

# Communist Voice



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## ***Support the class struggle of the Iraqi workers and poor!*** **No to the imperialist occupation of Iraq!**

The Bush regime boasted it would bring freedom and democracy to the Iraqi people. But after 10 months of running Iraq, the U.S.-dominated occupation authority continues to face the wrath of a people betrayed. The hated Baathist rulers are gone and Hussein is a POW, but the occupation has brought new forms of repression and impoverishment. This isn't surprising. After all, it wasn't liberation that motivated Bush and the imperialist system he represents. Rather the war was to insure continued U.S. domination of the Middle East and its oil by crushing a rival regional bully, Hussein.

With the occupation Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) unable to quell the anger of the Iraqi masses, Bush has found it necessary to give the occupation a face-lift. Previously the occupation authority hand-picked a powerless "Iraqi Governing Council" to give them a bit of an Iraqi cover. But this didn't dampen the revolts. So the Bush regime wants to declare a new "sovereign" provisional Iraqi government by the end of June and proclaim the CPA abolished. In reality, the imperialist occupation forces will remain in Iraq and the provisional government will be subordinate to them. While this plan was meant to calm the Iraqi masses, it again shows the occupation authority's disdain for what the masses think. Indeed, the Iraqi people will not be allowed to vote for the provisional government.

Though subordinate, the provisional government would put more decisions in the hands of sections of the Iraqi bourgeoisie. This will increase the squabbling of these bourgeois forces with imperialism over the extent of their power. And it will heat up the conflicts among themselves over which section dominates, the role of Islamic law, Kurdish rights, etc. This will also increase the importance of the class struggle in Iraq as the workers and poor will be increasingly faced with defending themselves against the local exploiters, and not just the occupation regime.

### **Hussein's tyranny replaced by occupation oppression**

The reason for the strong opposition of the working people in Iraq to the occupation regime is not hard to see. While the Iraqi masses are glad Hussein is gone, they have learned painfully that the occupation was not for their benefit, but to strengthen U.S. imperialist domination of the Middle East. Thus,

rather than the Iraqi people being liberated, they saw one tyranny replaced with another.

Out was the old dictator Hussein. In was the new dictator, the U.S.-dominated occupation regime, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Out was Hussein's butchering of political opposition. In were U.S. slaughters of unarmed protesters and civilians, indiscriminate mass roundups and raids in neighborhoods and villages, attacks on organizations of workers' and the unemployed, etc. Out were Hussein's repressive laws. In are some anti-women Islamic fundamentalist laws that have already found favor with the U.S.-picked Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). Also, still "in" are Hussein-era anti-strike laws. Out was Hussein's crony capitalism, where his family looted the government for personal enrichment. In are Bush's capitalist cronies to reap the spoils of the war and rewrite the laws to allow the multinational corporations a free hand to plunder the country. Out were Hussein's ruinous military adventures and attempts to dominate the Middle East. In is a new military base for the U.S. to threaten potential rivals in the Middle East.

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- \* On the "Open Letter from Arab-American and Muslim community"
  - \* Trotskyist LRP surrenders to militarism and the draft
  - \* Behind the bravado of non-class anti-imperialism
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Anti-Marxist-Leninist nature of Trotskyism, pt. 2

Oppose U.S. intervention in Haiti!

Bush's fraudulent Palestinian peace plan is dead

On the elections: to hell with Bush and Kerry!



# What is *Communist Voice*?

*Communist Voice* is a theoretical journal which not only exposes the capitalist system, but deals with the tragedy that has befallen the revolutionary movement. It confronts the thorny questions and controversies facing progressive activists today, and holds that the crisis of the working class movement can only be overcome if Marxist theory again enlightens the struggle for the emancipation of the oppressed. The liberating ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin have been twisted beyond recognition, not only by outright capitalist spokespeople, but also by the false "communist" regimes of China, Cuba and others today, and of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of yesterday. *Communist Voice* denounces these distortions (revisions) of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism — whether Stalinism or Trotskyism or reformism — and stands for placing revolutionary theory on a solid basis through the criticism of revisionism and by analyzing the new developments in the basic economic and political structure of the world today. Through this work, the *Communist Voice* seeks to pave the way for communism to once again become the red, fighting banner of the revolutionary working class movement. Only the influence of the real communist theory can help the goal of a classless, communist society again spread among the workers and oppressed here and around the globe. Only the spread of anti-revisionist Marxism can overcome the influence of liberal, reformist and petty-bourgeois nationalist trends and allow the struggle against capitalism to break out in full force.

The revolutionary parties and movements of the working class in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries never achieved their full goals. The working masses fought monarchy, fascism, colonialism, and various capitalist classes, and also made their first attempts to establish a new social system — however these attempts never went beyond the first steps. This class struggle will be renewed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the masses are faced with how to escape from the escalating misery brought by capitalist development around the world. To hasten the day of

the revival of the revolutionary movement, the *CV* opposes the neo-conservative and reformist ideologies that are dominant today. It holds that progressive work today requires more than opposing the ultra-conservatives and more than trying to reform the marketplace. It means helping reorganize the working class movement on a basis independent of the liberals and reformists as well as the conservatives. The *CV* sees its theoretical tasks as helping to clear the way for a future reorganization of the working class into, first and foremost, its own political party, as well as other organizations that truly uphold proletarian class interests.

*Communist Voice* thus continues the Marxist-Leninist and anti-revisionist cause to which its predecessor, the *Workers' Advocate*, was dedicated. For a quarter of a century, the *Workers' Advocate* was the paper of a series of activist organizations, the last one being the Marxist-Leninist Party. The demoralization of the revolutionary ranks included the dissolution of the MLP and, along with it, the *Workers' Advocate*. But the *Communist Voice* continues, in a different form, with fewer resources, and with more emphasis on theoretical work, the struggle of the *Workers' Advocate* to contribute to the development of a mass communist party.

The *Communist Voice* is published by the **Communist Voice Organization**, which links together members in a few cities. The CVO calls on all activists who want to fight capitalism in all its guises to join with us in opposing all the bankrupt theories and practices of the past — from Western-style capitalism to Stalinist state capitalism, from reformism to anarchism, from reliance on the pro-capitalist trade union bigwigs to "left" communist sectarianism toward "impure" struggles. It is time to lay the basis for the revolutionary communism of the future by revitalizing the communist theory and practice of today. Only when communism spreads among the millions and millions of oppressed can the struggle against capitalism again become a force that shakes the world!

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Meanwhile, the economic situation for the masses remains desperate. Over half the workforce is jobless, fueling soaring crime. And over 10 months into the occupation, even basic services remain a shambles. Constant gas shortages and electricity blackouts stand as a sharp rebuke to the Bush administration's happy talk claiming great progress on this front.

Nor has the U.S.-led occupation recognized the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people or protected the rights of other minority peoples in Iraq.

The longer the occupation has lasted, the more its true mission becomes clear, the more it is despised by the Iraqi masses. Angry protests are a common occurrence and even mainstream polling services record that the vast majority of Iraqis don't trust the occupation forces. Organizations and actions of the workers and unemployed are beginning to develop despite difficult conditions. Guerrilla attacks remain frequent and have become more sophisticated than a few months ago. They are taking a heavy toll on coalition forces. Well over 500 U.S. troops have been killed and there are well-founded estimates of over 10,000 wounded or seriously ill.

True, there is significant influence of Baathist remnants and Islamic fundamentalists among a section of the guerrilla forces. As well, reactionary elements have carried out horrific bombings which have slaughtered innocent civilians. But the vast majority of attacks target the occupation forces or U.S.-backed Iraqi military and police. There is significant sympathy for the guerrilla actions among the populace, and this has much more to do with a desire to get rid of the occupiers than bringing back the old Baathist regime or establishing theocratic rule.

## Imperialism lies behind the occupation

Bush's fiasco in Iraq is not merely a matter of some mistaken policy. Such adventures are inherent in the imperialist system. Imperialism is the domination of the huge capitalist businesses. They dominate the political and economic system in the U.S. And they seek control of world markets and resources. For many decades, control of Middle East oil has been a top priority for "our" capitalists. They have stopped at nothing to accomplish this — from overthrowing governments and propping up the aggression of Israel, its most loyal watchdog, to building a network of alliances among brutal Arab states such as the Saudi monarchy.

As long as Hussein was just murdering people inside Iraq or fighting other U.S. enemies of the day, like Iran, he was treated as an ally. But the U.S. bourgeoisie could not tolerate Hussein as a rival for domination in the Middle East. Gulf War I was launched, followed by a decade of economic sanctions that mainly bled the masses already being ruined by the Baathist regime. In this context, it's clear that Gulf War II and the occupation were not merely the product of Bush Jr. and his neo-con advisors, but deeply rooted in the class policy of the bourgeoisie.

Sure, the American bourgeoisie has disagreements within its ranks. But they're over how best to maintain their world empire. And the bourgeoisie is united in their support for the colossal U.S. war machine. This can be seen in the stand of the Democratic Party opposition. Their objection to the war was that it would have been better to first get the cooperation of other imperialist powers and the UN. But the Democrats overwhelmingly got behind the war effort once it began and likewise

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support the occupation. It's quite telling that the Democratic presidential candidate, John Kerry, who voted for Bush's war, is now fretting that Bush may prematurely withdraw from Iraq and that he hasn't beefed up the military enough to insure the occupation's success.

At the same time, the fact that the occupation has met great resistance inside Iraq has created a host of problems for the U.S. bourgeoisie. This, combined with the lies about the imminent threat of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, have raised questions among the masses as to the real causes of the war and increased their distrust of the Bush regime in general. Even capturing Hussein only resulted in a slight and temporary upward blip for Bush in the public opinion polls. The U.S. bourgeoisie as a whole is worried that this fiasco will make even other imperialist allies of the U.S. skeptical about supporting future U.S. adventures. Certainly, there is no doubt the occupation of Iraq has fueled hostility to U.S. foreign policy among the working people around the world.

In Britain, the major imperialist ally of the U.S. in the war and occupation, Tony Blair's government has faced a similar and deeper crisis. The war greatly hurt Blair's credibility with the working people and even top government officials have resigned and exposed how Blair phoned-up evidence of WMDs.

Meanwhile in Spain, massive anti-war sentiments led to the defeat in recent national elections of the conservative Popular Party of Bush's occupation ally, former Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar.

### **The UN and multilateral imperialism**

Among the critics of the U.S./British occupation, there are those who promote a UN administration of Iraq as the alternative. They imagine that the UN would oppose imperialist designs on Iraq while also avoiding the problem of Iraq falling under the grip of the Islamic clerics. But a UN intervention would not be on the side of the Iraqi working masses, but represent a broader coalition of imperialist powers. It would require an agreement between U.S. and British imperialism and other imperialist countries like France, Germany, and Russia.

The other imperialist powers have some differences with the U.S. and would have some of their own ideas about administering Iraq. But these differences are based on the interests of their own bourgeoisies. The European multinationals have their own rotten history of influence in Iraq and are seeking to re-establish themselves there. Meanwhile, these powers agree with the U.S. general agenda for privatization and "free-market" capitalism throughout the world. And while some may imagine these other powers to be more peaceful and kind than the U.S., this is hardly the case. Just look at France's joint effort with the U.S. to engineer a regime change in Haiti. Or take a glimpse at Russia's brutality to the Chechens.

A UN administration would not represent justice for the Iraqi masses, but basically share the same orientation towards them as the present occupation regime. It would replace unilateral imperialism with multilateral imperialism.

### **The Iraqi exploiters vs. the workers and poor**

Workers and activists here should step up the fight against the imperialist occupation. But standing with the Iraqi masses,

and even seriously opposing the occupation, also requires supporting the development of a class movement of the workers and poor of Iraq. That's the real alternative.

A section of the Iraqi exploiters may be getting more say under the occupation. But more rights for the local exploiters by no means insures democratic rights for the workers and poor. The Iraqi bourgeoisie is willing to tolerate the terror of the imperialist armies against the masses. They are cozy with clerics who would impose on everyone their religious zealotry and anti-women bigotry. Indeed, already the Iraqi bourgeoisie has agreed on an interim constitution which says no law can contradict Islamic law. So the masses should not expect their rights to come as a gift from the bourgeoisie.

Even less should the masses expect the Iraqi exploiters to solve their economic woes. The working people will have to wage a fight just to get basic services, and then they'll face a protracted struggle for living conditions under the free-market reforms initiated by the occupation.

