, Abrams tanks and Patriot surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). And after that the Ukrainians want F-16 fighter jets.

The Ukraine War is a precursor war to World War III, as the 1912-13 Balkan Wars were a precursor to World War I, while German intervention in the later stages of the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935-37 and Japan’s 1937 invasion of China were precursors to World War II. One aspect of such wars is that the imperialists can test out their latest weaponry, as the Germans did with the Ju 87 Stuka dive bombers introduced by the Luftwaffe’s Condor Legion in Spain in 1937. The U.S. war planners want to try out their not-so-new technology (the Sherman tank has been in service since 1980, Leopard 2s since 1979 and Patriots since 1981, but never against the Russians). They also want to force Russia to

⁵ *Ukrainska Pravda*, 5 May 2022.

⁶ *New York Times*, 12 April 2022.

bring in its T-90 tanks, not yet deployed in Ukraine, to see how they stack up. Already, the Russians have knocked the first of the two Patriot systems delivered to Ukraine.

For the past six months, the war has been in a holding pattern as the imperialists projected a Russian winter offensive, to be followed by a Ukrainian spring offensive. It's often said that "General Winter" was key to the outcome of past Russian wars, as Napoleon, the German army and other invaders were not able to wage war in the brutal Russian winter. But both the Ukrainian and Russian armed forces have their origins in the Soviet army, and are capable of waging hard fighting in -30° weather. Yet it was a warm autumn and winter, and a rainy spring, so that since November one could say that "General Mud" is in command – and Ukrainian mud is something to behold. The extremely fertile chernozem (black) soil of Ukraine and southern Russia makes this region a breadbasket for the world, but when turned to mud it can stop any tank, especially super-heavy 70-ton Abrams (compared to 46-ton Russian T-90s). One reason for Pentagon reluctance to send Abrams is that it can just see them stuck in the mud.

Dangerous Disinformation and Provocation on the Road to World War

More importantly, U.S. and NATO military officials as well as Western media misconstrue (and possibly misunderstand) Russian military action by interpreting it according to their own doctrines. Pentagon sources reportedly could not fathom why Russia didn't resort to a "shock and awe" display of massive fire power at the start of the invasion. Western military leaders (and some Russian military bloggers) also focus on territorial gains and rapid-fire offensives. In different ways they all share the German Blitzkrieg (lightning war) strategy from World War II.⁷ In contrast, Russian, and before that Soviet, military doctrine aims above all at destroying the enemy's army, in accordance with Karl von Clausewitz's dictum that the main objective in any campaign is: "The military power must be destroyed, that is, reduced to such a state as not to be able to prosecute the war" (*On War* [1873]). So if Kiev kept sending more and more troops into the "meat grinder" at Bakhmut, that didn't overly bother Moscow.⁸

But the most dangerous misjudgment to be drawn by imperialist war planners from the fighting in Ukraine is that "Putin Has No Red Lines," as Nigel Gould-Davies, the senior Russia "expert" at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London, put it in a *New York Times* (1 January) essay, arguing that NATO could keep upping the ante at will, to make ending the war seem less costly than continuing. This is a dangerous game of nuclear chicken. U.S. military spokesmen keep saying in "backgrounders" (not attributable) interviews that they are trying to find what Putin's "red line" is, i.e., the tripwire for total escalation. Yet the Pentagon and its NATO allies keep introducing one new weapon after another, in effect pushing Putin to escalate – by doing what, exactly? Moscow, Washington and Brussels have

⁷ Or their counterparts in World War I, the German Schlieffen plan and French doctrine of *attaque à l'outrance* (attack to the max).

⁸ Yevgeniy Pregozhin, head of the Wagner Private Military Company, tasked with taking Bakhmut (formerly Artemovsk in the Soviet Union), naturally has a different viewpoint.



M1 Abrams tank stuck in the mud in Aurora 17 military exercise in Sweden.

so far confined the fighting to Ukraine, although Kiev is provocatively attacking deep into Russia and the Ukrainian fascists (deeply incrustated in the military apparatus) are brazenly using terrorist attacks.

For his part, Putin has said (in a September 21 speech) that if "the territorial integrity of our country is threatened, we will certainly use all the means at our disposal to protect Russia and our people." He added: "This is not a bluff." Western media and politicians declared this a threat by Putin to use tactical nuclear weapons, which it was not. What government would not say the same? At least in this case, U.S. intelligence sources add that there is little reason to think Moscow would use its strategic nuclear weapons, that there has been no change in Russia's nuclear posture, and that it makes no sense for Russia to use tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine. It might, however, make sense to Ukrainian fascist provocateurs to do something like set off a "dirty bomb" dispersing radioactive material around the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant and claim the Russians did it. And once the taboo is broken, some in the Pentagon may be itching to use tactical nukes against a Chinese atoll in the South China Sea.

Bankruptcy of the Opportunist Left

So we have an extremely dangerous situation. For the first time since the 1990s an imperialist war is being waged on the European continent, a war that involves all imperialist states, big and small. (Even "neutral" Switzerland is getting in on the sanctions act, while Finland has joined NATO and Sweden is trying to join, after long cooperating with the Western military alliance.) The aim of the proxy war that the U.S., NATO and EU imperialists are waging against Russia, following Washington's dictates (and blackmail from Kiev), is to deal Russia a "strategic defeat," as the main U.S. operative on Ukraine, the undersecretary of state Victoria Nuland (the mastermind of the 2014 Kiev coup and contact person for Ukrainian fascists) put it. Any misstep could send the world spiraling toward a thermonuclear third world war. And yet, in the face of this united imperialist front, ultimately aiming at counterrevolution in China, the left is playing no visible role in opposing the war drive.

In fact, the bulk of the left have become "NATO socialists," proclaiming "solidarity with Ukraine" and demanding Russian withdrawal, while tacking on a fig-leaf criticism of NATO. Many denounce "Russian imperialism" as they side with the real imperialists. Some opportunists pretend to have an even-

handed stance. Thus the misnamed "Trotskyist Fraction" calls for "Neither NATO nor Putin," even as it demands Russian troops out of Ukraine, which would be a victory for Ukraine and NATO. And it joins pro-Ukrainian marches whose organizers call for NATO arms to Ukraine.⁹ As always, the so-called Third Camp is really support for the first, imperialist camp. And almost none on the left defend China against imperialism and counterrevolution, joining with the bourgeoisie in labeling it capitalist, and even "imperialist." In Germany, the only sizeable protests against the NATO war have been led by fascist and fascist forces, deadly enemies of the working class and virulent defenders of German imperialism.

"Antiwar" protests that are explicitly against the U.S./NATO war are few and far between. One in New York City on January 14, co-sponsored by the several offshoots (WWP, PSL and SUP) of the Stalinoid tendency of the late Sam Marcy, drew perhaps 200 people. The organizers positioned themselves in front of an electronic American flag in Times Square, sporting banners with social-pacifist slogans like "Money for Our Needs, Not the War Machine" and signs for "Negotiations: Yes! Escalation: No!" (both PSL). In contrast to these appeals for bourgeois support for a class-collaborationist "peace movement," supporters of the Internationalist Group and CUNY Internationalist Clubs stood to the side with signs calling to "Defend Russia, China Against War-Crazed U.S. Rulers!" and "Defeat the U.S./NATO Imperialist War Drive Against Russia and China." A second Marcyite-led demo, in Washington, D.C. on March 18, drew a similar number while an Internationalist contingent numbered 20.

On May Day in New York City, the left march again numbered about 200, this time with an Internationalist contingent of 50 supporters marching behind a banner proclaiming: "Defeat U.S./NATO War Drive Against Russia & China," and "Only Socialist Revolution Can Stop World War III."

The relatively small forces explicitly opposing the NATO war, including in Germany the Stalinist DKP (German Communist Party) and Kommunistische Organisation, as well as groups in Greece, Turkey and the Balkans, almost all seek to recreate a class-collaborationist "peace movement" of the sort they have led in the past. Some are calling for a "new Zimmerwald Conference," the 1915 meeting of the anti-war left during World War I. But that meeting included "social-pacifists" such as Karl

⁹ See "German Left in Lockstep in 'Changed Times'," on page 33 of this issue.

Kautsky, who only wanted to change the imperialists' policy, calling for peace without annexations. Lenin called to break with the social-pacifists and organized the Zimmerwald Left conference at Kienthal the next year. But even there the Bolsheviks were in a minority with their call to turn the imperialist war into civil war against capitalism. Today, there is no basis for even a "Zimmerwald conference" when much of the left is "social-imperialist," backing Ukraine and therefore NATO.

In Europe there have been the first beginnings of larger protest against the NATO war, but largely social-pacifist in character. In Berlin there was a mass demonstration of some 50,000 protesters on February 25, marking the first anniversary of the war, called by Sahra Wagenknecht, the former Stalinist, now left-populist, and feminist Alice Schwarzer. The protest, with ubiquitous blue and white dove symbols, demanded an end to German arming of Ukraine, but called for "peace talks" to end the fighting. In Genova, Italy, on the same day there was a march of some 10,000 people and a port shutdown to stop transport of NATO arms to Ukraine. The mobilization was noticeably larger than other "antiwar" demonstrations around Italy that day that were not explicitly anti-NATO. Various polls have shown that a majority of the Italian population is opposed to sending weapons to Kiev, but in mid-May Italy's fascist prime minister Giorgia Meloni met with Ukraine president Zelensky and vowed to increase Italian arms aid.

Today, the imperialists are united in their war drive as the events head pell-mell toward world war. Yet the imperialist war drive also creates the conditions for revolution. The key to victory, from the dawn of the imperialist era to today, is forging a revolutionary leadership. World capitalism is in crisis, and on the imperialist war drive against Russia and China, on the capitalist dismantling of past social gains and the struggle against mounting fascist forces, the contradiction between the objective conditions and the lack of an organized, genuinely communist leadership of the working class is excruciating. The genuinely Trotskyist forces are tiny compared to the tasks we have. This was also the case in 1938 at the founding of the Fourth International, although it had the renowned revolutionary Leon Trotsky, co-leader with Lenin of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and founder of the Red Army, at its head.

Standing on the program of proletarian internationalism against bourgeois nationalism; fighting for workers action against the imperialist war; calling for revolutionary defense of Russia and China and defeat of the U.S./NATO imperialists and their Ukrainian proxy; fighting for a general strike to defend pension rights in France, for full citizenship rights for immigrants, for working-class leadership of the struggle against all forms of social oppression – against racism, to defend the rights of gay, lesbian and transgender people – in short, in championing the struggle for workers revolution from Moscow and Kiev, to the imperialist capitals of Europe and North America and throughout the capitalist world, the League for the Fourth International is fighting to forge an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International that alone can lead the world's workers and oppressed against the threat of a new imperialist world war.

Only socialist revolution can stop World War III. ■

Free Assange...

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the arrest order and the entire investigation of rape and sexual harassment, declaring there was no basis for suspecting a crime; how the initial police report was rewritten; how weeks later the women's lawyer, an SAP politician running for election, got the case transferred to a friend, Marianne Ny, a prosecutor in Göteborg; how Ny orchestrated Assange's "flight" from "justice"; how he was never actually charged with any offense, only wanted for an investigation; how Sweden refused to give a guarantee that he would not be handed over to the U.S. if he returned for questioning; how the arrest warrant was revoked in 2017, then reinstated in 2019 after Assange was arrested in Britain, then dropped again in order not to compete with the U.S. request for extradition; and much, much more.

The second major development was the publication of a blockbuster investigation by *Yahoo News* (26 September 2021) titled, "Kidnapping, assassination and a London shoot-out: Inside the CIA's secret war plans against WikiLeaks." *The Internationalist* had warned after Assange's first arrest in 2010 that the WikiLeaks founder's "life could be in danger." The U.S. imperialists "seek to silence whistleblowers who have not only caused them diplomatic embarrassment but also lifted a corner of the veil on Washington's Murder, Inc. If the would-be masters of the world cannot stop the leakage of information through judicial/police methods, they will surely resort to other means."¹⁴ It turns out this was no idle concern. The *Yahoo News* article, by Zach Dorfman, Sean D. Naylor and Michael Isikoff, reported that in 2017, in year five of Assange's refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy:

"[T]he CIA plotted to kidnap the WikiLeaks founder, spurring heated debate among Trump administration officials over the legality and practicality of such an operation.

"Some senior officials inside the CIA and the Trump administration even discussed killing Assange, going so far as to request 'sketches' or 'options' for how to assassinate him. Discussions over kidnapping or killing Assange occurred 'at the highest levels' of the Trump administration, said a former senior counterintelligence official."

The article, a massive (7,500 word) work of investigative journalism, was "based on conversations with more than 30 former U.S. officials – eight of whom described details of the CIA's proposals to abduct Assange." The plans were pushed by CIA chief (later secretary of state) Mike Pompeo. The article contains a wealth of detail on how far the planning went, including "shooting out the tires of a Russian plane carrying Assange before it could take off for Moscow," in which case U.S. officials "asked their British counterparts to do the shooting if gunfire was required, and the British agreed." (When Assange heard talk of an escape to Russia, he rejected it out of hand.) Interestingly, the writers spell out how when Sweden dropped its extradition request in 2017, the sealed U.S. indictment was rushed through because the Justice Department was afraid the CIA would carry out its plans without having a putative "legal" basis for its smash-and-grab/rub-out plans.

So the former U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture officially declares that the treat-

¹⁴ "Free Julian Assange! Drop All Charges!" *The Internationalist* No. 32.

ment of Assange was "psychological torture," after the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention earlier stated that his confinement in the embassy was "arbitrary deprivation of liberty." A detailed exposé of U.S. plans to kidnap or assassinate the WikiLeaks founder is published. Yet, this all has zero effect, because fundamental imperialist interests are at stake. The crux of the indictment against Assange is to treat the relationship of a journalist to a source exposing official misdeeds as a *criminal conspiracy* against the state, while the U.S. asserts that its 1917 Espionage Act has *universal jurisdiction*. This goes along with U.S. indictments of foreign officials on corruption and drug-trafficking charges. Washington is decreeing that *the "rules-based" New World Order* it has unilaterally imposed, and that it upholds by proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, will be run according to *Washington rules*, and no others.

The persecution of Julian Assange is a fundamental threat to the free speech rights "enshrined" in the U.S. Constitution, but regularly violated when this suits the capitalist rulers' interests. The prosecution is a defense of imperialist crimes: as Melzer notes, "Assange published evidence of state-sanctioned war crimes, including torture, through WikiLeaks. Yet it is Assange who is prosecuted, whereas the torturers and other war criminals enjoy complete impunity." The same goes for Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, Mumia Abu-Jamal and others who have stood up to the criminal rulers. Like Mumia, Julian Assange is a prisoner of the capitalist class war against the exploited and oppressed. We must fight to free these class-war prisoners, and to put an end to the crimes they have courageously exposed and denounced, by the only means possible, fighting for international socialist revolution. ■

WGA Strike...

continued from page 2

WGA with this gross statement. In L.A. there are reports of Local 399 members going in before scheduled pickets so they're supposedly not technically "crossing" a picket line. This is dead wrong. *No one* should enter a struck facility, and certainly not union members. *Picket lines mean don't cross, period* – no ifs or buts.

The picket lines need to have real, material consequences for the bosses. Nothing should be delivered or picked up, no one should go in, there should be no auditions even at distant locations, just as no scripts should get written, even from home. Several showrunners have shut their production down despite receiving threatening letters by the production companies. These are important demonstrations of solidarity, but not enough to shut the industry down and win this fight.

For the Writers Guild East and West, the strike is in response to an "existential crisis," in part due to changes in the industry as streaming increasingly replaces broadcasting. The WGA is demanding higher pay and a higher up-front payment rate, rather than relying on residuals, which have dwindled to next to nothing for many. The spread of mini-rooms, with a handful of writers being paid lower rates, as production companies produce not just a pilot and an episode or two but as much as a season's worth of shows before getting the green light, is another factor. Over the last ten years, the percentage of writers being paid the minimum rate for their work has jumped from one-third to almost half making minimum.

As *Abbot Elementary* writer and WGA West strike captain Brittani Nichols pointed out, the studios are trying to transform writing for shows into a "gig economy." AMPTP chief negotiator Carol Lombardini flippantly said writers are "lucky to have" term employment, and insultingly claimed that the companies can't budge on writers' demands because they are "incompatible with the creative nature of the industry"! WGA strikers are putting forward demands around elimination of their jobs by artificial intelligence. This automation of the arts has also been a big issue among SAG actors, who have seen provisions added to their contracts stating that their likenesses and voices can be used by companies forever. A recent Netflix contract included language stating that actors' voices could be used "by all technologies and processes now known or hereafter developed, throughout the universe and in perpetuity" (*New York Times*, 2 May).

The AMPTP bosses are playing hardball. We remember how in the face of anti-communist witch-hunting by the U.S. House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in the late 1940s, the studios blacklisted the Hollywood Ten, many of them screenwriters, on charges of being communists. The entertainment moguls are also tight with the Democratic Party. Recall that when Democratic kingmakers decided to launch the presidential candidacy of Barack Obama, the first thing they did was take him to Hollywood to get the endorsement of studio chiefs. And remember how this past December, Democrats in both houses of Congress (including the "Squad" of "progressives" led by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) passed a law to prevent a railroad strike, imposing a contract with no sick days which had been voted down by a majority of the workers. The Democrats, like the Republicans, are a party of capital.

A strike of the film, TV and now internet media industry is a major event politically. Writers alone have limited power. That's why, as we wrote of the 2007-08 writers strike, "Don't Let Writers Stand Alone – All Media Workers Should Join the WGA on Strike!" (*The Internationalist*, December 2007). We added, "Craft Divisions Endanger Labor: Build a Single Media Union." As we emphasized then, and again in the 2021 near-strike by IATSE workers, it is necessary to fight to oust the pro-capitalist union bureaucrats, who like the studio bosses are closely tied to the Democratic Party. We need to forge a class-struggle union leadership and build a workers party that can lead all the oppressed in a fight for a workers government.

All out to win the WGA strike! ■

Rail Disaster...

continued from page 13

tion. But as Marxism explains, and experience shows, "regulation" by the capitalist government will never be more than a slap on the wrist of its corporate masters.

Railroad Workers United, a caucus active in several rail unions, has responded to the Norfolk Southern derailment by stepping up a campaign for "public ownership" (generally taken as a euphemism for nationalization) of the railroads.³ This call has also been raised by the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America (DSA),⁴ the

³ "Amid Ohio Nightmare, Rail Worker Alliance Urges All of Labor to Back Railroad Nationalization," *Common Dreams*, 17 February.

⁴ "The Case for Nationalizing the Railroads," *In These Times*, 16 February.

United Electrical Workers (UE)⁵ and other reformists. With an industry notorious for its disregard of safety, Marxists call for *expropriation*, to underline that not a dime should go to the capitalist owners who send "bomb trains" over the rails with no regard for the safety of the workers or the communities through which they pass. But government ownership of the rail freight companies, or "quasi-public" ownership as with Amtrak, is no guarantee of safety, as they will still be operated according to the dictates of the market, where profit rules and safety comes last.

Meanwhile, whether rail companies are owned by private capital or by the capitalist government, to fight for the health and safety of rail workers and the whole population, what's needed is a fight for **workers control over railroad operations**, beginning with **union safety committees** empowered to **shut down unsafe working conditions**.

Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific railroads rank as the top two "worst employers" of all major companies in the United States, according to Glassdoor. Not only is there terrible management and little job security due to continual layoffs, work schedules and the workload are brutal. In a 2021 conference call with investors, a Norfolk Southern executive bragged about putting profits and "efficiency" ahead of safety:

"Our push for efficiency led to record train weight and record train length in the quarter. These larger trains, combined with our strategy of better matching train size and locomotive horsepower, drove us to record fuel efficiency and enabled us to get the job done with a smaller workforce and a record low count of locomotives."

–"Norfolk Southern aims to further boost train length as volume rebounds," *Trains.com*, 27 January 2021

In the contract battle last year, a majority of railroad workers, angry over working conditions and the lack of safety, voted against the rotten "agreement" brokered by the Biden administration between the rail union bureaucrats and the railroads. With possibility of a national rail strike brewing, Biden and the Democratic majority in both the House and the Senate voted to ban the rail workers from striking and passed legislation imposing the contract that included no paid sick days. As we noted at the time, this deal was blow to workers and to safety. We wrote:

"This blatant **strikebreaking** sums up countless reasons why the capitalist Democratic Party is a noose around the neck of labor. This underlines why **workers urgently need to break with all the bosses' parties** and **build a class-struggle workers party** to lead the battles of all the oppressed."

–"Democratic Party Strikebreakers Shackle Railroad Workers," *The Internationalist*, December 2022 (see page 14)

Ultimately, expropriation will only occur under a workers government that expropriates all of capital. Sugar-coated slogans like "public ownership" cannot accomplish what only a socialist revolution will, to replace an economy governed by the relentless drive for profits with a socialist planned economy in which production is to fulfill human needs. That is the lesson of capitalist rail disaster in East Palestine, Ohio. ■

⁵ Statement of UE General Executive Board, "Railroads Must Be Brought Under Public Ownership" (30 January).

Railroad...

continued from page 15

reforms and can only survive by driving down the living standards of those whose labor it exploits to generate its profits. What's happening to railroad workers is happening to working people across the country and throughout the capitalist world. As an Internationalist Group sign at a December 8 solidarity-with-railroad-workers rally at New York City's Grand Central Station read: "Sellout Union Tops Roll Over for Democratic Party Strike-breaking – Rail Workers Need Class-Struggle Leadership."

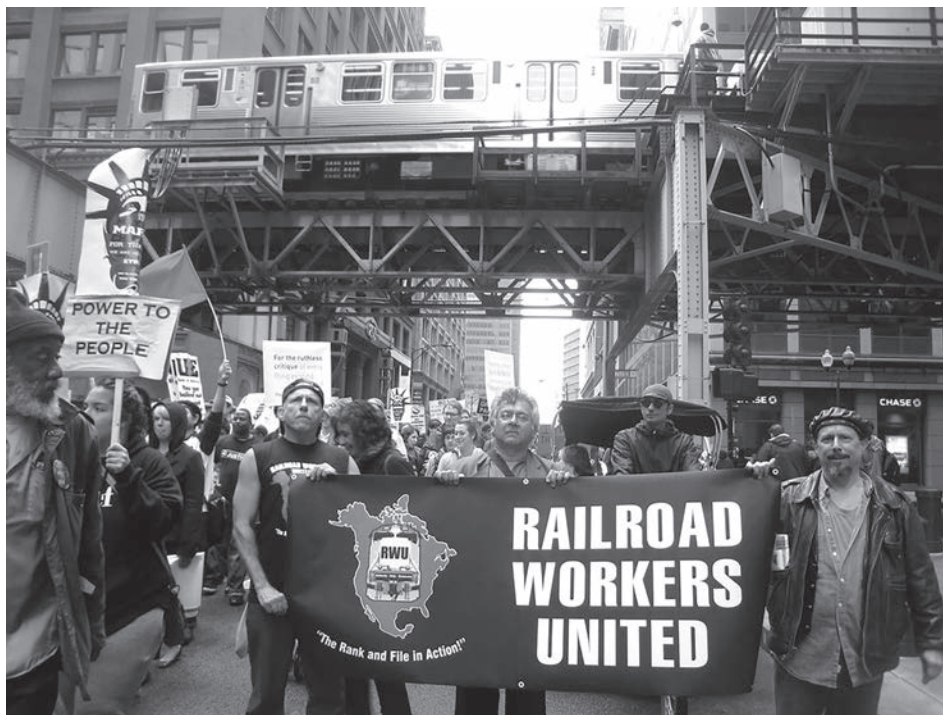
Oust the Bureaucrats, Break with the Democrats, Build a Workers Party!

This is a very different perspective than that being put forward by oppositions in the railroad unions today. That many rail workers want to fight is clear. Recently, the BLET division of the Teamsters elected a new president, Eddie Hall, who campaigned against the tentative agreement agreed to by his predecessor, criticizing the fact that the union leaders didn't strike after it was (finally) legal to do so. In the BMWED, the Rank and File United (RFU) caucus criticized the TA, but didn't take an official position against it, while Railroad Workers United (RWU), which is active in several unions, campaigned against it. But what none of them did was to say it's time to hit the bricks, *now*, rather than looking to the White House and Congress. Instead, they sought to maneuver with the "progressive" Democrats in Congress and their seven-days-sick-pay ploy.

The Intercept quotes Ross Grooters of the RWU saying that rail workers weren't "concerned about the Squad" and its vote to impose the contract. He went on: "Is it strike-breaking on the one hand? Yes. But it's a distraction from the work that needs to happen," calling criticisms of Bowman and other DSAers "misplaced." (Grooters is a DSA city council member in Pleasant Hill, Iowa.) The RWU, RFU and other rail union oppositionists were at the Labor Notes conference in Chicago in June, where they met others in this milieu working in league with, if not directly in, the Democratic Party.⁷ In a *Labor Notes* (2 December) article titled "What Would It Take for Rail Workers to Win?" Grooters refers to Sarah Nelson of the flight attendants union having "found ways to work within the RLA," with rolling strikes and the like.

But to win, rail workers and all workers will have to go up against the government, prepared to defy back-to-work injunctions, strike bans and the whole arsenal of anti-labor laws meant to hogtie the unions (Taft-Hartley bans on "secondary strikes," Supreme Court prohibition of sit-down strikes, state legislation like New York's Taylor Law outlawing strikes by public workers, etc.). In the past, some hard-knuckle union leaders have stared down judges and presidents, like United Mineworkers leader John L. Lewis, who called coal miners out on strike – three times – in 1943 in the middle of the imperialist World War II. "You can't mine coal with bayonets," Lewis defiantly declared.

⁷ See "Labor Notes Conference 2022: 'Solidarity' with the Democrats," in *The Internationalist* Nos. 67-68, May-October 2022.



Railroad Workers United demonstrate in Chicago.

But Lewis was no class-struggle militant and ended up supporting the Republicans in the 1944 elections, eventually knuckling under to the state.

A fighting union leadership must be built on a program of militant class struggle down the line. While reformists talk of "public ownership" of the rail lines – like Amtrak! – a class-struggle opposition would call for *expropriating the robber barons who own the railroads*, and would enforce *workers control*, beginning with *union safety committees* empowered to *shut down unsafe working conditions*. The rail bosses are once again on a tear trying to impose one-worker crews – on giant trains, often with more than 200 freight cars – ultimately aiming for driverless trains. The RWU has a perceptive article⁸ detailing how reducing crews to a single person is a huge safety danger. But what may soon be posed is the need for an all-out rail strike to stop one-person crews, defying everything the capitalist state can throw at strikers.

That underlines the fact that *it will take a revolutionary leadership to win!* Railroad workers cannot defeat the bosses and their government working "within the RLA." As an Internationalist Group speaker at the New York December 8 solidarity rally noted: "We

⁸ "What's Wrong with Single Employee Train Operations?" at www.railroadworkersunited.org.



Internationalists in December 8 solidarity with railroad workers march in New York City's Grand Central Station.

to one is an injury to all." The ILWU gave expression to this mighty call by shutting down every port on the U.S. (and Canadian!) West Coast on Juneteenth (June 19) in 2020 denouncing police brutality and systemic racism. Among railroad workers, the fight against racial oppression and for full equality is crucial today as it was in 1894, when the strike of the Pullman rail car workers was undercut by the refusal of the American Railway Union (ARU) to accept black sleeping car porters as members.