Nor can the working people expect the bourgeoisie to develop solidarity between the toilers of different religious and national groups. Like the U.S., the non-Kurdish bourgeoisie refuses to recognize the right of self-determination for the Kurds. In turn, the Kurdish bourgeois nationalist leaders mistreat the Turkoman and Arab minorities in their region. The workers need class unity. Thus it's in their interest to support the right to self-determination for the Kurds. If the decision of whether to be part of Iraq or to form a separate nation-state is denied the Kurds, this will be a constant source of friction between Kurdish and non-Kurdish toilers, whereas the right of self-determination creates trust and solidarity between the working people of different nationalities. Likewise, the workers oppose discrimination against any minority group and support the separation of mosque and state.

The working people hate the occupation and have waged protests of all kinds in the face of harsh repression. But the development of working-class organization is needed to undercut the influence of the Baathist remnants and Islamic fanatics who have a sordid history of crushing the workers and other oppressed. The armed actions have taken a heavy toll on the occupation forces and their Iraqi flunkies and have a good deal of popular support. But the series of indiscriminate bombings which have mainly hit ordinary Iraqi citizens is a disgrace. These wanton slaughters of Iraqi workers and poor are an example of why the need for the masses to establish their own independent trend is so pressing.

The harsh conditions under the occupation and the sharpening of class conflict will foster a climate for the revival of revolutionary trends of the working masses. This will be a protracted process, but a start is being made. There have been strikes, efforts to build unions, organizations of the unemployed, etc. The establishing of a party of the class conscious section of workers is vital. While one party, the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI) aspires to this, it has problems dealing with a number of key issues facing the masses due to its "left" communist orientation. For example, it mistakenly supports a temporary UN administration as the alternative to U.S. domination and the threat of fundamentalism.

## **Solidarity requires a class stand here**

Solidarity with the Iraqi masses requires a class political approach in the U.S. too. Both big capitalist parties stand for imperialist domination. That's why the Democratic presidential candidates haven't been for ending the occupation, but for finding ways to strengthen it with a bigger military presence. Or they say "get out" but mean bring in other imperialist powers to share the burden in cooperation with the UN. We should not allow the mass anger and protests against Bush's "unilateral" imperialism to be diverted into campaigning for Democratic Party "multilateral" imperialism. It's not the whim of this or that politician that's the root of U.S. global conquest, but a whole system of rule by giant capitalist companies whose existence is based on exploitation of the working people on a world scale.

Real solidarity with the working people of Iraq can only be based on exposing both bourgeois parties and the imperialist system they are based on. It requires basing our hopes not on the bickering between the bourgeois politicians, but on the working masses. They are the ones who are driven down by the capitalists here and then shipped off to get killed overseas on behalf of the same capitalist class. It's in their class interest to stand up against the occupation and target the bourgeoisie which is behind it. The giant pre-war demonstrations showed that there's a huge section of the American masses opposed to the U.S. adventure in Iraq. Within the ranks of the ordinary U.S. soldiers, doubts about the occupation are growing and some soldiers and their families have begun to organize against the occupation.

True, the demonstrations have tended to be smaller compared to their peak prior to the war. But there's no reason to believe that the occupation has made Bush's Iraq policy more popular.

Nor does the fact that the war went on despite massive protests show that taking to the streets was futile. Whether mass actions are larger or smaller, they play an essential role. They encourage the sentiments among the masses against Bush's policy by creating an atmosphere for developing clarity on the issues and raising the need for organization. Whether or not the struggle is powerful enough to stay the hand of Bush and imperialism right now, the demonstrations can provide an opportunity to build up an anti-imperialist trend among the activists and workers. The Iraq crisis is one opportunity to build such a trend, but Bush or Kerry will undoubtedly provide many more in the future. Building an on-going anti-imperialist trend will provide continuity as each new struggle arises. It will increase the level of militancy in the movement and help prevent it getting sidetracked into campaigning for imperialist Democrats. It will orient the masses toward directing their energies against the root cause of war and conquest, the bourgeoisie, and away from imagining it is just a mistake by this or that politician.

Let's utilize the mass protests to build up an anti-imperialist trend. Let's take anti-imperialist views directly to the workers and poor as part of mobilizing them into the struggle against the bloody occupation.

**U.S./UN out of Iraq!**

**Down with the fraudulent "provisional government" of the Iraqi bourgeoisie!**

**No to the imperialism of Bush and the Democrats!**

**Support the struggles of the Iraqi workers and poor!**

by Mark, Detroit □

## ***On the U.S. plans for a new Iraqi provisional government*** **An Iraqi cover for continued U.S. occupation**

by Mark, Detroit

The U.S.-led occupation regime tells the Iraqi people it's there to liberate them, and then subjects them to its dictate. Thus, it has faced widespread and persistent resistance. The longer this quagmire drags on, the more the administration is feeling the heat in the U.S. too. In this situation the Bush regime feels obliged to have more of an Iraqi cover for the occupation. Hence, they are attempting to patch together an Iraqi provisional government by the end of June. They have no intention of easing their repression of the masses. But along with this, they are cautiously moving to give more of a role in running things to sections of the Iraqi bourgeoisie they deem fit. The Bush regime hopes this quells the anger of the Iraqi masses against the occupation. By giving the Iraqi bourgeoisie more of a role, they are trying to shift attention away from their own responsibility for the miserable state of affairs in Iraq and have the Iraqi officials absorb more of the blame. By the same token, by giving more of a role to newly-created Iraqi police and military forces in the repression of the masses, they hope to keep U.S. casualties from mounting.

The Bush administration promotes its transition to the provisional government as marking the end of the U.S. occupation and the start of real Iraqi self-rule. From now on, they claim, U.S. troops will merely be there at the invitation of the Iraqi people. With such rhetoric, Bush hopes not only to placate the Iraqi masses, but make the American people believe that Bush's debacle in Iraq is really a great triumph just as the presidential election campaign swings into high gear.

But the reality of the situation is something else. Under the U.S. plans for the provisional government, the U.S. occupation doesn't really end, but changes form. More of the daily anti-insurgency policing and political affairs will be in the hands of the provisional government. But the huge U.S. troop presence will remain in Iraq and will always be there to intervene if the provisional government is unable to put down mass unrest or if policy decisions start jeopardizing U.S. interests. Indeed, since the provisional Iraqi government will rely on the U.S. to protect it from the masses, its ability to say no to U.S. plans for Iraq will inevitably be compromised. Moreover, while the CPA will no longer govern, an army of officials, advisors and CIA agents brought in by the CPA will remain, now under the guise of a

3,000-member diplomatic mission. These officials have for some time been picking and grooming the new Iraqi bureaucracy, so undoubtedly they'll still have much influence over the provisional government's policies. Moreover, before the provisional government even takes power, the U.S. has helped write an interim constitution and has sought other agreements that will provide for a continued military presence and insure that Iraq becomes an unregulated capitalist haven for the multinationals.

The Bush plan opposes the Iraqi people having any say about the occupation, its plans, or the composition of the new Iraqi government. Thus, it opposes elections. For the U.S., Iraqi sovereignty need not have anything to do with elemental democratic rights.

The U.S. opposition to elections for the provisional government is an affront to the democratic aspirations of the Iraqi people and shows the imperialist occupation is afraid power might pass to people they don't like. In particular they are wary of the domination of Islamic fundamentalists. There is much hypocrisy in this stand, however, as the U.S. is also courting certain Islamic clerics and has signed off on an interim Iraqi constitution that incorporates the notion that Iraqi law mustn't contradict Islamic beliefs. Moreover, the threat of fundamentalist oppression cannot justify the oppression of the occupation authority.

Of course, the question of what forces will come to power in elections is also of concern for the Iraqi masses. Fundamentalist rule would be a horror. In fact it must be recognized that under present conditions, one or the other secular or religious bourgeois forces, or combinations of such forces, will come to power. But this does not mean that the mass demand for elections is wrong. To deny elections would mean perpetuating the tyranny of the occupation authority. This would hardly be a guarantee against the Islamic fanatics either since the U.S. has already made concessions to them. The only real alternative is for the Iraqi working people to develop their own trend which fights on two fronts: against the occupation and against the fundamentalist clerics and other reactionaries. This is tied up with the struggle for democratization, which includes not just national elections but local and regional elections, the ending of imperialist dictate (even under a UN umbrella), freedom for the masses to organize, separation of mosque and state, etc.

### **From one fraud to another**

The provisional government that is supposed to take power in June is really not the first attempt to provide an Iraqi cover to the occupation. Soon after the occupation, the so-called Iraqi Government Council (IGC) was established for this purpose. IGC members were hand-picked by the U.S. and had no real power as CPA leader L. Paul Bremer had to approve all decisions. The IGC included an array of bourgeois forces with contending visions of the future of Iraq and a shared disdain of the masses. There were exiles like Ahmed Chalabi, whose main base of support was the Cheney-Rumsfeld crowd in the Bush administration. There were secular bourgeois nationalist groups rooted in Iraq, such as the main Kurdish parties, the KDP and the PUK. There were Sunni and Shia religious forces, including the Shia fundamentalists of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). Even the leader of the so-called Communist Party of Iraq was brought in, a misnamed group

which long ago abandoned revolutionary class struggle for reformism and alliances with an array of bourgeois nationalist forces.

Under U.S. tutelage, the IGC was supposed to write a constitution which would be followed by elections down the road sometime. But it quickly became evident that the Iraqi people weren't buying this fraud. The IGC was devoid of popular support and fast becoming a target of the masses. On top of this, the U.S. grew somewhat disenchanted with its own creation. It was upset with the IGC's failure to do anything about security and restoration of basic services. Meanwhile the IGC complained that the U.S. hadn't empowered it to do anything.

So in November 2003 the Bush administration and the IGC adopted a new plan which would replace the IGC with a provisional government in June of this year. This plan too had nothing to do with democracy. Due to massive opposition inside Iraq, a big part of this plan was scrapped. Still it is worthwhile to look at the discarded part of the plan as well as it provides a stark example of the occupation regime's attitude toward the rights of the Iraqi working people. It shows U.S. imperialism measures a country's democracy not by the extent of rights for the masses, but by how cooperative its government is with the U.S.

### **The interim constitution**

The first step of the November plan was that the U.S. and its IGC stooges were to write a temporary constitution, sometimes referred to in the press as a "fundamental law." This part of the plan went ahead and in early March the interim constitution was adopted by the IGC. The U.S. not only helped write the constitution but the occupation authority had to approve it, which it did. As for the Iraqi people, they had no input or vote on the matter.

The U.S.-IGC November deal also was supposed to provide for a separate agreement to be reached by the end of March on the status of occupation military forces once the provisional government is formed. The November agreement sets the parameters on this matter, requiring the future Iraqi government "giving wide latitude" to the coalition forces in Iraq. The new interim constitution embodies these principles, stating in Article 59 that "the Iraqi Armed Forces will be a principal partner in the multinational force operating in Iraq under unified command" of the U.S.-led occupation forces. In any case, both U.S. and British officials have long made known they plan to keep troops in Iraq for at least a couple of more years no matter what.

Evidently the CPA also wanted a host of "free-market" reforms it has already imposed to help the multinational corporations invade Iraq to be incorporated into the new fundamental law. The interim constitution does say that all decrees of the CPA will remain in effect for the time being, though it also states a future Iraqi legislature that is supposed to come into being at the beginning of next year would be able to rescind or change these decrees.

The new interim constitution makes clear that the provisional government, which it officially calls the Iraqi Interim Government, will not be an elected body. It is to be chosen by "deliberations and consultations" "conducted by the [Iraqi] Governing Council and the Coalition Provisional Authority and possibly in consultation with the United Nations." However, it does promise elections at the end of this year for a national assembly. This assembly is supposed to write a permanent constitution by mid-

August 2005. If it can accomplish this, and this is a big if given contradictions within the Iraqi bourgeoisie, there's to be a referendum on the permanent constitution in October 2005. If the constitution is approved, elections for a regular government are to be held in December 2005. This elections timetable is similar to the one envisioned in the November 2003 agreement.

But it should be noted that previous election plans have been canceled by the Bush administration when they didn't think the "right" people would be elected. That's why the November agreement and the interim constitution oppose national elections for the provisional government. In 2003 the U.S. canceled many local elections for this reason. And a previous plan to hold national elections by the end of 2004 was also junked. The U.S. policy shifts according to their needs of the moment, not what the Iraqi people want.