ARU president and future socialist leader Eugene Debs was jailed for leading that strike. We Trotskyists have taken Debs to task for his statement that socialists "have nothing special to offer the Negro" – the quintessential expression of a "color-blind" outlook of the *left* wing of labor, as against the racist, exclusionary right wing. Yet Debs strongly opposed racial discrimination and fought at the 1894 ARU convention against the exclusion of black workers.⁹ He was jailed again – under the Espionage Act! – for his courageous opposition to the imperialist World War I. Eugene V. Debs was an honorable socialist, the polar opposite of *the DSA today, which is an organization of strikebreakers and war-makers*. Running for president from his jail cell, Debs declared in an essay published in 1919: "From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet I am Bolshevik, and proud of it."

Joe Biden's use of the Railway Labor Act to block a strike by railroad workers was hardly the first time that Democrats have used the power of the capitalist state against the workers. In the coal strike of 1978,¹⁰ Democratic president Jimmy Carter used the Taft-Hartley Act to repeatedly issue injunctions trying to block a mine strike and force miners to accept a sellout contract, which they repeatedly tore up and burned. The miners finally gave in for lack of a class-struggle leadership to oust the UMWA's "reform" president Arnold Miller, who came to office in a Labor Department supervised election of the sort pushed by Labor Notes and Teamsters for a Democratic Union. Once in office thanks to the feds, the government owned him – as they did with TDU-backed Ron Carey, until jailing him for funneling dollars to Democrats.

Concluding his remarks at the December 8 rally, the Internationalist speaker asked the crowd, "Is Joe Biden a strikebreaker?" The crowd yelled the answer, "Yes!" He continued: "Is the Democratic Party strikebreakers?" Again, the answer was "Yes!" Well, then, he went on, "Are we going to remain silent about the DSA 'Squad' who voted for this?" The crowd responded, "No!" The IG speaker concluded: "Hell no! We need to break with the Democrats and Republicans and build a fight workers party!" That struggle for a workers party and a workers government is the program that is needed for railroad workers, and all working, poor and oppressed people, to win. ■

⁹ Eugene V. Debs, "The Color Line and the American Railway Union: Comments at the Convention" (18 June 1894). On the merits and limitations of Debs, and related topics, see James P. Cannon (founder of American Trotskyism): "E.V. Debs" (1956) and "The Russian Revolution and the American Negro Movement" (1959).

¹⁰ See the pamphlet *The Great Coal Strike of 1978* on the Internationalist web site (www.internationalist.org).



Trucks block roads in the Serbian district of Mitrovica, Kosovo, December 27, 2022. The protests by the besieged population in the Serb-inhabited area of Kosovo were sparked by a provocation approved by the (German) EU High Commissioner for Kosovo. Chancellor Scholz has announced that Germany intends to take the Western Balkan states under its tutelage.

War In East...

continued from page 8

head of IG Metall in the key district of Baden-Württemberg (*Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 23 May 2022).

Scholz had every reason to praise the “so far quite prudent wage policy” of the DGB (German Labor Federation) bureaucrats. In November 2021, ver.di (the public sector and white collar employees union) accepted a 2.8% wage increase for public sector employees, particularly in health care. Since there was no strike, members were not allowed to vote on these results. In September 2022, IG Bergbau, Chemie, Energie (the mine, chemical and energy union) agreed on two wage increases of 3.25% over two years, i.e., 6.5%, plus two one-time payments of €1,500 for workers in the chemical industry. In October, IG Metall in Baden-Württemberg accepted a wage increase of 5.2% in June 2023 and 3.3% in May 2024, plus two one-time payments. All of these cases were cuts in real wages, given that annual inflation then was over 10% (and the rise in key energy and food costs is much higher).

However, we should remember what happened in the first instance of “concerted action,” launched in 1967 to curb wage demands and serve as a break on inflation. The union bureaucracy naturally cooperated and met regularly with representatives of the government, employers’ organizations and the Bundesbank (Germany’s federal bank). Real wages started falling. However, this led to a series of wildcat strikes, mainly in the mining and steel industries, but also in the public sector – the famous September 1969 strikes of up to 140,000 workers, resulting in significantly increased wages for over 8 million workers.

In the midst of this chain of betrayals, we already had a foretaste of the potential power of the working class. Last July 15 [2022], there was a 48-hour strike in German ports and demands for inflation-compensating wage increases against the real wage loss. After a judicial ban on strikes failed, the bosses and their capitalist state responded with brutal police action and a ban on further strikes prior to collective bargaining at the end of August. The power of the several thousand workers in Germany’s largest port city

of Hamburg was demonstrated as they faced down the cops in riot gear who had attacked them earlier, pushing back amid physical altercations and chanting, “We are the port.” In the end, the dockers won up to just over 9%, with a new round of negotiations in 2023.

The much-promised “Hot Autumn” of social unrest has not materialized thanks to the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy and the Left Party, who act as a fire department to contain potential hot spots and deflect “uncontrolled” eruptions of class struggle. Ultimately, what’s needed is a proletarian counter-offensive against imperialist war that puts forward transitional demands – ranging from reduced working hours without a loss in pay and a sliding scale of wages (a cost-of-living escalator) to workers control of factories. Such demands are at bottom incompatible with capitalism and must point the way to socialist revolution. This means a struggle for a revolutionary workers’ party of the proletarian vanguard that will break the stranglehold of the reformists and unleash the dormant power of the working class in Germany.

Against the Threat of De-Industrialization – For a Red Europe of Workers’ Councils!

Heeding Washington’s call for sanctions on Russia, the German and European Union (EU) rulers have managed to shoot themselves in the foot. Since the 19th century, in two world wars, German imperialism has been fueled by a “*Drang nach Osten*” (“drive toward the East”) to meet its needs for raw materials, fossil fuels and food. For decades, German industry has been profitable because of its access to cheap Russian natural gas. No longer. Over time, it is no solution for German capital to purchase expensive liquid natural gas from the U.S. and Qatar while half the world – and especially China – buys cheap Russian energy supplies. The German economy will lose its competitiveness on the world market. In the short run, this can only be compensated for by a sharp reduction in the standard of living of working people in Germany and the EU.

The attempt to isolate Russia from the world market by the sanctions regime failed right from the start. Now the German bourgeoisie, after its initial delusions about the “deindustrialization of Russia” (from

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen), is itself threatened with deindustrialization. Out of economic necessity, it has taken up the cause of subjugating Russia through defeat on the battlefield in Ukraine and regime change in Moscow. This has increased the risk of a nuclear war enormously. But Russia can hit back, with impact. For the working people, oppressed and poor of the world, the question has hardly ever been sharper since World War II: it’s either socialism or barbarism.

The COVID-19 pandemic – which has killed over a million people in the EU, along with border closures, lockdowns and fights over protective equipment and compulsory vaccination – has exposed the fragility of the European Union as an imperialist alliance. Likewise, the all-round disruption of the world market, which makes clear the contradiction between, on the one hand, the suffocating framework of private property and national borders and, on the other hand, the international development of production. And all this is exacerbated by the attempt to force Russia to surrender through sanctions. Italy and Spain, for example, which have never relied on Russian gas to the extent that Germany has, want to know why they should reduce their energy use to offset Germany’s lower gas supplies.

Germany is scrambling to replace Russian gas (the much-ballyhooed deal with Qatar will cover just under 3% of its gas consumption), and U.S. exports are unlikely to fill the gap. The effects can already be felt in production cuts (e.g., fertilizers) in the chemical industry: BASF is threatening to dismantle its European plants (including its giant base in Ludwigshafen) and relocate them to the United States and China. ArcelorMittal has already shut down steel factories in the face of high energy prices: “Production in Germany is no longer competitive” (*Die Welt*, 12 September 2022). But the EU persists in self-destructive anti-Russian sanctions, and is lodging gentle complaints in Washington over the subsidies the U.S. government is giving to its electric vehicles and renewable energy branches.

In view of the enormous difficulties in its economic and military reorientation, German imperialism would like to streamline and centralize the European alliance it dominates. Scholz said as early as July 2022 that the European Union could no longer afford national vetoes because they would take away the EU’s security and foreign policy decision-making powers. But he cannot avoid the fact that the alliance is not a European “superstate,” that the various bourgeoisies have their own national interests. The continent remains very vulnerable to U.S. imperialism’s divide-and-conquer schemes. A hundred years later, there are echoes of when Washington intended, as Leon Trotsky said, to “put Europe on rations”. On that occasion (1924) he noted, “Before our eyes, European social democracy is being transformed into a political agent of American capital.” Today as well, aided and abetted by the Greens.

At the same time, the German imperialists want to expand the EU. While meeting resistance from the Polish nationalist government in Warsaw, they want to revive their involvement in southeastern Europe under the umbrella of NATO. After Berlin pushed ahead with the de-

struction of the multinational deformed workers’ state of Yugoslavia in the 1990s (recognition and arming of the fascist government in Croatia, support for the UCK in Kosovo), the SPD-led government now wants to expand its sphere of influence in the Balkans. Scholz recently wrote about “The global turning point” in the influential American magazine *Foreign Affairs* (5 December 2022) that:

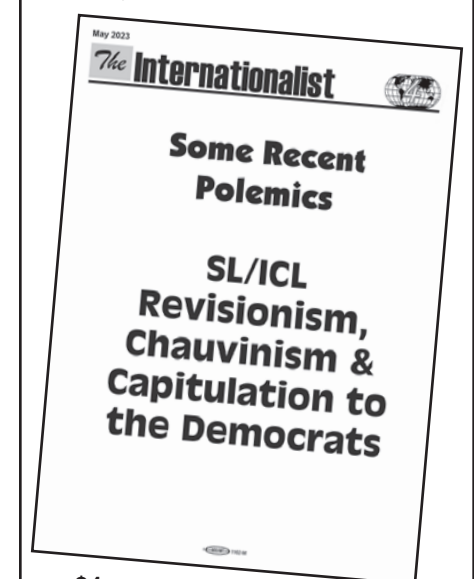
“EU accession of all six countries of the western Balkans must finally become a reality, a goal to which I am personally committed. That is why I have revived the so-called Berlin Process for the western Balkans, which intends to deepen cooperation in the region, bringing its countries and their citizens closer together and preparing them for EU integration.”

The Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International, on the other hand, says: *German imperialism, out of Eastern Europe!*

With the strike wave in Britain and the looming pension dispute in France (see article on page 5 of this issue), where surveys show unions and three-quarters of the population are flatly opposed to raising the retirement age, Europe is showing the first signs of a revival of the class struggle. It is developing excruciatingly slowly, in large part because of the lack of revolutionary political leadership with the political courage to fight imperialist war head-on. Not only the governing Social Democrats, but also the overwhelming majority of the so-called “far left” have become mere PR agents for the imperialist war drive. Why was there no “hot autumn”? That’s why, right there.

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One and All, NATO Socialists and Pawns of German Imperialism

German Left in Lockstep in “Changed Times”

The following is a translation of the article “Die Gleichschaltung¹ der Linke in der Zeitenwende,”² in *Permanente Revolution* No. 6, Winter 2022/23, published by the Internationalistische Gruppe, German section of the League for the Fourth International.

In his government statement in the Bundestag (Germany’s parliament) on February 27, Chancellor Olaf Scholz of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) proclaimed a “*Zeitenwende*,” a changing of the times. Accusing Russia of waging a war of aggression that was “contrary to international law” and “cannot be justified by anything or anyone,” he received, according to the official protocol, the applause not only of the parties of his red-yellow-green (SPD, FDP, Greens) “traffic light coalition” but also of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), the Left Party and some members of the Bundestag of the far-right AfD (Alternative for Germany). When he then announced arms deliveries to Ukraine and the establishment of a “special fund for the Bundeswehr” (the German army) of €100 billion euros, anchored in the Constitution, to beef up the German military, only his coalition colleagues and the CDU/CSU applauded.

Speakers from the various parties then took the floor, including the Left Party (Die Linke).³ From Die Linke we heard the same refrain as from Social Democrat Scholz: “Of course, we clearly share the view that Russia is waging a war of aggression against Ukraine in violation of international law,” said the co-chair of the Left Party caucus, Amira Mohammed Ali. The Russian attack “cannot be relativized by anything, it cannot be justified by anything,” and Russian troops “must be withdrawn immediately.” Sanctions? “Makes sense” if they strike at Putin and Russian oligarchs. Weapons to Ukraine? On that the Left Party filed a motion reaffirming the previous, hypocritical position of *all* Bundestag parties not to supply weapons to

¹ *Gleichschaltung* was a Nazi German expression for the regimentation of the universities and other cultural institutions in Hitler’s Third Reich, according to which they all had to march in lockstep with the regime.

² *Zeitenwende*, the expression from German chancellor Olaf Scholz has been alternatively translated as “historic turning point,” “change of era,” “changing times,” all indicating that the Russian invasion of Ukraine signifies that Germany, Europe and the world are no longer in the “postwar era.”

³ The Linkspartei (Left Party), or Die Linke, is a social-democratic party formed in 2007 by a merger of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism), which was the successor to the former Stalinist governing party of the DDR (German Democratic Republic), the East German bureaucratically deformed workers state, and a West German offshoot of the SPD, the traditional party of German social-democracy. The electoral scores of Die Linke have declined substantially over the last decade, but it still has 39 members of the federal parliament and over 100 seats in state legislatures in eastern Germany, where it regularly gets between 10% and 30% of the vote.