### **The interim constitution and conflicts within the bourgeoisie in Iraq**

Meanwhile, the interim constitution has not solved many of the major conflicts between different sections of the Iraqi bourgeoisie. Everyone in the IGC grudgingly agreed to the constitution, but only because it left out certain contentious issues and because it was seen as a temporary truce, not a lasting agreement. Indeed, no sooner was it signed, when various parties to it announced they would start campaigning against the features they didn't like.

One of the on-going fights is over the role of Islamic law. Initial drafts of the constitution stated there should be some influence of Islamic law in the constitution, but fundamentalist clerics were demanding language that would make Islamic law *the* basis of Iraqi law. The interim constitution tried to tap-dance around the question. It kept the draft's concept of Islam as "a source of legislation" along with other sources. But it attempted to placate the clerics by also adding that no law could be enacted which violates "the universally agreed tenets of Islam". These concessions to religious bigotry are bad enough, but top Shia fundamentalist clerics are still not really satisfied. Indeed only a few days before the interim constitution was signed, eight Shia members of the 25-member IGC walked out of talks on the constitution to protest the reversal of a previous IGC provision which put in place anti-women laws in accordance with Sharia law.

Nor could the volatile issue of Kurdish rights be resolved. The non-Kurdish bourgeoisie has never recognized the right of self-determination for the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. At most they will only grant the Kurds a certain autonomy and they are divided over that. The interim constitution makes no mention of the right of self-determination for the Kurds.

For their part, the bourgeois nationalist leaders of the Kurds agree to autonomy in general, but they have their own ideas of what type of autonomy should exist. For instance, there are disputes over what territories will constitute Kurdish areas. This is a major bone of contention because certain regions the Kurdish leadership claim should be under their autonomous government contain some of the richest oil fields in Iraq. Kurdish leaders also want the constitution to prohibit future non-Kurdish Iraqi armed forces from setting foot inside their autonomous region. The rights of minorities (Turkoman, Assyrians, Shias) inside the Kurdish areas is another controversial issue. And they have seen

violence and discrimination against them under the reign of the Kurdish leadership and want guarantees against this. The Turkmen representative on the IGC rejected the demands of the Kurdish leadership and threatened to demand an autonomous Turkoman region if they were granted. In the interim constitution many such issues are avoided or left vague and subject to different interpretations. So what's agreed upon will likely satisfy no one.

In fact, immediately after signing the interim constitution, 12 of the 13 Shia member of the Iraqi Governing Council announced they wanted to quickly overturn certain provisions. Their main target seems to be a measure that says that a future permanent constitution would not pass, even though it received an overall majority of votes, if there were at least three provinces or governorates where it failed to get at least one-third of the vote. Since there are three Kurdish provinces, this provision would, among other things, give the Kurds a veto over any constitution that they overwhelmingly opposed. The fight on this provision portends a series of upcoming battles between factions of the bourgeoisie in Iraq over Kurdish rights, oil revenues, etc. Indeed, as Joseph Siegle of the bourgeois think tank, the Council on Foreign Relations put it, the interim constitution is "more a set of guidelines than an enforceable legal document."

### **The November 2003 plan for a sham provisional government**

There is an interim constitution, but how to form the provisional government that will administer it is currently up in the air. The November agreement between the IGC and the occupation regime had a plan for this, but this part of the agreement collapsed.

Under the November agreement, the provisional government was to be chosen not by a popular vote, but by caucuses around the country dominated by local tribal chiefs, clerics and other forces oppressing the Iraqi working masses. The caucuses were supposed to choose the representatives to a transitional national assembly. According to the November agreement, the CPA was to "supervise" the process under which the unelected IGC, along with largely unelected provincial and local councils would pick five members each for a 15-member "organizing committee" which solicits nominations for the caucuses. The organizing committee then was to vote on who would be in the caucuses, with 11 of 15 votes required for approval. So the representatives of the Iraqi provisional government were to be "elected" by unelected caucus members chosen by an unelected organizing committee chosen by unelected Iraqi officials imposed on the people by an unelected occupation authority.

### **The November plan and fundamentalist opposition**

The U.S. plan for the provisional government ignored the will of the masses. A section of reactionary Islamic fundamentalist clerics began protesting the plan too. Shia Muslim leader Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani demanded immediate elections, and in January his call for elections brought 100,000 demonstrators into the streets to denounce Bush's plan. While the Iraqi people want and deserve free elections, the aims of Al-Sistani and other Islamic fundamentalists are anything but democratic. Their

ultimate goal is an Islamic theocracy and they have ties to the ayatollahs running Iran. Allegedly, they don't attach the same importance to the ayatollahs directly running the government as is done in Iran. But they want Iraqi laws to conform to their fundamentalist anti-woman, anti-democratic beliefs. Because Shia Muslims are the majority of the country and Al-Sistani and his allies have a large following, they believe elections will bring to power people amenable to their theocratic vision.

The Bush administration feared elections would lead to a fundamentalist victory. It portrayed its opposition to elections as saving the people from theocratic oppression, while ignoring that the alternative it was offering was the imperialist tyranny of the occupation regime. Actually the U.S. is not opposed to an oppressive regime in Iraq as such. They just want one that fits their plans. Thus, they recruited all sorts of secular and religious reactionaries into their hand-picked Iraqi Governing Council planned the same for the provisional government. Indeed they were friendly to Hussein in the 80's and even after they turned against Hussein they spent many years trying to organize a coup to install dissident pro-U.S. generals from Hussein's army in power.

But while the U.S. could care less about democracy, they are worried about whether Islamic clerics with strong ties to Iran will be reliable U.S. allies. They are also concerned about the Shia fundamentalists shutting out other sections of the Iraqi bourgeoisie, many of whom have stronger ties to the U.S. This would interfere with U.S. plans to balance power between the bourgeois sectors of different ethnic and religious groups. This is in line with U.S. desires for a united Iraq under the domination of imperialism and the local exploiters. True, a fundamentalist regime in Iraq would also embarrass the Bush regime which claims it's bringing democracy, women's rights, etc. to the Middle East. However, U.S. imperialism has shown itself quite capable of working with the worst religious and secular dregs, despite certain misgivings, if it serves their interests of the moment. Just look at Afghanistan where the U.S. replaced the brutal Taliban regime with a coalition of other anti-women fundamentalist warlords.

In fact, conditions in Iraq began driving the Bush administration to increasing efforts to placate the fundamentalists. The dilemma for U.S. imperialism was that while they feared Shia clerical domination, they also feared the possibility of the clerics calling for a mass uprising should they reject U.S. overtures. While the clerics have reactionary aims, the masses want elections and if they call for resistance to the occupation, the U.S. fears the consequences. While there have been anti-occupation protests all over Iraq, the most consistent resistance has been in heavily Sunni Muslim central Iraq. If resistance in the predominantly Shia south was to greatly escalate, the occupation regime would face a major disaster. The imperialists' concern about such a scenario could be seen in reports that even British military officers based in southern Iraq were recommending elections as the only alternative to a huge uprising, though this contradicted the Blair government's official stand. This is why Bush became intent on trying to find a way to placate the fundamentalists and incorporate them into their plans.

Then there were additional headaches for the occupation powers. In the situation of intense opposition to U.S. plans, even Cheney and Rumsfeld's favorite Iraqi leader, Ahmed Chalabi, began demanding an elected provisional government. Next, the

U.S.-friendly IGC voted to pull out of its November agreement with the occupation regime for unelected caucuses choosing the June government. The November plan for choosing the provisional government was dead.

### **The UN tries to reconcile the occupation regime and the fundamentalist clerics**

Bush, who before the Iraq war denounced the UN as ineffectual, thus found himself scrambling for a new way to slap together a provisional government. While before the war Bush denounced the UN as ineffectual, he now turned to the UN to facilitate an agreement between the occupation regime and the Shia clerics over a future Iraqi government. The UN is no ally of the Iraqi masses. It is a tool of the strongest imperialist governments. Despite misgivings, the UN wound up sanctioning the U.S./British war and the occupation. But there are differences among the imperialists over how to do this, and this is reflected in certain UN stands. The UN is not opposed to imperialist domination of Iraq, but has its own ideas how to carry this out.

At the end of February, UN General Secretary Kofi Annan agreed with the U.S. that elections could not be held at present and that there should be a new unelected government in June. However, the UN rejected the U.S. plan for unelected caucuses to choose the provisional government. Now the whole situation was up in the air as no plan existed to form the provisional government. The UN put forward some suggestions, including expanding the present IGC to 150-200 members to serve as the provisional government in June and for other types of meetings to facilitate the new government and its constitution. But at we write, there is still no agreed-upon plan.

### **Bush's covers up for Islamic fundamentalist attacks on women**

While the controversy over the June provisional government forced Bush to bargain more with the fundamentalist clerics, even before this the U.S. had brought fundamentalist leaders such as Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), into the Iraqi Governing Council. In January, Al-Hakim was part of a delegation that met with Bush in Washington. In fact, in a February 8 TV interview on *Meet the Press*, Bush went out of his way to praise al-Hakim as a man of tolerance opposed to an Islamic extremist regime. In response to questioner Tim Russert's question about whether the U.S. would accept "an Islamic extremist regime" Bush stated, "They're not going to develop that." Bush said he was confident of that because "I remember speaking to Mr. al-Hakim here . . . and he said, it's going to be a free society where you can worship freely. This is a Shia fellow."

Bush failed to mention that this tolerant fellow had only a few weeks earlier pushed a brutal anti-women resolution through the U.S.-backed Iraqi Governing Council. The measure, called "Resolution 137", abolished what secular laws existed under the Baath Party's system of civil status courts and replaced them with fundamentalist Sharia laws. The civil status courts dealt with marriage, divorce, inheritance and related matters. Under Sharia law, fanatical clerics could force all sorts of oppressive



measures against women, relegating them to second-class citizens in society and slaves of their husbands in the family. Depending on the whim of the particular local cleric, women could be subject to forced marriage and compulsory religious clothing along with restrictions on the education, inheritance rights, custody of children, etc. It would also open up wide possibilities for legalized wife-beating and vicious punishments such as stoning for the slightest violations of religious codes.

Bush also forgot to mention that there were mass protests against Al-Hakim's anti-women measures in Iraq. This law was also rejected by the Kurdish parliament which governs in heavily

Kurdish northern Iraq. Under this heat, the American leader of the occupation regime, Paul Bremer, was forced to intervene and stop the law from being implemented.

And this is hardly the only sign the fundamentalists want a theocratic regime. As mentioned above, they are pushing for the interim constitution to incorporate the principle that religious fundamentalism must be the basis of all Iraqi law. The fact that nonetheless Bush insists on whitewashing religious fanatics like Al-Hakim shows that U.S. has no principled opposition to clerical tyranny. It shows there is a real possibility that Bush and co. may reconcile themselves to the fundamentalist despots. □

## ***The occupation regime: oppressor of the Iraqi masses***

by Mark, Detroit

The repression carried out by the occupation authority is aimed not only at leftover Baathists or some Islamic terrorists. Its basic purpose is to keep the Iraqi people powerless. Meanwhile the Iraqi masses languish without basic services and with mass unemployment and poverty. But U.S. corporations are reaping a fortune from the funds supposedly meant to help the Iraqi people. And the occupation regime has decreed "free market" reforms in Iraq to help the multinationals plunder Iraq, though these plans have been stalled because the anti-occupation struggle is creating a bad investment climate.

### **Terrorizing the Iraqi masses**

Unless the Iraqi masses are repressed, neither the plans to install a pro-U.S. Iraqi government nor the plans for imperialist plunder of Iraq can go forward. Thus, the occupation regime has been stepping up their campaign of terror against the Iraqi population.

They have been using the tactic of collective punishment of whole towns which are suspected of harboring anti-occupation guerrillas. Some villages have been surrounded with razor wire in order to seal them off. The residents can only come and go if they present an occupation-issued card at military checkpoints.

One example of such tactics involved a village of 7,000 residents called Abu Hishmar. U.S. Colonel Sasserman, in charge of the operation, determined that this months-long lock-down would last until the villagers turned over someone for the killing of a U.S. sergeant.

Sasserman summed up the attitude of the occupation military brass toward the Iraqi people, stating: "With a heavy dose of fear and violence, and a lot of money for projects, I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them." Rule through "fear and violence" — that's how the U.S. military is winning the hearts and minds of Iraqis. As for the money for projects, we shall, in a moment, see who ended up with this in their pockets.