The parliament of German imperialism marches to war with “great unity.” Closing ranks in the Bundestag as all parties declared Russia’s military action in Ukraine “illegal under international law.” During the debate on February 27, Left Party spokeswoman Amira Mohamed Ali (at the lectern, top and bottom left) tells Chancellor Olaf Scholz (SPD) that Die Linke copied and pasted many passages from the government motion into its own.

war zones. *But*, she said to Scholz, on condemning the Russian attack there is “great unity among the democratic caucuses in this House.” That is why in the Left Party motion, “many passages of your motion are also taken over verbatim.” On NATO instigating the war? Or the fascist contamination of the Kiev regime? Not a word.

So, the “democratic caucuses” in the Bundestag close ranks. The parliament of German imperialism marches off to war with “great unity.” This war in Ukraine was instigated by the Western powers’ NATO military alliance encircling Russia, ripping up its pledges that it would not extend “one inch” eastward, which was a condition of German capitalist reunification in 1990; by the U.S. and European Union (EU) staging a “color revolution”⁴ in Kiev in 2004 and a coup led by fascists and ultra-nationalists in 2014, overthrowing the elected “pro-Russian” government; by holding annual large-scale “war games” to practice an invasion of Russia; by categorically refusing to give Moscow

⁴ The “color revolutions” were a series of coups d’état instigated by the United States to install pro-Western regimes in former Soviet-bloc countries (Serbia 2000) and Soviet republics (Georgia [Rose] 2003, Ukraine [Orange], Kyrgyzstan [Tulip] 2005).

any security guarantees. After all this, what does Die Linke do? It endorses NATO’s argument for war against Russia. In short: *the Left Party, social democrats of the second mobilization, are also social-imperialists, like their big brothers the SPD, only with a wafer-thin pacifist fig leaf.*

It was only the ultra-rightist Alternative for Germany that even mentioned the extension of NATO to Russia’s border; that the German government used “false promises” to Ukraine to “lure [it] into the EU and NATO”; that Berlin had been financing Ukraine for the last eight years, and that the government, as well as Scholz personally (as vice-chancellor of the 2018-2021 Grand Coalition led by Angela Merkel), bear “joint responsibility” for the war. Of course, for the fascistic AfD, such “anti-war” tones serve as window dressing for their racist hate campaign against refugees and multiculturalism, and for their call for the “biggest rearmament offensive since the Second World War,” extending far beyond the €100 billion. And, of course, these arch-reactionaries also label the Russian war a “breach of international law.”

In reality, “international law” is pure fiction. “Wars of aggression” are forbidden? And the wars of U.S. imperialism in Viet-

nam, Afghanistan (with German participation) and Iraq? State borders must never be changed by military force? So what about the destruction of multinational Yugoslavia, starting with Berlin’s recognition of the independence of Croatia and Slovenia in 1991, and the massive shipment of arms from Germany to the fascistic Croatian government of Franjo Tudjman? Breakaway territories (like Donetsk and Lugansk) are not allowed to “unilaterally” exit an internationally recognized state, especially with “foreign” military support? And the birth of an ethnic Albanian state of Kosovo, with the help of US/NATO military midwives? Of course, the U.S. never speaks of “international law,” only of a “rules-based world order” ... according to Washington rules. The United States has refused to unconditionally accept the rulings of the International Court of Justice since it declared the U.S.-contra war in Nicaragua to be illegal under international law in 1986.

While all parties in the Bundestag – bourgeois as well as social-democratic – were beating the war drums against a Russian “war of aggression” against Ukraine that supposedly “violates international law,” we Trotskyists of the League for the Fourth International have underlined NATO’s responsibility for instigating the nationalist (on both sides) Russian-Ukrainian war. We called for smashing the U.S./NATO war drive against Russia and China, along with the imperialists’ anti-Russia sanctions. And as we have done since 2014, we reiterated defense of the Donetsk and Lugansk “People’s Republics” and stressed the need to permanently stop the Ukrainian nationalists/fascists pushing ethnic cleansing of the Russian-speaking population of Donbass. Now that the conflict has turned into a NATO war via its Kiev proxy regime against Russia, we stress that it is the duty of all opponents of imperialism to defend Russia and China against the imperialist war.

In doing so, the LFI has given no political support to any of the adversaries, and has always called for revolutionary workers struggle against the capitalist rulers in Kiev and Moscow. Drawing on the Leninist lessons of World War I, we insist that the main enemy is imperialism, which must be defeated through the struggle for international socialist revolution. Thus, when a full-scale Russia-Ukraine war broke out, and later transformed into a NATO proxy war against Russia, the LFI acted firmly, according to criteria that we had already established beforehand. It has been different with most of the left, where the Russia-Ukraine war has produced the greatest confusion, programmatic wavering and political disarray in decades. The pseudo-Trotskyists cuddle up to pro-Ukrainian imperialist “peace” demos and try to cover their betrayal with empty formulas critical of NATO. The remaining Stalinists, nationalist opponents of Lenin’s revolutionary internationalist program, ask themselves whether Russia is imperialist or not.

Just imagine: *the imperialists are wag-*

YouTube / Die Linke

ing a war in Europe, and while the social-imperialists in government (SPD), together with the Green warmongers, are driving it forward, they are “critically” (or uncritically) accompanied by the social-imperialists on stand-by, while other leftists are paralyzed! Their reformist policies of various hues, and their inveterate opportunism, forbid them to say the essential thing: “the main enemy is at home.” And, precisely because it is impossible for them to wage revolutionary class struggle against the imperialist enemy, this capitulation creates the ignominious situation in which it is the far right that is leading antiwar protests! To combat this conspicuous collapse of the left, a tenacious programmatic struggle is needed to forge the nucleus of an authentically Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party of the working class capable of fighting for the liberation of all the oppressed – through international socialist revolution.

Die Linke on War Course

While the main agent of pro-imperialist German social democracy, the SPD, is directly driving the murderous slaughter from its position in the government, the Left Party, an auxiliary and junior social democracy, is still formally in opposition – at least at the federal level.⁵ But instead of mounting a real resistance, it is the antithesis of that. Various leftists in and around the Left Party want it to play the role of an opposition more credibly. However, their dancing around Die Linke’s shadow opposition is only a charade on the grand stage of class betrayal. The Left Party – along with its supporters – is fulfilling its actual reason for existence: its role in preventing and aborting the rebirth of a proletarian revolutionary movement. It seeks to keep the lid on the churning pot of workers’ unrest over capitalist crises and binds the working class to the imperialist war course. It cannot be ruled out that Die Linke could be part of a future federal government if its services were needed to quell labor unrest or if war fatigue increased.

The pro-NATO forces emerged strengthened from the Left Party conference held in Erfurt at the end of June 2022; Die Linke’s pro-imperialist course in the Ukraine-Russia war was not altered, receiving majority support with “alternatives” to arms deliveries. The debate centered on the party executive’s Motion 3, “Stop Wars and Rearmament.” It blamed Russia alone for the war in Ukraine, called for withdrawal of Russian troops and made suggestions to the imperialists on how to improve and change their sanctions policy, in order to effectively promote regime change in Russia. It cast NATO as a military alliance that has sometimes gone overboard, which they had criticized, but that their criticism failed to say that others, namely Russia, were waging what it termed “imperial wars.” The Chinese deformed workers state also came under rhetorical fire in the leadership motion. And that was it: no mention of NATO’s eastward expansion and of the role of this imperialist military alliance in instigating this war.

To be sure, the party leadership did not accept a motion seeking to legitimize arms deliveries to Ukraine. That will come later, as a prerequisite demanded by the bourgeoisie before they let Die Linke lay

⁵ The left party has since the late 1990s been in governing coalitions at the state level, including in Berlin until earlier this year, and still is in Bremen, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Thüringen, where it is the largest party.



Left Party Wedding (Berlin) branch at massive 27 February 2022 demonstration against Russian invasion of Ukraine and for “solidarity” with Ukraine, and thus with its fascist-infested government and armed forces.

hands on government affairs. Moreover, as said above, this refusal only reaffirms the conventional policy of German imperialism from the pre-February 24 epoch. In any case, the openly warmongering forces within the Left Party are growing beyond Gregor Gysi⁶: now the Berlin chairwoman and newly elected deputy party chair are among them. By accusing Russia of pursuing an “imperialist policy,” Die Linke wants to suppress a fight against the real imperialists and their NATO military alliance, and in particular against German imperialism. Alluding to Clausewitz’s statement that war is the continuation of politics by other means, Die Linke believes that “war must not be a means of politics.” In reality, one has to say that the politics of the Left Party are the continuation of the NATO war in Ukraine by other, “anti-militarist,” means.

In addition, the co-chair of the Left Party, Janine Wissler, an ex-pseudo-Trotskyist in the tradition of the renegade Tony Cliff, called for sanctions against Russian elites and also for a cap on gas prices in order to make the ban on Russian natural gas more bearable. For his part, the co-chairman of the Left Party caucus in the Bundestag, Dietmar Bartsch, wanted fast, serious negotiations for

⁶ Gregor Gysi was the main leader of the PDS since December 1989 when he presided over the liquidation of the DDR as it was swallowed by imperialist West Germany.



Die Linke “peace tank” 14 April 2022 rally in Neubrandenburg, where Left Party Bundestag caucus co-chair Dietmar Bartsch spoke. Bartsch wants to rush Ukraine into the European Union. It was precisely the lure of Ukrainian membership in the EU that triggered the nationalist/fascist Kiev coup of 2014.

Ukraine to join the European Union. With the EU’s austerity demands, this will hit Ukrainian working people hard, and would complete Ukraine’s economic uncoupling from Russia, which was a purpose of the far-right Maidan coup of 2014. Basically, the policy of the Left Party aims to improve the war policies of German imperialism. With its “fight” for participation in the government, it wants to help shape and co-manage the austerity policy, the deportation policy and the war policy. It wants to have its hand on the levers of the repressive organs of the ruling class to suppress the oppressed classes. The politics of Die Linke are simply class betrayal.

This quite openly pro-imperialist, pro-NATO course did not go unchallenged, but in all critical votes the Left Party leadership was able to clearly assert itself against the critics of NATO in its own ranks. Moreover, the NATO critics are by no means genuine anti-imperialists or socialists, much less revolutionaries. The replacement motion, tabled by Left MEP Özlem Demirel, received 42% of the votes at the party congress. But the differences with the party leadership can only be discerned with a magnifying glass. The motion begins by declaring, “No to Russia’s war – for immediate withdrawal of troops.” The “Russian war of aggression” is classified as “contrary to international law,” it proclaims “solidarity” with “the Ukrainians who are

defending themselves against the Russian attack” – i.e., with the Ukrainian army, including fascist units like the Azov Battalion. Although it talks of NATO’s “shared responsibility,” this has to do with the conflict with Russia that “preceded” the war, while it blames Putin alone for the war.

The left dissidents are obviously trying to maintain their good reputation – and in the case of some, their paid offices – in the face of the very latest knock-out epithet, “Putinversther,” Putin understander. Moreover, their motion declares support for the “‘Appeal: No to War!’ and mobilizations of the peace movement.” The appeal, initiated by Die Linke and SPD members, expresses their unity “with the hundreds of thousands of people who after the start of the war ... took to the streets to express their outrage at Putin’s war,” and their “solidarity with the Ukrainian population”: “Together with them we demonstrated against Putin’s war and for peace.” Although the appeal declares that “massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr does not help the people in Ukraine” and it criticizes the “acquisition of conventional weapons,” the huge demonstrations, full of blue and yellow Ukrainian flags, have pleaded for such a rearmament. With all their pseudo-pacifist rhetoric, these anti-Russian “peace” demonstrations serve only as propaganda for the imperialist war machine.

A revolutionary response to the suffering and justified pacifist sentiments of the broad masses of working people, in Ukraine and elsewhere, would organize anger at the consequences of the imperialist war on a class basis. In Germany it would call for the abolition of imperialist sanctions, for the import of Russian gas (put Nord Stream II into operation) and for workers’ actions against arms deliveries and militarization. Above all, it would call for defeat of the imperialist warmongers whose eastward expansion of NATO prepared the present war and whose refusal to give Russia any security guarantees triggered the war. A party that makes such demands and translates them into action would not be welcome in capitalist parliaments, but it could lead a revolutionary struggle against this imperialist war.

Leftists in Die Linke Called Up to the Anti-Russia Front

Then there is the hodgepodge of smaller groupings in and around Die Linke, several of which falsely pose as Trotskyists, even though their pro-imperialist policies are the opposite of Leon Trotsky’s uncompromising struggle against imperialism. Let’s briefly consider the positions of these groups on the Russia-Ukraine war.

Antikapitalistische Linke (AKL, Anti-Capitalist Left):⁷ “Russia’s war against Ukraine is a war of aggression against a sovereign country. This war is contrary to international law!... The AKL ... demands the immediate withdrawal of all troops and the cessation of all acts of war. This war is an imperialist war by a capitalist regional power against a smaller state.” (AKL Resolution, 10 April 2022)

Gruppe ArbeiterInnenmacht (GAM, Workers’ Power Group):⁸ “Immediate withdrawal of all Russian troops from Ukraine! Recognition of Ukrainian independence and statehood by Moscow! No

⁷ Led by the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) of Peter Taaffe.

⁸ Section of the League for the Fifth International (L5I), led by British Workers Power.

Die Linke Wedding

Ruptly-TV



A delegate of Ukrainian origin at the Erfurt party conference of the Left Party, dressed in national costume complete with garland, rebuked leftists in the party who spoke against arms deliveries to Ukraine.

support for Western economic sanctions against Russia! For workers action to stop the supply of arms and ammunition to all warmongers while the aggression continues!" (Statement by the League for the Fifth International, 24 February 2022)

Internationale Sozialistische Organisation (ISO):⁹ "To end this war, Putin's regime must be sanctioned and Ukraine must be supported in resisting the aggression. Immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from all of Ukraine, including territories occupied since 2014. Solidarity and support for the armed and unarmed resistance of the Ukrainian people. Arms supplies at the request of the Ukrainian people in the fight against the Russian invasion of their territory." (Statement of the International Bureau of the ICFI, 1 March 2022)

Marx21:¹⁰ "The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24 was an act of imperialist aggression and a violation of the Ukrainian people's right to self-determination. For Ukrainians it is a war of national self-defense. At the same time, it is a proxy war against Russia on the part of the Western imperialist powers, led by the U.S. and organized through NATO. We are against both imperialist powers." (IST statement on the war in Ukraine, 15 March 2022)

Sozialistische Alternative (SAV):¹¹ "No to the war in Ukraine! For the right of the people of Ukraine to decide their own future, including the right of self-determination for minorities! For the return of Russian troops to barracks in Russia and the withdrawal of all NATO troops from Eastern Europe. No trust in the 'peacekeeping' imperialist forces involved!" (Statement by International Socialist Alternative, 24 February 2022)

Sozialistische Organisation Solidarität (SOL):¹² "Stop the war in Ukraine. Withdrawal of Russian troops and end of bombing. Withdrawal of NATO troops from Eastern Europe. Build the international movement of workers and youth against the war." (Statement of the Committee for a Workers' International, 24 February 2022)

Sozialistische Zeitung (SoZ, Socialist Newspaper):¹³ "The Russian attack on Ukraine must be roundly rejected as an imperialist act.... Nothing can justify the aggression – not even the active encircle-

⁹ German branch of the "International Committee of the Fourth International" (ICFI, formerly United Secretariat), followers of Ernest Mandel.

¹⁰ From the International Socialist Tendency (IST), supporters of the anti-Trotskyist renegade Tony Cliff.

¹¹ German affiliate of International Socialist Alternative (ISA), which split in 2019 from the CWI.

¹² German section of the CWI.

¹³ Other supporters of the ICFI.

ment policy on the part of NATO, which actually forms the background for the Russian actions." (*Sozialistische Zeitung*, 15 March 2022)

As you see, these positions are strikingly similar. Some call for arms deliveries to Ukraine (which can only come from NATO), others for the withdrawal of NATO troops from Eastern Europe (a little late for that, a solid dozen Eastern European

countries are already members of NATO). But they unanimously ascribe sole responsibility for the war to Putin and Russia, and call for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine, while most support the Ukrainian "resistance," i.e., Kiev's armed forces. In so doing, these pseudo-Trotskyists agree with the Left Party's NATO socialists and join in the anti-Russia hue and cry whipped up by Western media.

This has been noticed by parts of the bourgeois press, e.g., *taz* (*Die Tageszeitung*), the daily newspaper close to the Greens. The *taz* complains:

"Resistance to rethinking is currently to be found in many texts and verbal interventions, all of which follow a similar structure. At the beginning they condemn Vladimir Putin as an aggressor, usually with the sentence: 'This war of aggression cannot be excused by anything.' Then follows a big but – and the same phrases that have been used for all these years...."

– "The left and the Ukraine war: the NATO-was-at-fault left," *Die Tageszeitung*, 8 March 2022

The warmongers have noticed the pro-imperialist "blueshift"¹⁴ of today's not-so-far-left left. But they require more. They demand the complete *Gleichschaltung* (regimentation) of the left: "Let's not have any belly-aching when eating crow,¹⁵ comrades!"

RIO: Pied Piper of Reformists in Die Linke

Naturally, there is friction among the different brands of the left in and around Die Linke. Some still want to hide their surrender behind a fig leaf, others are utterly shameless, like supporters of the anti-Trotskyist "International Bureau of the Fourth International" who claim that joining NATO is exclusively "the business of the Ukrainian people" (instead of fighting against Ukraine joining the imperialist military alliance). For revolutionary communists based on the program of Lenin and Trotsky, there is no point in rooting around in this swamp, whose denizens have long since adopted the logic of reformism. The right-centrist Revolutionäre Internationalistische Organisation (RIO), German offshoot of the misnamed Trotskyist Fraction, thinks otherwise, constantly proposing blocs, fronts, or even a common organization with these impostors. Now that Die

¹⁴ In physics a "redshift" refers to the increasing wave lengths of light, bringing it closer to the red end of the spectrum, emitted by an object that is moving away, while an object coming closer (in this case to the political "mainstream") will emit shorter waves, the "blueshift." The flags of both NATO and the European Union are blue.

¹⁵ *Kröten schlucken*, swallowing toads.

Linke is clearly facing a split, RIO is stepping up its maneuvering in this milieu.

As early as the fall of 2021, before the German federal elections, RIO started its campaign against government participation by Die Linke, offering the various left-wing currents in that party an alliance against the right-wing governmental course of the party leadership. This was a desperate attempt by RIO to keep the Left Party's reformist project alive as a supposed opposition. Die Linke's payoff for its pro-capitalist course was a miserable 4.9% of the votes in the federal election. Its presence in the Bundestag was only saved by winning three seats by direct election.¹⁶ This caused some ripples among the membership. But the leadership reiterated its course of jettisoning almost everything that differentiates Die Linke from the SPD in order to get junior partner posts in a coalition – or at least keep their posts in the red-red-green (or R2G) Berlin Senate (city government). (Now, due to problems with the 2021 election, there will be a repeat election in February 2023 in Berlin, with Die Linke's shaky government posts once again at risk.)¹⁷

After the election, RIO's *Klasse gegen Klasse* website ran the call, "Berlin: Why All Leftists Should Reject the R2G Coalition Agreement," ending with the suggestion: "Instead, it will be necessary to continue to put pressure on the new Berlin Senate on the streets and in the workplace, the universities and schools." Just refusing to participate in bourgeois governments hardly amounts to breaking with reformism. Only a few years ago, (Young Socialists leader) Kevin Kühnert spearheaded a revolt in the ranks of the SPD against the continuation of the Grand Coalition (GroKo) with the CDU. Kühnert spoke vaguely of a "renewal" of the party. In the end, the GroKo was continued until a new coalition with bourgeois parties could be cemented (resulting in the current "traffic light" gov-

¹⁶ Elections to federal and state parliaments in Germany are two-fold, some seats awarded by plurality in the election district while others are distributed by proportional representation based on percentage of the national (or state) vote, so long as the party receives at least 5% of the vote. In the 2021 vote, the Left Party fell below this threshold.

¹⁷ Due to irregularities in the 2021 vote in Berlin, a repeat election was held on 12 February 2023. As a result of a decline in votes for the left, the incumbent red-red-green (SPD-Die Linke-Greens) coalition lost its majority and was replaced in the city government by a Grand Coalition of the SPD and Christian Democrats.

ernment) and nothing else changed in the SPD, except that Kühnert became No. 2 (general secretary of the SPD). A bit of left-wing posturing in your youth can spice up your CV in the social democracy.

As we saw before the elections, RIO and *Klasse gegen Klasse* simultaneously campaigned for a rejection of the R2G coalition within Die Linke and for the creation of a new party slightly to its left. We see here the various methods of the reformist program in action as RIO sought to put pressure on the capitalist state: a) from the streets, b) from within a reformist party, c) from outside of the reformist party, and d) through a new reformist party. These continual machinations are a distinguishing trait of the Trotskyist Faction, which it learned from its forefather, Nahuel Moreno, whom it later disowned. These pseudo-Trotskyists are following in the footsteps of arch-Stalinist Maurice Thorez, who, as leader of the French Communist Party, brokered the popular front between the Socialists and the bourgeois Radicals in 1935, but remained outside the government. As Leon Trotsky observed in June 1936, when France was gripped by mass strikes (which the Stalinists betrayed in the service of the Popular Front), the French CP "wish[ed] to preserve an outward semblance of independence in order better to subject the working masses to the People's Front, i.e., to the discipline of capitalism" ("The Crucial Stage" in *Whither France?*).

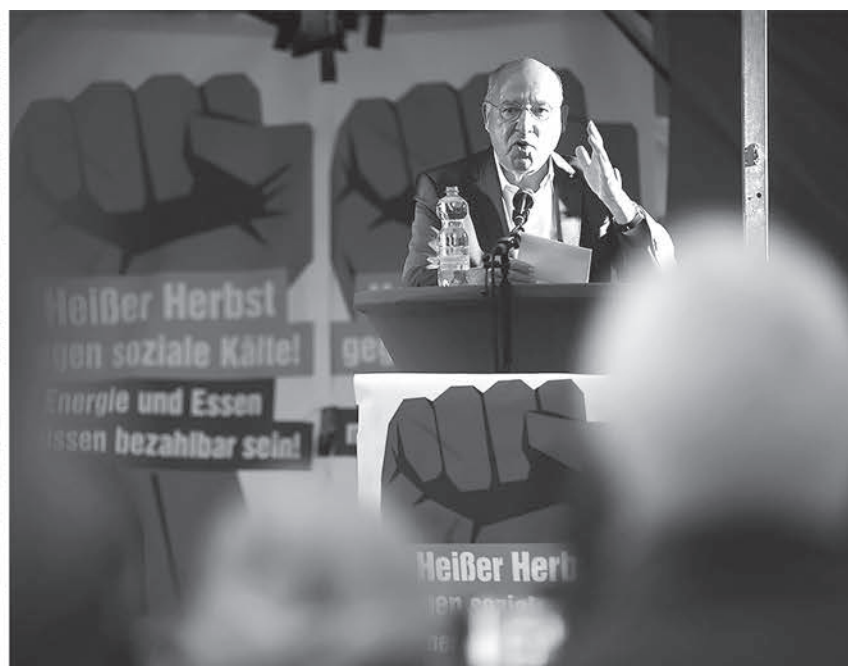
Since the Left Party's latest electoral defeat (2.9% in the state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia), it has been in an "existence-threatening" crisis (as party co-chair Wissler put it). Should it lose its parliamentary group status in the Bundestag and in state parliaments, this could mean financial bankruptcy. "They receive a lot of money for election campaigns, parliamentary work, political education work and party-related foundations (the Left Party estimates around €150 million in 2021)," according to one account.¹⁸ With a split in the party hovering in the air, RIO saw its time had come. In view of the involvement of Die Linke in the imperialist NATO war drive, they made another attempt to build a new "revolutionary" party together with all sorts of reformists:

"Therefore we are proposing to the AKL,

¹⁸ "Against the wall: Theses on the situation of the Left Party at the end of October 2022," *Junge Welt*, 18 October 2022. In addition, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, as a foundation linked to the Left Party, received in 2021 €79.8 million in financing from the German state.



Opportunist left auxiliary forces of NATO. "Class-Struggle Bloc" marches in the large demonstration called by the DGB and other union leaders for "peace and solidarity" with Ukraine, Berlin, 13 March 2022.



Some 5,000 people demonstrated in Leipzig on 5 September 2022, at a rally called by the Left Party against high energy and food prices. To assure that the rally would not turn into an anti-war protest, the leadership brought in NATO backer Gregor Gysi (right), as the closing speaker. The party's campaign for a "Hot Autumn" was a flop, while right-wingers brought up to 100,000 onto the streets in East Germany against the war and inflation.

the SAV, SOL, Marx21, as well as to the progressive parts of the Left Party youth and to all those currents and individuals who want to set about building an actual socialist opposition, that after the Left Party congress a conference be organized to take stock of the party congress, and to debate there the question of how, in view of the social-chauvinist and imperialist rearmament policy of the 'traffic light' government, a class-struggle, socialist and revolutionary alternative can be built in a break with reformism."

—*Klasse gegen Klasse*, 19 June 2022

But the experienced impostors of SOL, SAV, AKL, etc. need no assistance from RIO in maneuvering and posing as a "left" opposition, so this variant of its pressure-politics projects also failed to succeed.

In the fall, as far-right forces mobilized thousands of nationalist demonstrators against the war, the energy crisis, inflation, etc., and the Left Party's "Enough Is Enough" campaign met with little response — partly because it was *not* antiwar — RIO published a call "For a Revolutionary Break with the Left Party" (*Klasse gegen Klasse*, 15 October 2022). With signatures from some current or former members of the Left Party youth group, RIO issued a call for a conference to draw the line on 15 years of Die Linke. In preparation for this January 2023 conference, RIO asked rhetorically, "Is a revolutionary socialist party to the left of Die Linke possible?" (*Klasse gegen Klasse*, 28 December 2022). Leaving aside how much of a following this initiative aroused, one must first and foremost ask what the hypothetical party is supposed to stand for. This article speaks of a "transitional program." To get an idea of what RIO means by that, let's take a look at its "emergency program" for the (stillborn) "Hot Autumn"¹⁹ (*Klasse gegen Klasse*, 3 October 2022).

In this seven-point program we read of a "price freeze now" for "gas, electricity, fuel, food, rent"; automatic adjustment of wages and benefits according to inflation; "expropriation of the energy companies without compensation under the control of the employees"; "social and ecological restructuring of the energy system and the entire economy";

¹⁹ In September 2022, as it became clear that far-right forces were leading opposition to the war, Die Linke called for a "hot autumn" of struggle against escalating fuel and heating costs. But the campaign fizzled, mainly because it did not oppose the imperialist war and sanctions which sparked the inflationary spiral.

"End the war. Neither Putin nor NATO. End sanctions and arms shipments. No €100 billion for rearmament!" Also "Admit all refugees! End of the system of holding camps! Against right-wing incitement!" Etc. So you have to ask, how are all these nice things supposed to come about? There is talk of "strikes against war and crisis," which would involve "organizing among the rank and file of the unions themselves" since "the union leaders prefer to make pacts with the companies and the government" — but nothing about a struggle against the union bureaucrats. Various demands amount to begging the government, while the rest are just pious wishes.