In another instance, the U.S. arrested all males from 13 to 81 years old in the small village of Habbiriyah, near the Saudi border. Two men were released while the other 79 remained

imprisoned. A common tactic is for U.S. troops to swoop into a town or neighborhood, going door to door smashing up homes and terrifying families. Mass arrests are made among those unfortunate enough to be around. These raids have filled the jails formerly used by Hussein. Reportedly, some 13,000 Iraqis are languishing in prison with no charges against them and no trials on the horizon. The victims families often don't even have any idea where their relatives were taken.

The U.S. arsenal of terror tactics also includes such measures as leveling the homes of, or arresting, relatives of suspected insurgents. Israeli advisors are also training U.S. assassination squads to secretly kill anyone they deem an enemy while other U.S. hit teams are reportedly already operating in Syria. With such a list of atrocities, it's no wonder that the group Human Rights Watch has accused the U.S. military of war crimes in Iraq.

While the pretext for much of the occupation terror against the populace is the hunt for armed guerrillas, in fact unarmed protesters have routinely been gunned down by U.S. and British occupation forces. In January, for example, British forces fired on a demonstration of unemployed workers, murdering six and wounding 11 others in the city of Amara in the supposedly quiet and pro-occupation Shia region. Meanwhile, U.S. troops don't hesitate to indiscriminately gun down Iraqis who happen to be near the scene when a guerrilla attack is launched. As well, occupation forces have arrested union officials and ransacked union offices.

U.S. forces are also busy trying to train Iraqi forces to help put down the rebellion. In early January, in the large southern city of Basra, the new Iraqi police carried killed four unarmed people in another unemployed protest demanding stipends promised by the occupation regime. Such events have helped quickly discredit the Iraqi police and led to a number of demonstrations against them.

The Bush administration crows about training a new Iraqi army. But even here the occupation regime suffered a fiasco in December when one-third of the soldiers in the first battalion it created soon quit because of the danger and low pay.

It also appears that the U.S. is going ahead with setting up a 10,000-member Iraqi secret police force. Its ranks will include former agents of Hussein's notorious intelligence forces as well

as members of Shiite fundamentalist militias and Kurdish bourgeois nationalist militias. The CIA will help direct their operations and is initially paying the salaries. The U.S. hopes its close involvement in this force will give it a powerful lever of influence even when a future Iraqi government takes over. While the new force will go after some leftover Baathist dregs, it will also be a threat to any opponent of the occupation and even future Iraqi regimes who do something U.S. imperialism doesn't like. The Pentagon has already pledged \$3 billion in its secret "black budget" to this effort.

U.S. imperialism takes a back seat to no one when it comes to clamping down on the masses around the world fighting imperialist dictate or local U.S.-backed reactionaries. But it has been having a lot of problems in Iraq. It needed to consult with another expert in crushing subject peoples and so has turned to the brutal Sharon regime in Israel to get some added advice and training. This is an additional reason why the U.S. repression of the Iraqi working people is resembling that of the murderous Israeli government's subjugation of the Palestinian masses in the West Bank and Gaza.

### **Profiteering continues despite delays in privatization**

Along with the U.S. "stick" of repression, there's also the "carrot" of promised economic aid which is supposed to buy allegiance to the foreign conqueror. However, it turns out that the carrots hardly make it to the people anyway as the Halliburtons of the world have been eating them all up. The U.S. has felt free to try to restructure the Iraqi economy according to its own free-market fanaticism. The reconstruction under imperialist occupation is not so much about providing for the basic needs of the people, but insuring that giant U.S. companies make the maximum possible profits. That's the main reason that after 10 months, even basic services remain a shambles.

The economic focus of the Coalition Provisional Authority has been figuring out how to allow U.S. corporations to take over as much of the economy as they can. Under Hussein, there was a large state sector of the economy, though it was being partially privatized. U.S. privatization plans offered the potential of a huge windfall for the multinationals taking over the former state sectors. Thus, last fall the U.S. announced it wanted to sell off 150-200 state enterprises. The CPA decreed measures designed to make foreign investment as lucrative as possible and to facilitate foreign domination of banking, etc. Some pre-war Bush administration documents indicate a desire to privatize the biggest prize, the Iraqi oil industry. In the meantime, the CPA took over control of the funds from the Iraqi oil industry so it could funnel them to its favorite capitalist profiteers involved in reconstruction projects.

Like all of Bush's post-war reckoning, the privatization plans were based on the illusion that the Iraqi people would love the occupation authority and agree to whatever it wanted. However, the hostility of the Iraqi masses to the occupation has upset everything. The inability of the occupation regime to quell the rebellion was frightening to would-be profiteers. And it didn't look like this situation would improve anytime soon.

In this climate, the U.S. and British imperialists discovered that there might be some legal problems, too. Even Tony Blair's top legal advisor admitted that an occupying power selling off

state enterprises might violate international law. Moreover, since the CPA was promising a sovereign Iraqi government by the end of June, they felt pressure to first get approval for privatization from the new government they were hoping to rig up. In line with the slow-down in privatization plans, the *Wall St. Journal* of January 7 reported that U.S. officials were now leaning toward establishing a new Iraqi state oil company. These officials still see a role for foreign investment in the Iraqi state company, but direct foreign control may be off the agenda, at least for the moment. Plans for a massive sell-off of other Iraqi state enterprises are also officially on hold. Nevertheless, some moves toward privatization are still underway. For example, the state-owned Rafidain Bank, the largest in the country, is preparing for privatization by laying off a third of its staff.

But whatever the setbacks for privatization, the plunder of Iraq by the U.S. monopoly corporations continued unabated. For example, in January, Bechtel was awarded a contract worth \$1.8 billion to repair power, water and sanitation facilities. It had previously gotten a \$1 billion contract. Motorola was given a fat contract for telecommunications.

Then there are the series of scandals surrounding Halliburton and its subsidiary Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR). Vice-president Cheney is the former CEO of Halliburton. During his term as Secretary of Defense for Bush I, and just before becoming CEO of Halliburton, he hired KBR to write contingency plans for the Pentagon that essentially said that KBR was the only company suitable for doing certain work for the military. Hence the \$7 billion dollar no-bid contract for repairing Iraq's infrastructure.

In Iraq, Halliburton hasn't gotten the oil flowing, but its profits are. The Pentagon found that Halliburton had overcharged them by \$61 million for high-priced oil they brought from a Kuwaiti company and imported into Iraq. Pentagon investigations are continuing. But that hasn't stopped the Pentagon from allowing Halliburton to continue its plunder. Indeed, the Army Corp of Engineers agreed with Halliburton that it was not obligated to provide the military with normal cost-justifying data. The Pentagon is not the innocent victim here, however, but a co-conspirator. Because of the numerous ties between the military establishment and the defense contractors, the Pentagon has little interest in stopping profit-gouging. For example, the Halliburton contract not only provides no incentive for Halliburton to purchase cheaper gas, it provides some reasons for Halliburton to pay more for gas. Why? The contract with Halliburton guarantees that no matter how much Halliburton spends on imported gas, they will be compensated for the full cost plus get a fixed per cent of their total costs on top of that. When Halliburton paid twice the going rate for gas, they were actually doubling their profits. And they were encouraged to do so by the Pentagon.

In addition to the oil rip-off, Halliburton is also being investigated for inflating the number of meals it serves the military in Iraq under its food service contract. And Halliburton had to admit that two of its KBR executives took \$6 million in kickbacks from one of its Kuwaiti subcontractors.

There is also a powerful connection between the failure of the occupation authority to restore basic services and capitalist profit-grabbing. This failure is not due to mere incompetence or occasional guerrilla attacks on oil pipelines. It's mainly due to the fact that the occupation regime has been more concerned



with enriching the multinationals than with the needs of the Iraqi people. Their “free-market” experiment in Iraq has been a miserable failure in the limited task of restoring essential services, much less reviving the collapsed Iraqi economy.

The big corporations don’t just overcharge, but they directly impede the restoration of the economy. An article in *Asia Times* (“Iraq reconstruction’s bottom-line”) by Herbert Docena, which appeared on their website last December 27, documents some examples of how the profit-motive underlying reconstruction in Iraq has been a disaster for the people. In one case Docena chronicles the problems with a major power plant in Basra. The plant needed replacement parts for its turbines. Iraqi turbines were built by French, German and Russian firms and those countries would have been the logical place to get the parts. But the conquerors decide who gets the contracts, and the repair contract was given to the U.S. company Bechtel. In fact, on December 9, Bush formally banned companies from these countries from getting contracts. Thus, despite the constant pleading of Iraqi energy officials, it took Bechtel about seven months to come up with the replacement parts.

The energy shortages in turn impact the oil refineries and

help cause the gas shortages. Now the notorious Halliburton re-enters the scene. Its KBR subsidiary is supposed to be getting the refineries running. Oil workers of the South Oil Company in Basra report they haven’t seen KBR do any repairs, however. Then again, there’s no reason KBR would be in a big rush to do this. Halliburton has the above-mentioned contract to import oil into Iraq which would be jeopardized should domestic oil production revive.

Other press reports have exposed how repairing Iraqi schools has been hampered because the contractors do the easy and more profitable work while failing to make more essential repairs.

In addition, it turns out that Bechtel was given a contract to make “road maps for future longer term needs and investments,” a process that may result in about \$20 billion in future contracts for them by some estimates. What the Iraqis want doesn’t matter — they’re not even consulted about what they need. It’s what profitable for Bechtel that counts.

The plunder of Iraq by U.S. capitalists not only shows that there are no noble motives behind the occupation. They also show the vast gulf between the corporate reconstruction of Iraq and meeting the needs of the Iraqi masses. □

## Solidarity with the Iraqi workers!

by Mark, Detroit

The Iraqi workers and poor want real democratic change and relief from their miserable economic conditions. The occupation authority, the Iraqi bourgeoisie and the fundamentalists clerics quarrel with each other but are all against the working masses, as are the ex-Baathists and religious fanatics who are fighting the occupation. In order to survive these difficult times, the workers must build their own class movement. That’s why, though the workers’ movement overall is just beginning to revive, the actions and attempts at organization over the last several months are so noteworthy.

### Recent workers’ struggles

At various workplaces, strikes and demonstrations have taken place in the most difficult circumstances. The occupation authority imposed wage-scales similar to those under Hussein, averaging a paltry \$60/month. Making matters worse, the CPA ended various food and housing subsidies which existed under the Baathists. Hussein’s policies combined with years of U.S.-approved sanctions and two wars have destroyed much of the economy and created massive unemployment. Such high unemployment creates tremendous pressure for employed workers not to rock the boat. Moreover, the occupation regime has carried over laws from the Hussein regime banning strikes in many sectors of the economy and added their own laws against labor actions. And the authorities have unleashed savage attacks on protesting workers. Yet, workers in Iraq are raising their heads.

There have been a number of work actions in the oil industry, the most important part of the economy. At the Daura Oil Refinery in Baghdad the occupation regime saw fit to install a

former Baathist as director. Getting in line with his new neo-liberal masters, the director boasted that “Privatization is good because it keeps workers in fear. It keeps workers in fear for their jobs. Every worker here knows I control his life. If I sack him I ruin his life, his family’s life.” In the face of these threats, the workers carried out three work stoppages in October and November 2003, demanding a salary higher than the paltry wage-scale implemented by the Coalition Provisional Authority.

In the supposedly “quiet” south of Iraq, workers at Basra’s Southern Oil Company have also been protesting low wages. A delegation of U.S. trade union activists visiting workers there reported that they were contemplating strike action to shut down oil production and planning to forcibly resist any attempts of the authorities to stop them. Some workers talked of joining the armed resistance against the occupation if their demands were not met. These threats frightened the authorities and early this year they agreed to significantly increase wages at the plant.

Also in southern Iraq, the 18,000 workers of the Iraqi Port Authority in Umm Qasr have been quite active. The overall port operations were awarded by the CPA to the U.S. company Stevedoring Services of America, operating under the name SSA Marine in Iraq. Visiting U.S. union activists report workers there say “There’s no difference between [CPA head] Bremer and Saddam. They’re both thieves, two faces of the same coin.” Workers have waged five wildcat actions against the hated port authority boss and are threatening more militant actions. Some workers promised to revive the revolutionary legacy of the uprising of 1920 against British colonialism.