This is not at all a Transitional Program like the founding document of the Fourth International written by Trotsky. There are no provisions that would serve as a bridge between the current demands of the masses and the goal of socialist revolution. How should a price freeze be implemented? It says nothing about union-based committees to control prices. How should the right-wing incitement against immigrants and the left be answered? No mention of workers defense committees. Who should implement the "employee control" of nationalized energy companies? The bourgeois state? *Workers control*, as conceived by Trotsky and the Communist International as a transitional demand, can only be achieved through workers occupying the workplaces. And on the key issues, there's nothing about fighting for a workers vanguard party to lead it. All in all, this is a reformist program that a slightly more left-wing Left Party could put forward.

But is this then supposed to be an "imme-

diated program" distinct from the transitional program? That would be the dichotomy between the minimum and maximum program of social democracy. Especially around the war, the class question sharply stands out. "The war will not be stopped by NATO weapons" (!), writes RIO, addressing "opponents of the war" (i.e., defenders of Ukraine) who seek salvation in the imperialist military alliance. Instead, these hustlers for a third way call for workers action that "simultaneously blocks NATO and Russia war logistics." In doing so, they equate NATO imperialists with their targets. Revolutionary communists, on the other hand, call for workers action *against arms deliveries to Ukraine* in order to *defeat the U.S./NATO imperialist war against Russia*. In any case, the purported pacifist neutrality of RIO is wholly fictitious. With their perennial policy of chasing whatever "movement" is currently popular in petty-bourgeois milieus, these professional tailists often end up on the side of bourgeois reaction.

So too with the war in Ukraine. The RIO/FT are well aware that the enormous pro-Ukrainian "peace demos" are in fact mobilizing in support of the imperialist war against Russia. An article on the large-scale demonstration in Berlin at the end of February reported that "hardly anyone at the rally opposed the militarization of Germany.... In addition to a sea of blue and yellow flags, flags of the European Union could be seen everywhere" (*Klasse gegen Klasse*, 28 February). But "several hundred thousand people in the capital took to the streets." "What is to be done?" RIO asked itself. Its answer: join in. So it came to pass that on March 13,

when union leaders once again brought tens of thousands onto the streets of Berlin, RIO and other opportunist left groups organized a supposed "class-struggle and internationalist bloc." But even here, they had to admit, there were "many voices in favor of sanctions and, in some cases, for arms deliveries to Ukraine" (*Klasse gegen Klasse*, 13 March).

It wasn't just "voices," the DGB leadership that initiated the demo called for "tough economic sanctions" against Russia, and was only "critical" of (i.e., not opposed to) the militarization. Whether the left propaganda bloc takes a stand for or against arms deliveries and sanctions is beside the point. They take part in demos for "solidarity with the Ukrainians," i.e., with the Kiev regime, which serves as NATO's spearhead against Russia. These are mobilizations for the war against Russia, and RIO, with its "Neither Putin nor NATO" banner, goes along for the ride. The multicolored left opportunists are swimming with the war tide. These *NATO auxiliaries* have enlisted in the war effort and are making their contribution with pseudo-pacifist slogans to gutter propaganda for the imperialist assault on Russia. Even when it comes to smaller demos of the left, e.g., on May 29, called by the "Social Programs Rather Than Guns" alliance, this is only a dispute over the state budget, not resistance to imperialism.

ICL Tries In Vain To Mobilize Pacifists

The final link in this chain of lockstep leftists who have enlisted in the imperialist war against Russia (and ultimately against the Chinese deformed workers state) is the centrist International Communist League (ICL) and its local section, the Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SpAD, Spartacist Workers Party of Germany). As the Left Party leadership chases after the warmongering SPD and the party left bows to the leadership, the various reformist pseudo-Trotskyists are chasing after the left in the Left Party, while the centrist variants are hot on the trail of the reformists. As noted earlier, the RIO/FT has tried in vain for several years to lure leftists in the Left Party into one project or another for a slightly more left-wing party. And just as in the fall of 2021 RIO sought to foment opposition within Die Linke against government participation, in the spring of 2022, the SpAD brought up the rear, using the same methodology, with an initiative, "Kick NATO Supporters Out of Die Linke."

As a reminder, the ICL (and before it,



Beating the war drums at "peace" demonstration in Berlin, 13 March 2022. DGB union chief Rainer Hoffman called for "strong sanctions" against Russia, while many participants waving blue and yellow Ukrainian flags called for more arms deliveries from NATO to Ukraine.



Internationalistische Gruppe at Luxemburg-Liebnecht-Lenin demo in Berlin, January 15. Signs say: “Defeat the U.S./NATO Imperialist War Drive and Proxy Regime in Ukraine”; “SPD/Greens, Butchers of Yugoslavia, German Imperialism Out of the Balkans”; and “Defend China Against Imperialism and Counterrevolution.”

the international Spartacist tendency) was the embodiment of revolutionary Trotskyism for three decades, until the mid-1990s, when, following the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and allied Eastern European bureaucratically deformed workers states including East Germany, the ICL succumbed to the wave of defeatism within the left worldwide.²⁰ The founders of the League for the Fourth International and the Internationalist Group were cadres expelled from the ICL in 1996-1997. The latter-day ICL abandoned the Leninist-Trotskyist program bit by bit until, in 2010, it scandalously defended the military invasion and occupation of Haiti by U.S. imperialism. During a year and a half of the pandemic, the ICL/SpAD completely took leave of the class struggle, not even capable of taking to the streets to protest the murderous racist police repression. Then, just as the bourgeoisie decided to abandon the lockdowns, these ex-Trotskyists suddenly discovered that supporting these measures (which in fact they were the only ones to religiously follow) is class betrayal.

Awakened from its long slumber, the SpAD/ICL took a look around and tried to orient itself politically. In doing so, it discovered a supposed conflict between the pro-NATO leadership of the Left Party and pacifist tendencies in the membership and tried to exploit this contradiction. It proposed to exclude open NATO supporters like Gregor Gysi and Thüringen prime minister Bodo Ramelow from Die Linke, even printing up a motion to that effect, and went to the Erfurt party conference with a banner that got a mention in some bourgeois media. With all this, they only made themselves look ridiculous since, as we have shown, *the entire Left Party* has embarked on the pro-NATO, anti-Russia war course. Not only that, with their super-sly tactics, they prettified pacifist currents and even German imperialism. The SpAD writes of Die Linke:

“For decades their position ‘against rearmament’ and ‘against foreign deployments of the Bundeswehr’ was compatible with the goals of German imperialism.... The ‘peaceful’ policies of German imperialism over the past 30 years have focused on the exploitation and subjugation of the dependent countries of Europe from Lisbon to

²⁰ In 1989-90, the then-revolutionary ICL intervened in the DDR where it uniquely fought against capitalist reunification of Germany, including running in the last DDR election, on a program for a “Red Germany of Workers Councils.” The founders of the LFI played a leading role in that intervention. In 1990-92, the ICL also intervened in the Soviet Union fighting against counterrevolution. The latter-day ICL has since abandoned the Trotskyist program it fought on then.

Athens to Riga within the framework of the EU [European Union] and with the help of the euro, thereby further expanding its economic and political dominance in Europe under the umbrella of U.S. imperialism.”

– *Spartacist*, Spring 2022

During its long COVID sleep, the SpAD had obviously been struck by pacifist fever delirium and afflicted by a wondrous amnesia. It has forgotten Germany’s imperialist military deployment in Afghanistan and the massacre in Kunduz;²¹ also the First Gulf War in 1990, the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, the KFOR troops in Kosovo,²² the naval mission in the Horn of Africa and the Mediterranean, and the German armed forces in Mali, Libya, Sudan, Western Sahara, the training of the *peshmerga*²³ in Syrian Kurdistan. Apparently all forgotten or unnoticed, along with German frigates in the South China Sea, “Defending Germany in the Hindu Kush” and the defense of German security and freedom in the “Indo-Pacific.” The fact is that pacifist rhetoric often leads to military action, much as the Social Democracy in 1914 suddenly forgot its ringing anti-war resolutions with the outbreak of the imperialist World War I, and as can be observed with the pacifist German left today.

Pacifism is a bourgeois ideology, and “peace movements” are by their very nature popular fronts built on defense of the capitalist foundations. As Trotsky wrote in an article in the middle of the revolutionary year 1917:

“Theoretically and politically, pacifism has

²¹ During almost the entire U.S. war on and occupation of Afghanistan, from January 2002 to July 2023, several thousand German troops were stationed in the northeastern region, which the Bundeswehr was in charge of, supposedly in a non-combat role. In September 2009, the German commander called in an airstrike in Kunduz where two hijacked jet fuel tankers had bogged down. Villagers rushed to siphon off the precious fuel, and when the U.S. jets struck, it set off a fireball, in which at least 140 people were killed. See “Afghan Massacre Blows Apart German Occupiers’ Lies,” in *The Internationalist* No. 30, November-December 2009.

²² The Kosovo Force (KFOR), is a NATO “peacekeeping” military force that has occupied the region since 1999 when it was effectively split off from the former Yugoslavia by U.S./NATO bombing of Serbia. This was the first time the German Luftwaffe (air force) engaged in combat since World War II. See “German Fourth Reich: Back in the Balkans Again,” *The Internationalist* No. 7, April-May 1999.

²³ *Peshmerga* is the generic term for Kurdish fighting forces of several different factions. The forces in Syrian Kurdistan, trained and armed by U.S. and other NATO military forces, including the German Bundeswehr, are the YPG (People’s Protection Force), allied with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) which, however, is banned in Germany and other NATO countries.

just the same basis as the doctrine of social harmony between different class interests. “English and American pacifism ... provide[s] an outlet for the petty-bourgeois citizen’s fear of world-shaking events, which after all can only deprive him of the remnants of his independence; they lull to sleep his watchfulness by useless notions of disarmament, international law, and arbitration tribunals. Then, at a given moment, they hand him over body and soul to capitalistic imperialism which has already mobilized every means necessary for its end: technology, art, religion, bourgeois pacifism and patriotic ‘socialism.’

“We were against the war, our deputies, our Ministers, were all against the war,” cries the French petty bourgeois: “Therefore it follows that we have the war forced upon us, and in order to realize our pacific ideals we must pursue the war to a victorious end.”

– Leon Trotsky, “Pacifism as the Servant of Imperialism” (June 1917)

That is why the high-speed *Gleichschaltung*, or regimentation, of the reformist and centrist left that is unfolding before our eyes is not unexpected news. On the contrary, it is the corollary of the policy of class collaboration that underlies both social-democratic and Stalinist reformism. For the same reason, the centrist maneuvers of RIO/FT and the SpAD/IKL have been failures. Parties and political tendencies built on reforming capitalism (with slogans like “social programs not rearmament,” “books not bombs,” “butter not cannons,” etc.) are inevitably inclined to participation in government, and in times of great social and economic upheaval necessarily succumb to pressure for national unity.

The *Zeitenwende*, or changing of the times, that we are witnessing today follows on the heels of a pandemic that has rocked the entire capitalist world, it comes amid capitalism’s mounting decline, and now with the crazed war drive of the U.S. and NATO/EU imperialists against Russia and China, the escalating threat of a thermonuclear world war. Reformism is dead, peace movements are doomed to failure – and to transform themselves into war movements. Thus, the only way out for the exploited and oppressed of the world is class struggle, directly pointing to international socialist revolution. This was the program of Lenin and Trotsky, for which the Internationalistische Gruppe and the League for the Fourth International are fighting today. ■

Slams Door...

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from his hospital bed that he shot Faulkner. Yet the cop who stood guard over Mumia in the hospital reported, “The negro male made no comments.” Sabo refused to let the cop testify. Prosecutors won a death sentence by claiming that Mumia’s former membership in the Panthers showed he was a committed “cop killer.”

Mumia’s persecution was not just by a racist judge and a vicious prosecutor. Mumia has been in the crosshairs of the rulers from age 15 when he was a spokesman for the Philly Panthers. Back then, in March 1968, FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover wrote: “The Negro youth and moderate[s] must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teaching, they will be dead revolutionaries.” By 1981 when local cops shot, beat and arrested him, Mumia had been a target of the FBI – as well as U.S. Army Military Intelligence, the Naval Investigative Service, the Air Force Office of

Special Investigation and the U.S. Secret Service – for more than a dozen years.

Throughout Mumia’s ordeal, there have been counterposed strategies over how to defend him, as was true during the defense of the Scottsboro Boys, Sacco and Vanzetti and other major political defense cases in the past. We have argued with liberals and leftists whose strategy ultimately boiled down to calls on the courts to deliver justice to Mumia. Some even had illusions in “progressive” Democratic D.A. Larry Krasner. A March 11 Philadelphia rally, “Bearing Witness in the Case of Mumia Abu-Jamal,” featured calls on the judge to “do what’s right,” to ensure “basic fairness” and “follow the law.”

Even after Judge Clemons’ ruling, an article appeared in *Workers World* (3 April) under the headline, “Denial of Mumia’s appeal: An affront to basic justice and the law.” The article stated: “Mumia Abu-Jamal, his family and his supporters around the world had every reason and right to hope that all their hard work would pay off in persuading Judge Lucretia Clemons from the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas to follow and apply the law, as has been done in other cases.” “Every reason and right to hope”? This says it all about reformists’ illusions in the capitalist state! Class-conscious fighters for Mumia’s freedom, on the contrary, had “every reason” to expect that Clemons would do exactly what her predecessors had done.

We in the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International have a very different strategy. We look to the policy put forward by James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, who wrote in 1927 of the policy of class-struggle defense:

“It puts the center of gravity in the protest movement of the workers of America and the world. It puts all faith in the power of the masses and no faith whatever in the justice of the courts. While favoring all possible legal proceedings, it calls for agitation, publicity, demonstrations – organized protest on a national and international scale. It calls for unity and solidarity of all workers on this burning issue, regardless of conflicting views on other questions.”

– “Who Can Save Sacco and Vanzetti?” *International Labor Defender*, January 1927

Mumia Abu-Jamal was targeted because the government saw him – and sees him today – as a powerful voice for the downtrodden, and a revolutionary threat to the state that tramples on them. At protest after protest, as we call out the names of victims of racist cop terror, there are always new names. Recently, an Ohio grand jury ruled that there will be no charges against the death squad of eight Akron police who, last June, pumped 46 bullets in seven seconds into the body of 25-year old Jayland Walker. “The officers were legally justified in their use of force,” the Ohio Attorney General said.

As Marxists we know that the law is there to defend the interests of the ruling class. The police and military, the courts and jails, are the core of the capitalist state which enforces the exploitation and oppression of the masses on behalf of the exploiters and oppressors. Who will stop the never-ending war against black people? That is the urgent task of a politically awakened multiracial and multiethnic working class, defending all the oppressed and led by a genuinely communist party fighting for international socialist revolution. ■

Ayotzinapa: It Was the *Capitalist* State!

Mexico: López Obrador Exonerates the Army for the Disappearance of the 43 Students

The following is a shortened translation of the article from the forthcoming issue of *Revolución Permanente*, published by our comrades of the *Grupo Internacionalista*, Mexican section of the *League for the Fourth International*.

One of the most resounding promises of the election campaign of Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador, leader of the bourgeois populist National Regeneration Movement (Morena), was that under his government the case of the 43 disappeared students of Ayotzinapa would be resolved. On the 26th of every month, in the streets and schools of Mexico there are commemorations of the night of 26-27 September 2014, when six students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural Rural Teachers College of Ayotzinapa were murdered in Iguala, Guerrero, while the police and military orchestrated the kidnapping and disappearance of 43 of their classmates.

As president-elect, López Obrador (universally known by his initials, AMLO) formalized this promise when he met with the parents and *compañeros* of the 43 at the Museum of Memory and Tolerance in the capital in September 2018. There he pledged to form a Truth and Access to Justice Commission for the Ayotzinapa Case (CVAJ) to address the case, vowing: “We are going to know what really happened, to find out where the young people are and to see that those responsible are punished.” The parents expressed their gratitude and confidence in what AMLO promised.

It was not until August 2022, almost four years later, that the Truth Commission submitted its first preliminary report by Alejandro Encinas, the undersecretary for human rights of the Interior Ministry. The extensive report does not yet provide an answer to the heartfelt question of where the normalistas are, although it explicitly recognizes the falseness of the so-called “historical truth” fabricated by

Jesús Murillo Karam, the attorney general in the preceding government of Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In particular, the report exposes how this lying official story was intended to cover up the participation of the Federal Police and the Army in the kidnapping and disappearance of the teachers college students. It also details how torture and the violation of the legal norms of due process were used not only to sustain the lie and the cover-up, but also to guarantee impunity for many of those responsible for the massacre in Iguala and the subsequent disappearance of the students.

The story told by the “historical truth” was simple: police from Iguala and other nearby municipalities allegedly detained the students to hand them over to a group of drug traffickers, the *Guerreros Unidos*, who believed that among the students there were *sicarios* (hired killers) from a rival group. Once in the hands of the criminals, the students were allegedly taken to the garbage dump in the municipality of Cocula, where they were supposedly killed and their bodies burned in a huge bonfire. In short, it was all a local affair in the badlands of the *Tierra Caliente* of the state of Guerrero. Yet as was already pointed out at the time, the version of Murillo Karam and the Peña Nieto government contradicted amply proven facts that confirmed that both the Federal Police and the Army had participated step by step in the kidnapping of the students.

This infamous “historical truth” was defended in hundreds of articles in the bourgeois press by the PRI government’s unofficial spokesmen, and in more than a few books (many of which are nothing more than crude libels that sought to blame the students for what happened). Yet it aroused fury among large sectors of the population that followed the news of the case with growing concern. In the huge protest demonstrations of late 2014 and early 2015, after counting from one to

forty-three, there was a resounding cry, “It was the state!” The contingents of the Internationalist Group completed the chant with one addition: “It was the *capitalist* state!”

The Army in Ayotzinapa

Alejandro Encinas, president of the Truth Commission for the Ayotzinapa case, presented his preliminary report on August 18, 2022. He emphatically qualified what happened in Iguala as a “state crime” and detailed the participation of municipal, state and federal police and officials, as well as the Mexican Army, in the disappearance and execution of several of the students. Chief among the accused military officials is Colonel Jose Rodríguez Perez, who in 2014 served as commander of the 27th Infantry Battalion in Iguala. According to the report, Rodríguez Perez not only ordered the execution of six students who were still alive days after they were kidnapped, but also ordered the bodies of several of the murdered students to be taken to the battalion’s facilities in order to destroy (cremate) their corpses.

There then began a barrage in the capitalist media against Encinas. Not a few recalled Encinas’ membership in the (ultra-reformist) Mexican Communist Party to accuse him of slandering the Army. Reactionary columnists described the CVAJ report as the “hysterical truth” and defended the “general conclusions” of the hoax enunciated by Murillo Karam. On the other hand, the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI), who had done a detailed and professional job in revealing the inconsistencies of the “historical truth,” questioned the authenticity of the screenshots on which some of the conclusions of the new report were based, arguing that they could be fabrications. This idea is not far-fetched: in Mexico “evidence” is often fabricated to blame the victims and the guilty are tortured so that they can be released later for violation of their legal rights. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Army was involved in every step of the disappearance of the students.

However, when the bourgeois media began to spread the idea that the CVAJ report was an attack against the Mexican Army, AMLO was quick to distance himself from Encinas’ conclusions, saying that it was not the Army but a few individuals who were responsible. In response to those who “generalize the participation of the military” in the Night of Iguala, AMLO asked, “Do they want a discredited Army so that foreign agencies come and be the ones who take charge?” He insisted: “Those who acted are the ones who should be punished, but not the whole Army. What do they want? For the benefit of whom?” (*El Financiero*, 26 September 2022).

For AMLO, the myth that soldiers serve the people is an article of faith. Thus, for example, in his third government report he defended himself against the accusation that he is militarizing the country by defending the armed forces: “The Armed Forces were born with the Mexican Revolution. It is not an elite army, it does not belong to the oligarchy, it is not the same

as other armies in the world, it comes from the people. The soldiers are the people in uniform” (*Animal Político*, 1 December 2021). In reality, the army and the police are the backbone of the capitalist state. It does not matter if the foot soldiers are recruited from among the impoverished peasant population: this repressive institution, tasked with imposing by force the will of the ruling class represents, together with the police, the armed fist of the bosses.

The current Mexican army is the same one that crushed the railroad strike in 1958 and 1959, that repressed the postal and telephone workers’ movement in 1960 and that liquidated the student movement in Mexico City in 1961. It is also responsible for the ignominious massacre of 1968 in Tlatelolco Square, with its toll of hundreds of dead, and for the cold-blooded murder of the agrarian Rubén Jaramillo. It is the same Army that summarily assassinated Lucio Cabañas and a huge number of leftist guerrillas and suspected leftists in the 1970s and 1980s during the infamous “Dirty War.”

In addition, the military’s ties to drug trafficking in states such as Guerrero and Sinaloa are longstanding and can be explained precisely by the implementation of counterinsurgency measures in these states that resulted from the “Dirty War.” When Colonel Jose Rodriguez Perez collaborated with drug trafficking groups such as the *Guerreros Unidos* in Iguala, he was merely continuing the work of his predecessors during the campaign against Lucio Cabañas.

Only Socialist Revolution Will Bring Justice for the Ayotzinapa 43!

So far in his term, AMLO has substantially improved the material conditions and the “legal framework” of action of the Armed Forces in exchange for their guaranteeing “internal security”. But “internal security” is nothing more than the defense of the regime of private property. As we have also insisted, the “war against drug trafficking” is not even a war between the government and “organized crime.” It is a brawl between sectors of the ruling class for the control of territories and markets. To be sure, this dispute is terribly bloody, but the fact that it is not resolved through the usual price wars, monopolistic tactics and lawsuits is exclusively due to the “illegal” nature of the goods.

AMLO has sought to restore the old corporatist system on which the PRI-government relied for many decades. This system included not only the integration of workers “unions,” peasant organizations and even the professional guilds (architects, musicians, folkloric dancers, etc.) into the state party (and thus into the capitalist state apparatus), but also that of the army and its officialdom. In fact, the PRI’s immediate predecessor, the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM), was composed of three sectors: the “workers” sector (represented by the then newly founded Confederation of Mexican Workers), the “peasant” sector (embodied in the National Peasant Confederation) and the military sector. Although the latter formally left the party in

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1946 when the PRM became the PRI, the generals remained strongly integrated into the political-state apparatus of the regime. Some of them even formed one of the most conspicuous PRI supporters: the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM), a constant ally of the president.

Reestablishing the old corporatist apparatus is no longer feasible today. The basis of this extensive apparatus of social control was a heavily stratified economy, with hundreds of state-owned enterprises providing huge profits to finance not only the repressive apparatus, but also certain social welfare measures, throwing some crumbs to sectors of the workers. While AMLO seeks to strengthen the capitalist state, what is needed – in the case of the Ayotzinapa 43 as in many others – is to fight against the capitalist system itself, which in a semicolonial capitalist country like Mexico can only be sustained by an endless succession of massacres.

Through the establishment of a workers and peasants government, a workers state in Mexico would fight to extend the socialist revolution internationally, first north of the Rio Bravo, into the heart of the main bastion of imperialism, and also south to impoverished Central America and the powerful proletariats of the Southern Cone. The key lies in the forging of a revolutionary workers party, a national section of an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International, as the world party of socialist revolution. ■

AMLO...

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Sin embargo, cuando en los medios burgueses comenzó a esparcirse la especie de que el informe de la CVAJ era un ataque contra el Ejército Mexicano, AMLO se apresuró a marcar distancia frente a las conclusiones de Encinas, diciendo que no era responsable el Ejército, sino unos cuantos individuos. Contra quienes “generalizan la participación de los militares” en la Noche de Iguala, AMLO preguntó: “¿Quieren un Ejército desprestigiado para que vengan las agencias del extranjero y sean ellas quienes se hagan cargo?” E insistió: “Los que actuaron son quienes deben ser castigados, pero no todo el Ejército. ¿Qué quieren? ¿Que se debilite nuestro Ejército? ¿En beneficio de quién?” (*El Financiero*, 26 de septiembre de 2022).

Para AMLO es un artículo de fe el mito de que los soldados sirven al pueblo. Así, por ejemplo, en su tercer informe de gobierno se defendió en contra de la acusación de que está militarizando el país al defender a las fuerzas armadas: “Las Fuerzas Armadas nacieron con la Revolución Mexicana. No es un Ejército de élite, no pertenece a la oligarquía, no es igual a otros ejércitos del mundo, surge del pueblo. Los soldados son pueblo uniformado” (*Animal Político*, 1° de diciembre de 2021). En realidad, el ejército y la policía son la columna vertebral del estado capitalista. No importa si los soldados rasos son reclutados entre la empobrecida población campesina del sur y el norte del país: la verdad es que esta institución represiva encargada de imponer por la fuerza la voluntad de la clase dominante representa, junto con la policía, el brazo armado de la patronal y no está al servicio de los pobres ni los oprimidos.

El actual ejército mexicano es el mismo que aplastó la huelga ferrocarrilera en 1958 y 1959, el que reprimió al movimiento de los trabajadores postales y de teléfonos en 1960 y el que liquidó al movimiento estudiantil en la Ciudad de México en 1961. Desde luego,

es responsable también de la ignominiosa matanza de 1968 en la plaza de Tlatelolco, con su saldo de cientos de muertos, y del asesinato a sangre fría del agrarista Rubén Jaramillo. Es el mismo Ejército que asesinó sumariamente a Lucio Cabañas y a un ingente número de guerrilleros izquierdistas y de sospechosos de serlo en las décadas de los 1970 y 1980 a lo largo de la infame “Guerra Sucia”. Es el que combatió a los zapatistas bajo el mando de Carlos Salinas, Ernesto Zedillo y Moctezuma Barragán, y el responsable de los miles de asesinatos de civiles desde que los gobiernos panistas iniciaron su “guerra contra las drogas”.

El ejército mexicano es, no hay que dejar de subrayarlo, el corresponsable de la matanza y posterior desaparición de los 43 normalistas de Ayotzinapa. Además, del ejército han salido las figuras más funestas de la represión “civil” en México. Todos los jefes de la siniestra Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS) entre 1946 y 1970 y luego varios en años posteriores fueron militares. Entre ellos destacan los connotados asesinos Miguel Nazar Haro (torturador y asesino profesional, orquestador de diversas entidades contrainsurgentes), Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios (quien como jefe de la DFS estuvo a cargo del Batallón Olimpia el 2 de octubre de 1968, pasando luego a ser el turbio jefe de la Brigada Blanca y sempiterno policía político del régimen priísta), Antonio Zorrilla Pérez (autor intelectual del asesinato del periodista Manuel Buendía) y Luis de la Barreda. Luego, el primer jefe del CISEN fue un militar experto en contrainsurgencia, el coronel Jorge Carrillo Olea.

Además, la vinculación de los militares con el narcotráfico en estados como Guerrero y Sinaloa es de larga data y se explica precisamente por la implementación de las medidas contrainsurgentes en estos estados que resultaron de la “Guerra Sucia”. Cuando el coronel José Rodríguez Pérez colaboraba con grupos de narcotraficantes en Iguala como Guerreros Unidos, no hacía sino continuar con la labor que sus antecesores impulsaron durante la campaña contra Lucio Cabañas. Fueron campesinos enriquecidos por el cultivo de marihuana y amapola los que delataron a Lucio en Tépam de Galeana en 1974 para que fuera asesinado por el ejército. Fueron campesinos enriquecidos de este modo los que formaron la base social de la contrainsurgencia local, apuntalada también por la infame Dirección Federal de Seguridad.