The courage and militancy of the Iraqi workers has been evident in other strikes as well. At the largest shoe factory in the Middle East, General State Leather, workers have formed a new union and launched a struggle to oust their management and improve wages. The new “democratic” Iraqi police and management goons have fired on worker protests, wounding two union

leaders. But the bold moves by the workers, including a march on the Ministry of Labor, have resulted in at least kicking out the old manager.

Another inspiring struggle was carried out at the Nahrawahn complex of brick-making factories near Baghdad. The 15,000 workers employed here were making \$1.50 for a 14-hour day. Child labor was also employed at 60 cents a day. On October 11 of last year, 75% of the workers went on strike. Several hundred marched to the owner's office, demanding improvements in wages and working conditions. The workers' had secretly formed a union, but the arrogant employer, unaware of this, thought he could easily intimidate the workers by threatening to dismiss them. But the workers refused to back down. Instead, they returned to their homes to get their guns, including machine guns and AK-47s, and set up an armed picket line to stop scabs from taking their jobs. The shocked owner was forced to grant higher wages and make other concessions.

### **Struggles of unemployed workers**

In Iraqi conditions, the development of organization among the unemployed is particularly important. The Union of the Unemployed in Iraq (UII), an organization tied to the "left"-communist group, the Worker Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI) reports they have been able to organize tens of thousands of the unemployed into the UII, at least for some period of time. The UII has organized a number of actions for relief.

There have also been a number of militant spontaneous outbursts by unemployed workers. On October 1 in Basra, unemployed workers attempted to occupy the local governing council, which was dominated by the Islamic clerical trends. The council fled while police fired on the demonstrators. In early January, there were stormy protests by unemployed workers in the city of Amara in southern Iraq. The protesters, demanding jobs and food, confronted police sent to stop them. The police opened fire on the unarmed demonstrators, killing six and wounding eight. The protesters returned two days later in front of the regional Governor's building, expanding their demands to include new gubernatorial elections and elimination of the police forces involved in the slaughter.

At about the same time, some 400 unemployed workers took to the streets of the southern city of Kut in a militant struggle for jobs and food. They targeted an air base of the occupation regime manned by Ukrainian troops. The Ukrainian troops responded with tear gas, beatings and warning shots. Nevertheless the protesters returned the next day. They clashed with local police and the Ukrainian troops, who fired upon the demonstrators.

### **Trends organizing among the workers**

The present actions of the employed and unemployed give a glimpse of the potential strength of the Iraqi working class. But whether that potential is directed toward building up a militant class trend depends largely on what sort of trends hold sway among the workers and other oppressed.

One of the trends concentrating on organizing among the workers is the Iraqi Federation of Workers Trade Unions (IFTU). This trend has established a number of unions and conducted certain actions. It has certain contradictions with the occupation regime which has ransacked its offices and temporarily arrested

its leaders, because the occupation regime finds almost any sort of organized force among the workers intolerable. But this is not a particularly radical or militant trade union federation. It reportedly is hesitant to defy the array of decrees which limit organizing and strikes on the pretext that the Baathist remnants might take advantage to make a comeback. An IFTU leader claims that the Iraqi National Accord (INA) is among the groups supporting it. This is not good news as the INA is a pro-capitalist trend led by anti-Hussein former Baathists officers and officials who developed close ties with the CIA and the Saudi monarchists.

The IFTU also says it has support from the Communist Party of Iraq. Despite its name, this is, unfortunately, not a party of genuine communism or revolution. Long ago it lost the desire to stand alone for the workers against all the bourgeois trends. Thus, it has served as a left fringe of a variety of bourgeois nationalist trends. For a period of time it even took part in Hussein's Baath Party government.

Today, it promotes the imperialist-dominated UN as the alternative to the U.S./British occupation. And it has taken a seat in the puppet Iraqi Governing Council. While the CPI mouths phrases against the occupation and for the workers, it works to contain the mass struggle. During the militant demonstrations of the unemployed in Kut, for example, the leader of the CPI branch recommended begging the occupation regime for assistance rather than struggle, stating "We disagree with the demonstrations, but we have told the Americans our views and we are ready to be of service if we can help." Far from being a party with the goal of overthrowing capitalism, the CPI now sees value in a controlled privatization of Iraqi industry. Despite its ties to the workers, this is a party of class collaboration, not class independence.

The Worker Communist Party of Iraq (WCPI) is a relatively new party founded in 1993. As mentioned above, it has devoted a lot of efforts to organizing among the unemployed. It also has been in the forefront of advocating for women's rights. In contrast to the CPI, the WCPI denounces not only the occupation, but the lackey Iraqi Governing Council and the forces in it. The WCPI has carried out bold work in the face of attacks by fundamentalist gangs and the occupation forces. At the same time, their "left communist" views have hindered their ability to orient themselves on some of the key questions facing the struggle of the masses.

### **WCPI on the UN and elections**

One example of this is their view that the U.S.-led occupation should be replaced by a UN administration. They write: "As a matter of practical necessity, the UN, with the help of the international humanitarian and human rights organizations, should temporarily administer Iraq through the transition to a government chosen freely by the people of Iraq." But the UN, reflecting its character as an agency of international capitalism dominated by the more powerful imperialist states, has betrayed the Iraqi people time and again. It supported Gulf War I and sanctions. It wouldn't sanction Gulf War II but supported the U.S.-led occupation and gave credibility to the puppet Iraqi Governing Council. Certain of the big powers in the UN disagree with aspects of the present occupation. But they are not interested in what the Iraqi people want but what a coalition of



imperialist predators desires. After all, the European imperialist powers are also interested in having their multinationals make inroads into Iraq and are ardent supporters of neo-liberal globalization. Nor would this eliminate the power of the U.S. in Iraq as any deal to bring in the UN will have to be approved by the U.S. and the UN is not anxious for U.S. troops to leave. A UN occupation will still mean imperialist domination in Iraq, not a humanitarian administration concerned with the well-being of the masses.

The WCPI is no doubt aware of this history and feels uneasy about the UN. But they feel the fundamentalist threat looming over Iraqi society, and evidently feel the UN might ward this off. Thus, while they denounce elections under the U.S.-occupation as "Islamists' elections" where the fundamentalists or other reactionaries will come to power, they praise elections held under the UN as simply "the transition to a government chosen freely by the people." By contrasting things in this way, they imply that UN elections will lead to a happy result. However this is just wishful thinking which glamorizes a UN administration as a force for the masses.

This stand reflects a desire to find a shortcut around the unpleasant realities in Iraq today. The fact is that the workers' movement in Iraq is relatively weak compared to the clerical trends and bourgeois nationalist trends. What this means is that whether elections take place under the U.S.-British occupation or under a multinational imperialist UN administration, forces representing this or that section of the bourgeoisie will almost certainly come to power. As well, a fundamentalist-dominated regime may be the result. In these circumstances it may be tempting to imagine some powerful established force will intervene and make things right for the masses. But there are no easy ways around the unpleasant situation. In fact, there are any number of bourgeois trends, including top fundamentalist clerics, who see UN intervention in Iraqi as hastening elections which would put them in power. This means that the Iraqi masses must fight against imperialist occupations, whether under the U.S. or the UN, and fight against the clerics. They must establish and build up their own class movement. True, this too will not prevent the Iraqi bourgeois forces from winning the elections at this time. But this is the only way the masses can offer resistance to the forces of exploitation and imperialism that will lord over them, elections or not.

There is also the question of what attitude the revolutionary workers should take toward calls for elections. After years of authoritarian rule and then imperialist dictate, the Iraqi people are yearning for democratic elections. No doubt there will be questions about how they will be carried out and what restrictions will be imposed under either the U.S. or the UN. It is also important to give a realistic appraisal of what class forces will come to power. As well, revolutionary activists will have to evaluate the relative importance to give to elections as compared to various other democratic and economic demands. All that being said, the masses have a right to have their say and learn through their own experience the nature of the class trends in Iraq. Whatever emphasis one chooses to give elections, they certainly cannot be opposed.

Unfortunately, the WCPI has a hard time coming to grips with this. True, it thinks elections would be good if only the UN came in. But they are upset when this demand is raised under the U.S.-led occupation. They not only denounce elections as merely

a plot of the fundamentalists in alliance with the U.S. At times they even denounce the general notion of elections and representative democracy. For example the argue that

"Elections and representative democracy have very little to do with freedom, mass participation, and control in the political process. They are political frameworks through which the bourgeoisie legitimizes its control of the society. Every few years, people get the chance to exercise their highest 'civic duty' to relieve themselves of their power as citizens and delegate it to those who rule over them and exploit them. Through these procedures we get Hitler, Khomeini, Aznar, Berlusconi, George Bush, Bill Clinton, etc."

This is typical of the reasoning of "left"-communism. It rightfully sees the bourgeois nature of governments that have come to power in free elections under capitalism. But it draws the faulty conclusion that it is therefore irrelevant to the masses whether they live in a dictatorship or whether there is at least a modicum of democratic freedoms. This attitude is particularly wrong in a situation such as exists in Iraq where the issue of elemental democratic rights is and will be a major issue. The combination of supporting UN intervention as a practical matter while raising doubts about the general notion of elections will not serve well the goal of rallying the masses around a revolutionary workers' party.

### **WCPI support for banning the "hijab" headscarves**

The WCPI's desire for shortcuts to overcome the influence of the clerics has also led it to support the initiative by conservative French president Chirac that led to banning the wearing of the "hijab" head scarves by Muslim women attending French public schools. Indeed, they wish the French bourgeoisie adopted an even more severe ban. The French rulers also banned conspicuous symbols of other religions, but there's no doubt the ban was inspired by the Muslim religious symbols and the wave of chauvinist anti-Muslim peoples hysteria of the French bourgeoisie.

Islamic fundamentalism relegates women to a subservient status, and no doubt the wearing of the hijab in many cases reflects the influence of these backward prejudices. But banning religious beliefs and personal symbols of them is not how to fight against the backward influence of Islam or any religion. The decision to give up one's personal beliefs must be voluntary. When it is not, the backward beliefs are not eliminated, but often become more deeply held and defended, which plays into the hands of the clerics. Turkey has banned the hijab, but the political Islamic trends have now become a powerful force there. And of course scum like bin Laden utilize every instance of anti-Muslim discrimination to equate fundamentalism with liberation from secular oppressors. Indeed, in the case of France, the banning of the hijab may drive a number of Muslim students from the public schools to Islamic schools. This will hardly help develop working-class unity across religious lines.

Moreover a revolutionary workers trend should not support a campaign that reflects the backward prejudices of the French imperialist rulers against Muslims in general. Yet the WCPI writes "Although under the leadership of a Right Wing govern-

ment, any degree of set back of political Islam will ease the struggle of women under Islamic states and groups around the world.” (article on the WCPI web site: “Hijab in France: Battle for Islamic Political Uniform.”) This is a very dangerous stand as it implies that in the conflict between imperialism and fundamentalism, one should side with one against the other.

The WCPI has a hard time seeing how one could be against religious influence and yet support the right to have one’s personal religious views. Thus, a WCPI writer is critical of “secular forces in the western countries” like a Canadian feminist who says “I think if we are going to protest against a state forcing women not to wear the hijab we should also protest forcing women to wear the hijab.” The WCPI considers this stand inconsistent, as they tend to equate defending the right to religious views with supporting religion. But in fact the Canadian women’s stand is an example of consistent defense of democratic rights whether infringed on by the state or the clerics. And unless the battle to overcome fundamentalism is carried out in a democratic way, it will be bound to back-fire.

### **WCPI on the armed resistance**

The WCPI also has problems differentiating between the just sentiments of the masses and the reactionary forces who try to utilize those sentiments for their own ends. As noted above, they have difficulty separating out the mass demands for elections from the rotten goals of the fundamentalists. This also comes up in how they deal with the armed struggle. There is much that isn’t clear concerning how the armed resistance is organized. But it is clear there is a strong influence of former Baathists and assorted fundamentalists. The growth of random bombings claiming massive civilian casualties reflects anti-people currents. But as the WCPI itself says, there’s “millions of people in Iraq [who] are showing growing discontent and protest and demanding that the U.S. and its allied forces leave Iraq.” There are reports of armed resistance organized on a spontaneous basis, of workers contemplating armed resistance, and of armed resistance organized on a local basis with fairly loose connections to any definite trend. It also seems that a number of guerrilla operations require support from the local masses. So despite the strength of the reactionary trends in the armed resistance, there is also a section of the masses whose support the armed resistance based mainly on hatred for the occupation.

But the WCPI undermines efforts to appeal to the masses who are sympathetic to the armed resistance when they denounce armed resistance itself. For instance, they portray the armed resistance only as disrupting public services and killing civilians while implying that the idea of the armed resistance fighting the occupiers is just propaganda of the reactionaries to trick the masses. In an article on the armed struggle, the WCPI also states it “believes that political and mass struggle is the suitable form of struggle during the current situation in Iraq because it can help organize millions of people and bring them to the forefront.” They are right to emphasize the building up of the political and mass struggle. But when a guerrilla movement already exists with some popular support, it doesn’t help to break the influence of the Baathists and religious zealots to portray it as an

illegitimate form of struggle. Rather it makes it easier for the rotten forces in the armed resistance to claim exclusive rights to this front of struggle.

This is a glimpse at some of the problems of orientation with the WCPI. We have devoted much more space here to probing into their views than that of the other trends in the workers movement, it is not to denigrate the WCPI’s achievements but because of them. It is a group that is trying to organize an independent working class trend, while miserable groups like the CPI abandoned their class independence long ago.

### **What lies ahead?**

The Iraqi workers have begun to move forward under daunting circumstances. The first attempts at organization and struggle have shown that there is an alternative to both the occupation regime, Islamic and Baathist reaction, and the bourgeois nationalist forces. But it also must be recognized that the process of developing class organization has just begun and will be a protracted process. Today the workers’ actions are still sporadic and there are many weaknesses of orientation among the worker-based trends. But it’s only through the experience gained in the present struggles that progress toward independent class motion and organization will be made.

While the building of worker organizations of various types will be a vital task in the upcoming period, of special importance is work toward establishing the organization of revolutionary class-conscious workers. There are workers and activists with revolutionary class sentiments, but more work lies ahead to develop a party grounded on a genuine communist stand. Such a party will be necessary to help the workers find their way through the whirl of events.

Iraq is undergoing a transition from direct rule by imperialism to rule by sections of the Iraqi bourgeoisie in alliance with imperialism. The Iraqi workers still face the task of ridding themselves of imperialist occupation while also opposing the former Baathists and Islamic fanatics who have influence in the anti-occupation struggle. As well, the anti-Hussein sections of the bourgeoisie collaborating with the occupation will see their role grow. This will bring the class contradictions more to the fore on all the pressing issues. This conflict will focus not just on conditions at particular workplaces, but on the extent to which the Iraqi workers will have democratic rights and social services. There will also be the question of whether the Kurdish people are allowed the right to self-determination, including forming a separate state if they so chose, and whether all minority peoples enjoy full rights. Or will the bourgeois factions place obstacles in the way of this, thus inflaming strife among the workers of different nationalities? And there will be the struggle for women’s rights and the separation of mosque and state in the face of clerical tyranny and the willingness of other sections of the bourgeoisie to bow down before it.

It would be the task of a genuinely communist trend to rally other sections of the masses around a platform reflecting their distinct class interests in this period. Each step the workers take toward organization will put them in a better position to resist the forces of imperialism and the domestic bourgeoisie. □



# The LRP surrenders to militarism and the threat of a new draft

by Tim Hall

## Introduction

Last fall the League for the Revolutionary Party, a Trotskyist organization, announced that it would not oppose military conscription. (See No.66 of their journal *Proletarian Revolution*, winter 2003.) It was sad to see leftists acquiescing in advance to a potential resumption of the draft. The draft has been a hated symbol of U.S. imperialist foreign policy. Anger against the draft was one of the main ways working-class and student youth in the 1960's expressed their hatred of the brutal war against the Vietnamese people. Now the U.S. military machine is finding itself stretched thin and is considering resuming the draft. In its struggle for world domination, the American ruling class is bogged down in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, plus interventions and conflicts elsewhere. It is looking for more cannon-fodder. At this moment of difficulty for the Bush militarists, liberal Black Congressmen Charles Rangel and John Conyers (the latter a darling of the liberal leadership of the anti-war movement) have come to the rescue, introducing a bill into Congress renewing the draft. They even drape this bill in anti-war colors! (See *Communist Voice*, Vol. 9, No. 1, May 20, 2003 for an analysis of the bill.)

So this is not the time for revolutionaries, as the LRP's style themselves, to be giving the militarists a go-ahead sign. Instead, it is a moment when sharp exposures of militarism and imperialism should be made, exposures not only of the right-wing, neo-conservative naked imperialism of the Bush type, but also exposures of its collaborator, liberal imperialism of the Conyers variety. Exposing liberal imperialism gains added importance since Bush may be defeated in November by the Democrat Kerry, whose imperialism differs from Bush's only in that he prefers multilateral action by several imperialist powers over Bush's go-it-alone unilateralism. But the LRP's acquiescence in the draft shirks the opportunity — the duty, in fact — of making these exposures.

In *Communist Voice* last May I wrote an article denouncing the LRP's stand. My article must have touched a raw nerve because the subsequent issue of *Proletarian Revolution* (No.69, winter 2004) carried a lengthy reply.<sup>1</sup> My present article will consider this reply.

First, I will note briefly the tone of the LRP's article. While my article against them was reasoned and calm and ended by stating that "the LRP's stand harms the development of an anti-imperialist movement," the tone of the LRP reply is shrill and frantic. According to them, I am a "dishonest," "thumb-sucking," "middle-class," "moralist," and I "butcher" the truth. Here LRP descends to the strident, factional, ad hominem rhetoric we are

familiar with from the rest of the Trotskyist movement, most notably the Spartacists (and, we might add, from Stalinists *towards* Trotskyists). Vituperation is not conducive to rational debate.

One of the LRP's opening charges should be dealt with here, albeit briefly. They state that our Communist Voice Organization "descends from the Stalinist tradition that has its own notorious devotion to fabrication." It seems that no Trotskyist can debate against a non-Trotskyist without calling the latter a Stalinist. To a mouse, all cats have one color. The CVO's predecessor organization, the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA, broke with the Stalinist tradition 20 years ago, in the 1980's, after we repudiated Maoism. The LRP knows this.

## The gist of LRP's reply

The gist of LRP's reply to my article is that to oppose the resumption of the draft is to support the imperialist mercenary (non-drafted) military. The only way, according to them, to bring about the overthrow of the bourgeois war machine is to accept militarization, remain silent about the resumption of the draft, go into the military and from there organize the soldiers for revolutionary class struggle. While the CVO certainly aims to organize the soldiers for revolutionary class struggle (and in the 60's some of our comrades were active with soldiers and in the military), in our view the LRP abandons an absolutely crucial weapon: the weapon of anti-militarism. Without encouraging among working-class youth a bitter hatred for the whole spectrum of militarization of society, including the draft, a militarization that is inextricably linked to the reactionary capitalist goals of the war(s), it is impossible to see how the workers in the military could be aroused to revolutionary class struggle.

LRP's abandonment of anti-militarism is evident in the following statements in their article:

"So while we in no way support the bourgeois draft and would never vote for one or call for its resumption, we argue against campaigns that oppose the resumption of the draft. We also argue *against* those who advocate refusing to enter the draft, should it be resumed." "Ignorantly labeling Lenin 'a most determinedly anti-militarist revolutionary,' Hall tries to obscure the fact that Lenin time and again warmly welcomed the inevitable militarization of the masses because it advances the capacity of the workers to overthrow capitalism!" And: "His (Lenin's — T.H.) fundamental outlook was expressed by his 'Full speed ahead!' in relation to the bourgeoisie's wartime militarization of the population; that is incompatible with campaigning against the draft."

These quotes obviously raise the question of what was Lenin's stand on militarization and conscription. We are Lenin-

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<sup>1</sup>The LRP's polemic will be posted in full on the CV website at [www.comunistvoice.org](http://www.comunistvoice.org) soon, along with this article and the rest of the contents of this issue of CV.

ists, but we are not Leninists because we accept every phrase of Lenin's writings like religious people do the Bible, the Koran or the Talmud. We weigh Lenin's analysis against current and historical conditions. Over a period of nearly 40 years of our continuous communist political activity we have found that Lenin's writings, together with those of Marx and Engels, offer the most consistent and profound political guidance. We hold that they do so on the subjects of militarization and conscription as well, and we will explain our view below.

However, we must first note that, with the above quotes, the LRP reveals that it is not only opposed to a fight against conscription but also to a fight against militarism in general. This is evident in their opposition to my claim that Lenin was "a most determinedly anti-militarist revolutionary," in their claim that he "warmly welcomed" militarization of the masses and that his "fundamental outlook: on militarization was "Full speed ahead!" So the LRP is citing a "Lenin" whom it believes to be a supporter of capitalist militarization! But early in its article the LRP claimed that it is "flat-out opposed to any support whatever to the capitalist military machine." We have to ask: Why? Why do you claim to oppose the capitalist military machine when this "Lenin" you have created and claim to follow has a "fundamental outlook" of "Full speed ahead!"?

### Lenin against militarism

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

I stated both aspects of Lenin's stand on militarism in my article. The LRP sees only the second aspect of Lenin's stand and builds their whole strategy on it, supplying voluminous quotes, including the "full speed ahead" statement, to support their view. They view this as Lenin's "fundamental outlook." No, Lenin's fundamental outlook was not "full speed ahead!" to militarization. His fundamental outlook was opposition to militarism and imperialism.

Incredibly, right next to its article asserting "Full speed ahead!" as Lenin's "fundamental outlook," the LRP reprints a 1907 article by Lenin ("Anti-Militarist Propaganda and Young Socialist Workers' Leagues," *Collected Works*, Vol. 41). The Lenin article hails anti-militarist propaganda among the workers and cites activities in such places as Austria, where "ardent anti-militarist speeches" were given by socialists to military recruits before their induction into the service. Lenin hails the spread of anti-militarist sentiment among the recruits: "... everything is done to awaken the recruit's consciousness, to ensure him against the evil influence of the ideas and emotions which will be instilled into him in the barracks by fair means and foul." That sounds like all-sided anti-militarism to me. But LRP shrugs it off, saying that Lenin only called such activities anti-militarism because he "had not yet worked out his theory of imperialism."

According to the LRP, as soon as imperialism arises, it's wrong to fight militarism.

In my article I illustrated Lenin's opposition to a bourgeois standing army with a quote from 1916: "On the question of a militia, we should say: We are not in favor of a bourgeois militia; we are in favor only of a proletarian militia. Therefore 'not a penny, not a man,' not only for a standing army, but even for a bourgeois militia, even in countries like the United States, Switzerland, Norway, etc."<sup>2</sup> The LRP conveniently ignores this resolutely anti-militarist quote because it firmly establishes what I call the first aspect of Lenin's attitude towards militarization and conscription. This statement was made in the same year that Lenin published *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. The statement clearly shows that Lenin did not abandon the fight against militarism once he had developed his analysis of imperialism. But the LRP is blind to this. In fact, the quotation of "not a penny, not a man" for a standing army comes from the same Lenin article from which the LRP takes their lengthy quote which includes the words "full speed ahead!" I guess if you want to be just a tad *dishonest* about Lenin's views you can quote the part of Lenin's article that seems to agree with you and ignore the part that refutes you.

The LRP attempts to refute the other quote I use to show Lenin's anti-conscription, anti-militarism views. Lenin in 1917 talked specifically about the prospect of conscription in the U.S., which the American capitalists were then considering: "... it is difficult to conceive them (the American people — T.H.) standing for compulsory military service, for the setting up of an army pursuing any aims of conquest..."<sup>3</sup> According to the LRP, I am guilty of using that quote out of "a highly specific context." They say the context is that, as Marx had speculated, during the 19th century a violent revolution might not have been needed in the U.S., since, for one thing, the U.S. did not then have an army. Lenin pointed out that one of the reasons the U.S. bourgeoisie entered World War I was to have an excuse to build just such a standing army. But Lenin made this statement in 1917, the year *after* the quotes the LRP uses to "establish" "Full speed ahead!" as his "fundamental outlook" on militarization and conscription. Why didn't Lenin just say, in the later 1917 article, "Full speed ahead!" to the American capitalists and discourage American proletarian resistance to militarization? Why didn't he say "plenty of pennies, plenty of men" for the standing army? A year had already passed since he had written *Imperialism*, his classic analysis of monopoly capitalism. Did he somehow believe that this analysis did not apply to the United States, even though statistics on American economic development underpinned much of its argument? Did he think that militarization and a standing army were not inevitable in the U.S. absent a proletarian revolution?