¡Sólo la revolución socialista hará justicia a los 43 de Ayotzinapa!

En lo que va de su mandato, AMLO ha mejorado sustancialmente las condiciones materiales (esto es, especialmente, el pago a sus oficiales y los pertrechos y capacidades bélicas) y el “marco legal” de actuación de las Fuerzas Armadas a cambio de que éstas garanticen la tan cacareada “seguridad interior”. Pero la “seguridad interior” no es otra cosa que la defensa del régimen de propiedad privada. Como hemos insistido también, la “guerra contra el narcotráfico” no es ni siquiera una verdadera guerra entre el gobierno y el “crimen organizado”. Es una reyerta entre sectores de la clase dominante por el control de territorios y mercados.

Esta disputa es terriblemente sangrienta, sí, pero el que no se libre mediante las usuales guerras de precios, tácticas monopólicas y pleitos judiciales se debe

exclusivamente al carácter “ilegal” de las mercancías en tránsito. Además, siempre que se hace referencia al “crimen organizado” cabe preguntarse si acaso se habla de la entrega de Telmex a Slim, la connivencia de gobiernos del PRI, PAN y PRD con los asesinos industriales del Grupo México de Germán Larrea, el despido de 44 mil electricistas de Luz y Fuerza a manos de Calderón, etc. Todos éstos son ejemplos del crimen organizado perpetrado por el estado como representante directo de los intereses de los explotadores contra los explotados.

La política de AMLO ha sido la de intentar restaurar el viejo sistema corporativista en que se apoyó durante largas décadas el régimen del PRI-gobierno. Este sistema incluyó como elemento primordial no sólo la integración de los “sindicatos” obreros, las organizaciones campesinas y hasta los gremios profesionales (arquitectos, músicos, bailarines folklóricos, etc.) al partido de estado (y así al aparato estatal capitalista), sino también la del ejército y su oficialidad. De hecho, el antecesor inmediato del PRI, el Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM), estuvo compuesto por tres sectores: el sector “obrero” (representado por la entonces recién fundada Confederación de Trabajadores de México), el sector “campesino” (encarnado en la Confederación Nacional Campesina) y el sector *militar*. Si bien este sector salió formalmente del partido en 1946 cuando el PRM se convirtió en el PRI, los generales siguieron fuertemente integrados al aparato político-estatal del régimen. Algunos incluso formaron uno de los más conspicuos partidos paleros del PRI: el Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana (PARM), sempiterno aliado de la voluntad del “compañero presidente” en turno y obvia instancia paraestatal.

Para muchos viejos priístas, el sistema corporativista era más eficaz para contener y desviar la presión social en el México capitalista que la mera represión descarnada. Pero restablecer el viejo aparato corporativista es una perspectiva que ya no es realizable hoy. La base de este extensivo aparato de control social era una economía altamente estatizada, con centenares de empresas paraestatales que ofrecían enormes ganancias para financiar no sólo los aparatos represivos, sino también ciertas medidas de bienestar social, arrojando algunas migajas a sectores de los trabajadores. Con muy pocas excepciones, las viejas empresas paraestatales fueron privatizadas a precio de ganga.

La farsa burguesa de la “Cuarta Transformación” de AMLO es la ilusoria promesa de que en México puede prevalecer un capitalismo con “rostro humano”. Esto es imposible. Una lección comprobada con torrentes de sangre de explotados y oprimidos a lo largo de los siglos XX y XXI es la de que el estado de los explotadores no puede ser reformado para que sirva

a los intereses de los explotados y oprimidos. Mientras que AMLO busca fortalecer al estado capitalista, lo que hace falta –en el caso de los 43 de Ayotzinapa como muchos otros– es luchar contra el capitalismo mismo, un sistema que entraña opresión omnimoda. En un país capitalista semicolonial como México, entraña claramente la sucesión sin fin de matanzas de explotados y oprimidos.

Es urgente luchar en México por una revolución socialista que expropié a los expropiadores, tanto a los nacionales como a sus amos imperialistas. Mediante el establecimiento de un gobierno obrero y campesino, un estado obrero en México lucharía por extender internacionalmente la revolución socialista, en primer lugar, al norte del Río Bravo, a las entrañas del principal bastión del imperialismo, y también al sur, a la empobrecida Centroamérica, y a los poderosos proletariados del Cono Sur. Con esto sonaría el clarín de una nueva era para la humanidad, dejando atrás de una vez por todas al sistema capitalista y su cauda de hambre, racismo y guerra.

En 1938, en el documento fundacional de la IV Internacional, el Programa de Transición, León Trotsky insistió en que la crisis de la humanidad se reduce a la crisis de la dirección revolucionaria de la clase obrera. Hoy, como entonces, las condiciones objetivas para la revolución socialista internacional están más que maduras. Sin embargo, las condiciones *subjetivas* no están a la altura de la apremiante necesidad de la clase obrera de liberarse del yugo del capitalismo y de liberar de este modo también a todos los oprimidos. La clave para superar la disparidad entre las condiciones objetivas y subjetivas para la revolución radica en la forja de un partido obrero revolucionario, de una sección nacional de una IV Internacional auténticamente trotskista, como el partido mundial de la revolución socialista. ■

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Ayotzinapa: Fue el estado *capitalista*

AMLO exculpa al Ejército de la desaparición de los 43

Una de las más sonadas promesas de campaña para la presidencia de Andrés Manuel López Obrador, jefe del populista burgués Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (Morena), fue la de que bajo su gobierno se resolvería el caso Ayotzinapa. Como se recuerda en calles y escuelas de México cada día 26 de cada mes desde entonces, en la noche del 26 al 27 de septiembre de 2014, seis estudiantes de la Escuela Normal Rural Raúl Isidro Burgos de Ayotzinapa fueron asesinados en Iguala, Guerrero, mientras fuerzas policíacas y militares orquestaban el secuestro y desaparición de 43 de sus compañeros. Los normalistas se encontraban en la ciudad para conseguir apoyo y transporte para participar una semana más tarde en la manifestación para conmemorar la Masacre de Tlatelolco del 2 de octubre de 1968 en la Ciudad de México.

Ya como presidente electo y 66 días antes de su toma de posesión, AMLO formalizó esta promesa cuando se reunió con los padres y compañeros de los 43 en el Museo Memoria y Tolerancia en la capital el 26 de septiembre de 2018. Ahí se comprometió a formar una Comisión de la Verdad y Acceso a la Justicia para el Caso Ayotzinapa (CVAJ) para atender el caso y sentenció: “Vamos a conocer lo que realmente sucedió, que se sepa dónde están los jóvenes y se castigue a los responsables” (BBC, 27 de septiembre de 2018). Los padres expresaron su agradecimiento y confianza ante lo prometido por AMLO. Como resumió una madre: “Fue una gran emoción estar al lado de él y que diga que nuestro caso no quedará impune” (*La Crónica*, 27 de septiembre de 2018).

No fue sino hasta agosto de 2022, casi cuatro años después, que la Comisión de la Verdad rindió su primer informe preliminar por boca de Alejandro Encinas, subsecretario de derechos humanos de la Secretaría de Gobernación. El extenso informe¹ no da respuesta aún a la sentida pregunta de en dónde están los normalistas, aunque reconoce explícitamente la falsedad de la llamada “verdad histórica” fabricada por Jesús Murillo Karam, procurador general en el gobierno del priísta Enrique Peña Nieto. En particular, el informe deja al descubierto cómo esta mentirosa *historia oficial* tuvo el propósito de encubrir la participación de la Policía Federal y del Ejército en el secuestro y desaparición de los normalistas. También detalla de qué manera fue empleada la tortura y la violación de las normas jurídicas del “debido proceso” no sólo para sostener la mentira y el encubrimiento, sino también para garantizar la impunidad de muchos de los responsables de la masacre de Iguala y la subsiguiente desaparición de los normalistas.

¹ La versión pública del informe y sus anexos puede encontrarse aquí: http://www.comision-ayotzinapa.segob.gob.mx/es/Comision_para_la_Verdad/Informe_Presidencia



Grupo Internacionalista en protesta por la desaparición de los 43, octubre de 2014.

El cuento que relataba la “verdad histórica” era simple: policías de Iguala y otros municipios cercanos habrían detenido a los normalistas para entregarlos a un grupo de narcotraficantes, los Guerreros Unidos, pues estos creían que entre los estudiantes habría sicarios de un grupo rival. Una vez en manos de los criminales, los estudiantes habrían sido conducidos al basurero del municipio de Cocula, donde supuestamente habrían sido asesinados y sus cuerpos incinerados en una fogata de enormes proporciones. En fin, todo se habría tratado de un asunto local en la “bárbara” Tierra Caliente del estado de Guerrero. Sin embargo, como se señaló ya desde aquella época, la versión de Murillo Karam y el gobierno de Peña Nieto contradecía hechos ampliamente probados que confirmaron que tanto la Policía Federal como el Ejército habían participado paso a paso en el secuestro de los estudiantes.

La infame “verdad histórica” fue defendida en centenares de artículos en la prensa burguesa de los voceros oficiosos del gobierno priísta, y en no pocos libros (muchos de los cuales no son más que burdos libelos que pretendían culpar a los propios normalistas de lo ocurrido). Sin embargo, concitó una verdadera furia entre vastos sectores de la población que seguían las noticias del caso con preocupación creciente. En las enormes manifestaciones de protesta de finales de 2014 y principios de 2015, lo mismo que en una cascada de paros estudiantiles y magisteriales, tras el largo conteo del uno al cuarentaitrés se gritaba con razón “¡Fue el estado!” Los contingentes del Grupo Internacionalista completaban el cántico con un estentóreo grito que añadía un calificativo: “¡Fue el estado *capitalista*!”

Con ello subrayábamos que se trató

del estado mexicano en su conjunto, es decir, de los “destacamentos especiales de hombres armados (policía y ejército permanente)” que defienden los intereses y encarnan el dominio de la burguesía. Para ponerlo en otros términos: la responsabilidad del estado en el caso de Ayotzinapa recae en el aparato represivo de la clase dominante. La única forma de conseguir justicia, entonces, es luchando en contra del sistema al que sirve dicho aparato, esto es, el capitalismo. Ello supone derribarlo para establecer un gobierno obrero y campesino y extender internacionalmente la revolución socialista. Como muestra la experiencia de la Revolución de Octubre de 1917, esto exige forjar el instrumento imprescindible para conducir a los explotados y oprimidos a la victoria: un partido obrero genuinamente comunista, como el de los bolcheviques de Lenin.

El Ejército en Ayotzinapa

Alejandro Encinas, presidente de la Comisión de la Verdad para el caso Ayotzinapa, presentó su informe preliminar el 18 de agosto de 2022. Calificó enfáticamente lo ocurrido en Iguala como un “crimen de estado” y detalló la participación de policías y funcionarios municipales, estatales y federales, así como del ejército mexicano, en la desaparición y ejecución de varios de los normalistas. El principal de los militares acusados es el coronel José Rodríguez Pérez, que en 2014 fungía como comandante del 27 batallón de infantería en Iguala. Según el informe, Rodríguez Pérez no sólo habría ordenado la ejecución de seis normalistas que seguían vivos días después de haber sido secuestrados, sino también que se llevara a las instalaciones del batallón los cuerpos de varios normalistas asesinados

para desaparecer sus cadáveres.

En la conferencia de prensa en la que se presentó el informe, un periodista le preguntó a Encinas si estaba plenamente establecido que “hubo participación del Ejército en el caso, en la desaparición y demás”. Encinas respondió que sí (véase la versión estenográfica de la conferencia de prensa en que se presentó el Informe de la Presidencia de la Comisión para la Verdad y Acceso a la Justicia del caso Ayotzinapa).

Comenzó entonces una andanada en los medios capitalistas en contra de Encinas. No pocos recordaron la militancia de Encinas en el (ultrarreformista) Partido Comunista Mexicano para acusarlo de calumniar al Ejército. Columnistas reaccionarios calificaron al informe de la CVAJ como la “verdad histórica” y defendieron las “conclusiones generales” de la patraña peñanietista enunciada por Murillo Karam. Carlos Marín, de *Milenio*, fue uno de los más activos periodistas oficiosos. En un artículo tras otro arremetió contra Encinas (a quien culpó de “crédulo” y de haber basado sus conclusiones en “pruebas inventadas sin valor alguno”) y defendió a los militares acusados, empezando con el coronel Rodríguez.

Jorge Fernández Menéndez, otro de los plumíferos lacayunos de la “verdad histórica”, se apresuró a entrevistar en televisión nacional al coronel Rodríguez para ayudarlo a “limpiar su nombre” ante la embestida de Encinas y, de paso, defender también la no participación del ejército en la fatídica Noche de Iguala. En un artículo publicado en *Excelsior* (30 de septiembre), sostiene que sin la participación del instituto armado en la desaparición de los normalistas de Ayotzinapa no puede hablarse de un crimen de estado: “La comisión de Alejandro Encinas, la Fiscalía especial y antes el GIEI partían de una premisa diferente: había sido el Estado y habían participado el Ejército y la Policía Federal. No tenían ni tienen cómo probarlo”.

De hecho, el Grupo Interdisciplinario de Expertos Independientes se distanció del informe de Encinas. Los peritos del GIEI, que realizaron un trabajo detallado y profesional en revelar las inconsistencias de la “verdad histórica”, también pusieron en duda la autenticidad de capturas de pantalla en que se basaba algunas de las conclusiones del nuevo informe, al sostener que podría tratarse de fabricaciones. Esta idea no es descabellada y no hay que olvidar que en México se fabrica “evidencia” para culpar a las víctimas y se tortura a los culpables para poderlos liberar después por violación de sus derechos legales. Sin embargo, es patente que el Ejército sí estuvo involucrado en cada paso de la desaparición de los normalistas y que tiene en ello una responsabilidad inmediata.

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