The Lenin quotation I cited in my earlier article and re-quoted above, the "not a penny" quote, sheds some further light on this question of the "highly specific context" of the U.S. which, the LRP alleges, negates any general application of Lenin's statement against conscription. Note that Lenin declares

<sup>2</sup>"The military programme of the proletarian revolution", *Collected Works*, vol. 23, p. 85., September 1916.

<sup>3</sup>"War and revolution", *Collected Works*, vol. 24, p. 417, May 1917.

“not a man” for “a standing army” (echoed by the most militant 1960's anti-draft slogan: “Hell No! Nobody Goes!”) or a bourgeois militia “*even* in countries like the United States, Switzerland, Norway, etc.” (emphasis mine — T.H.) Here Lenin is opposing militarism and conscription in *all* bourgeois countries and *explicitly including* countries which developed standing armies later and fall within LRP’s “highly specific context.” In fact, this quote shows that Lenin’s view on the importance of anti-militarism and anti-conscription in that “highly specific context” was the exact opposite of the LRP’s. The LRP thinks that the significance of Lenin’s belief that the American people would resist conscription has been lost since it is obvious that the U.S. has long since developed a massive standing army; they think that such a belief or call does not apply to countries with developed standing armies. But Lenin’s 1916 statement, “not a penny, not a man,” makes it clear that his anti-militarism applies most strongly to countries *with* standing armies. The phrase “even in” indicates that he has applied “not a man” *precisely* to those countries and is then adding that it also applies to countries still developing a standing army. Do I detect some “butchering” of Lenin’s views here?

One might ask: if “Full speed ahead!” was Lenin’s “fundamental outlook” on militarization, what was the point of the whole struggle against the leaders of the Second International leading up to, and at the outbreak of, the First World War? The best socialist of all countries opposed this war. Led by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, the most conscious revolutionaries denounced the main leaders of the International, who were betraying the workers by voting credits for the war where they were members of parliaments and refusing to break with the war-mongers. The stand of the Bolsheviks and the left led to the Bolshevik Revolution, the formation of new communist parties in many countries and the establishment of the Third Communist International, which for a time strongly promoted the revolutionary proletarian movement in the world. Was all this wrong? Should the militants have gone along with the social-chauvinist opportunists, who voted plenty of pennies, plenty of men for the standing armies? Or was the Leninist policy, with its two aspects, which led to the Bolshevik Revolution, correct? Of course, the LRP would say that it stated in its article that it would not vote for an imperialist war, but if “Full speed ahead!” is its “fundamental outlook” on militarism, then we would ask, why not?

### Scenes from the 60's anti-war and anti-draft movement

Now let us take up the matter of the LRP’s views on the 1960's anti-war movement. In my article I related some history of the anti-draft and anti-war movement in order to support my arguments for the potential anti-imperialist value of agitation and action against the draft and militarism. The LRP says it wants the efforts of activists to lead towards a revolutionary class war of the proletariat against the imperialist bourgeoisie. This is precisely what a section of activists came to want, as a result of the struggles we went through and the increasing study of Marxism and Leninism that we turned to in order to solve the problems posed to us by the mass movement. The degeneration of the CPUSA into revisionist betrayal and the factionalism and class

collaborationism that pervaded the Trotskyist movement left us without Marxist-Leninist organization and Marxist-Leninist mentors to guide us. But, despite these obstacles, the anti-draft and anti-war movements contributed to weakening imperialism and to producing a class-conscious, revolutionary trend of activists.

The version of the 60's the LRP gives in their article would make a fine text for a book entitled *The 60's Movement, as told by Archie Bunker*.

In the LRP’s 60's only middle-class boys, not workers, hated and resisted the draft. This is laughable for anyone who participated in the movement of the time. It makes one wonder where the LRP gets their information — *Time Magazine*? In Cleveland, nearly all the members of the Cleveland Draft Resistance Union in 1967-8 either came from worker background or from lower-middle class background; all held working-class jobs except for two activists who lived on pennies, and all lived in working-class communities. One of the main motivations in organizing the group was the drafting of young workers all around us as cannon-fodder for the slaughter of the Vietnamese. Our office was in a Black working-class area. We advertised and conducted draft counseling, which attracted mostly proletarian youth, Black and white, who came through in a constant flow. (We not only counseled them on escaping the draft but we held political discussions and mobilized them for our demonstrations.) There were three main colleges in Cleveland at the time, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University and Cuyahoga Community College. CCC was attended largely by workers and it was the source for the largest number of people whom we counseled and who took part in our actions. We also got support from Case Western Reserve students, the most middle-class of the colleges, mostly for our demonstrations. We got the least support at Cleveland State University, which enrolled many lower-middle-class and worker students who were interested in rising into management. There was also a variety of older, working-class leftists, influenced by various opportunist political trends, from revisionist to Trotskyist to nationalist, who gravitated towards the Draft Resistance Union, as it offered a vigorous alternative that appealed to their sincere class instincts which had been stifled by opportunism. They tried to draw us in various directions, but we consistently went our own way; however, our contact with them taught us a great deal about the history of the proletarian movement. Our close ties to this varied working-class base resulted in a number of young workers joining us as we began to take up Marxism.

This was our experience in Cleveland but it was echoed in the experience of the left-wing of the draft resistance movement nationally. The right wing of this movement conformed more closely to the LRP picture, isolating moral protest from working-class politics. But in a number of places, activities similar to ours were carried out.

In the LRP’s version of the 60's, draft resistance was not motivated by protest against the war and imperialism but only by a middle-class desire to throw off authority. Actually, the motivation of the CDRU organizers, and most other anti-draft activists nationwide, was to try to stop the war by stopping the flow of inductees. The war was the overriding issue, not authority in general. While draft resistance couldn’t in fact stop the war, it contributed to the general anti-war movement, and that’s what



activists were aiming at. At the same time there developed a most bitter hatred of the authority of the government, the military and the draft machinery, for their class role, and this hatred was the most powerful among the young workers. The LRP's concern that the anti-draft movement was primarily anti-authoritarian is, in this case, a diversionary issue. If the class instinct of young workers to hate the capitalist authorities is not fanned to a white-hot pitch and an attitude of defiance is not spread, how can one even think of revolution? The CDRU and other militant anti-draft activists fanned the flames of this defiant spirit, to their everlasting credit.

There was another way in which the connection of worker resistance to the politics of the war became evident to us. We were inexperienced activists, with backgrounds in the civil rights movement and other struggles, and we had begun informally studying Marx and Lenin, in order to find an explanation for the war, racial discrimination, etc. We had been influenced by the anti-communism of the mass media and cultural establishment, one of whose messages was that the workers do not want Marxism and socialist politics. But when we related our study of Lenin's *Imperialism* to the workers whom we counseled and mobilized in our actions, they affirmed the analysis powerfully. This showed us that it related closely to their view of the world, completed it and made it systematic. Our experience of introducing Leninism to the workers thus brought workers closer to communism while it taught us that Marxism is the philosophy of the working class and that the workers will embrace it when it is presented directly to them. This also affirmed the link of the draft resistance by the workers to the nature of the war and imperialism, which LRP denies.

The LRP implies in their article that draft resistance was a white thing. Amusingly, they are then forced to admit the example of Muhammad Ali's draft refusal, while treating it as isolated. Again, we have a *Time Magazine* account of the 60's. Actually, hatred of the draft and resistance to it was quite widespread among African-Americans. In Cleveland, there were many Blacks in the anti-draft demos and the membership of CDRU was about 50 per cent non-white. This provided at least one humorous incident, when LRP-style perceptions about draft resistance clashed with reality. A right-wing radio talk show personality invited the CDRU to send a delegation to participate in his show. He was shocked when three Black worker-activists and one white worker appeared, defied his bullying and threatened to walk off his show every time he pulled his usual demagogical tricks. During the 1968 Black rebellion in the Glenville area, our activists held a demonstration of support at the federal building, attended by Blacks, whites and Filipinos, with a young Filipino worker as spokesman. Again, the LRP's picture of the 60's has an establishment slant.

The LRP also believes that draft resistance was resented by the soldiers. I am sure that you could have found some soldiers who did resent it, but at the same time many soldiers were then joining the anti-war movement. Dave T., a Black veteran returning directly from Vietnam, joined the CDRU and went on speaking tours with us. I remember at one engagement some right-wingers in the audience jumped up and threatened to kill us. Dave just giggled and said something to the effect that he had just returned from combat and if they thought they could scare him they were out of their minds. They shut up. Dave's brother,

Tom, had organized a group of 12 anti-war Black soldiers, calling themselves "The Dirty Dozen," in basic training at Fort Knox, and they requested our help. We made a trip down there to interview him and give him support. It was hilarious to see the MP's frantically running around to keep us under surveillance once they had made the mistake of letting our van on the base. There was one white male (me), one Black male (Dave), a Filipino woman in a bright Mexican serape and a Black woman with a big natural. (I describe us only to further illustrate the internationalist nature of our draft resistance activity.) We publicized the anti-war stand of "The Dirty Dozen" as best we could. That there were 12 Black soldiers in a group at one time at one base calling for the help of the draft resistance movement was far more typical of the situation around the country than the LRP would like to admit. They certainly didn't see any contradiction between draft resistance work and work among soldiers.

Most of the demos of the CDRU were held to support youths resisting the draft, but one of our members was drafted and decided to go into the Army and organize. The FBI and the Cleveland Red Squad were shocked when we showed up at the induction center picketing in support of someone entering the service (apparently they shared the LRP's view of the draft resistance movement as unconnected to activity in the military). This comrade also ended up at Fort Knox. There he organized a group which published an anti-war underground newspaper in the Army, entitled *FTA*. (FTA was an acronym extremely popular with soldiers at the time; it means Fuck the Army!) This paper got a wide circulation. Such a close connection between draft resistance and activity within the army was not unusual; all around the country anti-war coffee houses were being opened near military bases, where anti-war literature was circulated and discussions and meetings held attended by many soldiers. Many of the people involved with these coffee houses were involved in anti-draft activities as well.

Spreading anti-militarist thought and feeling, whether through draft resistance or other means, is crucial to creating a revolutionary trend among the working class in general and among soldiers in particular. I believe that this is why Lenin's attitude has two aspects, as I pointed out in the first part of this article. Without creating an anti-militarist atmosphere from the first, from outside the military, it is hard to see how one can be created within the military. The LRP's desire to build a proletarian militia is inconceivable without such a spirit.

Views similar to the LRP's on draft resistance were held by members of the Socialist Workers Party that we encountered then. The SWP was the largest and most influential Trotskyist group in the 60's and it was heavily active in Cleveland. It advocated meekly accepting the draft and then organizing the soldiers inside the military. I do not recall that their "go-in" line resulted in any significant soldier activity. It did, however, give them a rationale for disrupting anti-draft actions on the outside.

Like the SWP of the 60's, the LRP today ridicules militant anti-draft actions as "confrontationalist." Apparently this means that the anti-draft activists sought confrontations with the police for their own sake, for "macho" reasons, that the confrontations that did take place were not forced on the movement by the police and were not handled in such a way as to defend the movement and carry it to a new level. This charge of "confrontationalism" recalls the traitorous behavior of the SWP

in Cleveland in the fall of 1967, when they accused the CDRU of provoking the police. The CDRU held a demo at the induction center as a part of the national Stop the Draft Week in October. Anticipating police attacks, which had already beset the STDW in California, we wore helmets and carried shields — strictly defensive weapons. The anticipated attacks came but the police were unable to disperse our picket line through a morning of conflict. At no time did we attack the police, not for moral reasons but because it would not have served our goal of promoting resistance to the war and the draft. Our tactics were carefully chosen according to the level of the movement and what was needed both to defend it and to raise it to a higher level; they were closely connected to the anti-war sentiment of the working-class and student youth in Cleveland at that point. This was not “wilding” of the Weatherman type (and Cleveland’s future Weathermen boycotted our action).

Confirming the correctness of these tactics, our success had an electrifying effect on the movement in Cleveland (unlike the later Weatherman true confrontationalism, which alienated the working-class youth). But at a peace coalition meeting an SWP leader attacked the CDRU for “provoking” the police. We sharply denounced him and mobilized a larger demo, with more armor, for the following week. Unable to prevent this demo, the SWP joined it and, while the participants were gathering, this same SWP dreg sneaked over to the police without permission and told them we weren’t planning on attacking them. We had never discussed attacking the police, but apparently these Trotskyists shared with the police a view that self-defense is “confrontationalism” and both viewed us in that light. The LRP, too, seems to view defense of the movement against police attacks, when the masses are ready and able to do so, in the same manner.

In sum, the LRP has a distorted view of the 1960’s struggles, one in which the positive elements of the movement are overlooked and the movement often belittled. The LRP’s inability to see these positive developments is rooted in the non-materialist, philosophically idealist nature of the Trotskyist outlook. Instead of looking carefully at the specifics of the development of the mass movement of a particular time and place and using the framework of Marxism-Leninism to devise tactics to lead that movement towards revolutionary consciousness and more effective action, the LRP measures the movement

against certain abstract, dogmatic yardsticks, finds the movement wanting, and condemns it arbitrarily. Since the Vietnamese people were the main force in defeating the U.S. war machine, the LRP belittles the importance of the anti-war movement altogether. Since the anti-war movement did not overthrow imperialism, the LRP belittles it and accuses me of exaggerating its significance. Since that movement was not led by the working class through its own revolutionary party, they again belittle the movement and refuse to recognize the elements, like our trend, that learned through their participation the need for such organization and began to work to bring it about. Since the Black rebellions in the cities took place separately from the anti-war movement and without conscious proletarian leadership, some of the sites where beginnings of this leadership were developing are ridiculed. Since the anti-war and anti-draft fights against police attacks were often waged by students (though in Cleveland the activists were heavily working class, and the student population nationally was more proletarian ever before), then such battles are to be belittled as “confrontationalism.”

In short, the LRP has a pre-conceived notion of how a movement should develop, a box it must fit into or be viewed with “proletarian” scorn. They refuse to look at the actual development. Bemoaning the lack of working-class leadership and revolutionary struggle, they belittle some of the very places, the very paths through which such leadership and struggle was beginning to develop. They call our activity retrograde. We must ask: in comparison to what? Where was the proletarian party, the proletarian movement that we could simply have followed, simply joined? They did not exist. We were forced to work through these problems ourselves. The LRP rolls out its Trotskyist daydreams of great proletarian days, finds the actual movement lacking, feels superior as hell and spits on those who struggled to learn and promote Marxist tactics in the midst of the mass movement. They think that someday a glorious, pure proletarian movement will suddenly appear, practicing all the tactics dreamed up by the “old man” (Trotsky), and anoint them the leaders.

The LRP denigration of the anti-draft activists of the 1960’s shows a view of the struggle that is mechanical rather than based on the real contradictions of mass struggle, abstract and not materialist, in a word, Trotskyist rather than Marxist and Leninist. □

# Liberals prepare country for a draft

Whenever the imperialists wage war, a section of the liberal Democrats come out for the draft. This is not only the case today, with Bush II's Persian Gulf war and occupation of Iraq, but it was the case with Bush I's Persian Gulf war. The following article is *The Workers' Advocate*, December 1, 1990, page 5.

Congressman John Conyers is one of the most liberal members of the Democratic Party and he is also a member of the Congressional Black Caucus. He has recently called for reviving the draft, with no deferments or exemptions. (*Michigan Chronicle*, Nov. 21-27)

You would expect the militarists to want the draft. But Conyers wants us to believe that he is a man of peace. According to Conyers, reviving the draft would be a step towards peace. Why? It would make the prospect of military hostilities repulsive to more people by supposedly spreading the sacrifice of military service "fairly" to the whole population. He paints the draft in anti-racist colors as a way to ensure that blacks and minorities and the poor are not disproportionately in the armed services.

Jesse Jackson too, ignoring the experience of U.S. aggression against Viet Nam, claims a draft would ensure fairness. One of his first acts as "shadow senator-elect" from Washington, D.C. was to call for Congress to reconsider the draft. (*Chicago Defender*, Nov. 14)

## The real meaning of the draft

But what is the real purpose for a draft? Conyers himself admits that "If we go to war, a draft is inevitable. There would be no other way for the president to maintain the troop strength and numbers."

Doesn't this mean that the militarists need the draft in order to have sustained warfare? Doesn't this mean that by calling for the draft, Conyers is paving the way for more war?

Today the Pentagon is worried whether recruitment for the volunteer army can be maintained during a war crisis. And liberals like Conyers and Jackson have come out for the draft in advance.

## Democratic Party wants to regiment the youth

Indeed, from its liberal wing to its "moderates", the Democratic Party has supported a universal youth service for years. Former President Carter reinstituted registration for the draft. NOW and many bourgeois feminists insisted that any draft should include women. Later other Democrats called for national

service, either in the military or in a civilian service as cheap labor, for all youth. When this didn't get instituted, a new proposal was put forward for national service for those youth who needed government financial help for college or other reasons.

And now the Democrats are again talking about the draft. This time the most liberal wing of the party is taking on itself the shame and notoriety of being the first to call for conscription.

## Painting militarism in anti-racist colors

Conyers says that what distinguishes his draft from that of the militarists is that he is against any deferments. According to him, this will ensure that minorities and the poor don't bear the burden.

In fact, universal conscription would not end the extra burden on the minorities and the poor. The rich and privileged have long had favorable treatment within the military, and not just in escaping it. And today too, the numbers of blacks on the front lines is higher than their percentage in the armed services as a whole. As of mid-November, blacks were 29% of the troops in the Persian Gulf (according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff), although they are only 20% of total armed forces personnel. (*Detroit News*, Nov. 29)

For that matter, if the draft is reinstated, it is not likely to be done according to Conyers' prescriptions. Conyers call for the draft will imply make it easier for the rich and privileged militarists to impose this hateful step upon the country whenever they see fit. They can even present themselves as more humane than Conyers by adding a few exemptions. Indeed, while saying he is opposed to the extra burden borne by the minorities and the poor, Conyers' proposal would ensure that not a single black or working class youth escaped regimentation.

Conyers holds that the harsher and more militarist laws that are passed, the more war will be repulsive. So he "fights" war by calling for a draft. He doesn't oppose the imperialist system, and expose its aggressive designs in the Middle East. He doesn't call for mass meetings of the working class to denounce the militarists. No, he calls for the draft, something he can do hand in hand with the imperialists and militarists.

But never fear, Conyers won't just vote for sending the youth to the trenches. We have no doubt that, if necessary, Conyers himself will make the extreme sacrifice. He will take on the militarists hand to hand in the front lines – of a House subcommittee negotiating the exact terms of the draft. He will bear the burden of haggling with the enemy – while lingering over expense account lunches. What a hero! □



# On the open letter to the anti-war movement

by Joseph Green

On March 20 anti-war demonstrations took place from coast to coast as well as internationally. It was a good time for demonstrations, as the first anniversary of the war in Iraq coincided with a growing political crisis in Iraq and a growing skepticism of American working people towards the occupation. In the run-up to these demonstration, disagreement broke out over slogans, speakers and arrangements for the demonstrations. One question was whether the Palestinian issue would be raised, and how it would be raised. This is addressed in the *Open Letter from the Arab-American community and Muslim Community to the US anti-war movement* (see page 24). It appeals to especially to anti-imperialist activists, who back the struggle of the Palestinian people, want to oppose US imperialism everywhere, and also oppose multilateral imperialism. As the issues put forward in the *Open Letter* do not lapse with March 20 and will arise again at other anti-war demonstrations, it is important to look further into them.

Today the Palestinian struggle is at a dangerous and critical stage. The Sharon government is carrying out repeated murderous raids on the occupied territories, a wall is being put up that cuts the occupied territories into isolated prison camps or bantustans, and there is a crisis of orientation among the Palestinian people. Moreover, the Bush government is pushing a "road map" that is a facade for continuing the oppression of the Palestinian people forever. It is thus particularly important now to render support to the Palestinian people. And the *Open Letter* calls for this support, and moreover insists on the "right to return" for Palestinian refugees, a fundamental prerequisite for justice and one which both US imperialism and the Israeli government are vehemently opposed to.

As well, the *Open Letter* opposes the idea that the occupation of Iraq should be "internationalized". Without saying so in so many words, this presumably denounces the idea of putting a UN fig leaf on the US occupation. And the *Letter* also opposes the idea of rationalizing the occupation as perhaps bad to begin with, but necessary to democratize the Iraqi people.

The *Letter* also connects the anti-war struggle to the struggle against the oppression in the US of the Arab-American and Muslim communities. This is important as the repression carried out in the name of "the war on terrorism" since the Sept. 11 atrocity have fallen most heavily on certain minority communities.

## No class stand to its anti-imperialism

Many groups may have signed this letter simply to support the Palestinian people or other of the anti-imperialist sentiments expressed in the letter. But there's more to the letter than this. The *Letter* also reflects an approach to the world situation especially championed by Workers World Party. It has no class stand concerning the political conflicts, tyrannies and struggles in the world, except for opposition to the US government. It is an anti-imperialism which ignores the class issues involved.

The *Letter* appeals strongly to the anger of progressive people at the trampling of peoples by US imperialism. But it puts forward an old conception of anti-imperialism in which everyone is united against the occupier, and class differences are irrelevant. In reality, the vast anti-colonial wave of the 20th century didn't occur this way. And today, there are various political forces and class trends among the Palestinians and Iraqis. The Iraqi working people, for example, are faced with a struggle against both foreign imperialism and local reactionaries, such as the strong forces of Islamic fundamentalism, the local bourgeoisie, and the remnants of the Baath regime.

And the working masses of other subordinate and oppressed countries are also faced with a similar two-pronged task. US and Western imperialism are the greatest global oppressors of the working people, but they are far from the only oppressors. It would be a fatal mistake for the working people to take sides between the largest and most powerful imperialisms, such as US imperialism, and smaller reactionary rivals. The working class needs to build up an independent political force, to rally peasants in the countryside and urban non-proletarian working people around it, and to fight for its own rights, not to subordinate itself to the fundamentalists or other would-be imperialists and regional powers.

Indeed, one of the most encouraging things about the Iraqi struggle is that in the midst of the terrible unemployment, misery and political oppression of the occupation, the workers of Iraq are trying to assert themselves in their own interest. They have staged workplace actions and rallies of the unemployed, and they have taken part in political events. They are hampered by a lack of political and class organization, but they have made use of the end of Baath oppression to try to assert their class interests. In doing so, they face both the occupation authorities and the local Iraqi bourgeoisie.

## Finding the path of struggle

The *Letter* refers to the Palestinians and Iraqis as at "the forefront of the global anti-war movement, transforming themselves as a whole as its embodiment". Certainly Iraq and Palestine are among the key points of world political crisis today, and the struggle of the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples deserve the zealous support of progressive people and activists everywhere. But there are also struggles elsewhere around the world. Every day brings a flare-up somewhere else. A few days ago, US imperialism began a new intervention in Haiti. The Chechen people continue to bleed, day after day, year after year. The struggle in Colombia, Venezuela, the Philippines, and elsewhere continues. Neo-liberal privatizations strike at the people's livelihood in country after country. There is a global struggle proceeding, taking one form or another around the world.

The phrase that Iraq and Palestine are "at the forefront" might suggest that these struggles have shown the path forward to the others. But it is no insult to the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples to point out that they are still searching for the path of struggle. Nor is it any aid to them to pretend that they have already found this

path and are unified around it. For the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples have their own crises of orientation, and honeyed phrases about their already having found the path forward provide no help to them at all.

The idea that the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples have “transformed themselves as a whole” into the embodiment of the movement might also suggest that there is a certain political unity among each people. But take a look at Iraq. Despite material hardship and the oppression of the occupation, a variety of political and social trends have come back into the open and pressed their claims on the occasion of the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s government. Part of this shows the vigor of a people that can’t be held down, but it has also laid bare the class and political contradictions in Iraq. There are those who take part in the occupation government, and those who have thrown bombs at anyone associated with it. There are those who are organizing to hunt down the resistance, and those who take part in it. There are those who want a complete sweeping away of the Baath bureaucracy, and there are Baath elements involved in some of the resistance activities. Meanwhile the Kurds want the right to self-determination, and the Iraqi bourgeoisie is opposed and willing to concede autonomy at most. Women want to preserve and extend the social rights they have had, while the fundamentalist clerics want to eliminate secular marriage and impose a number of Islamic restrictions. The workers want to organize and obtain their rights, while the bourgeoisie looks towards a neo-liberal economy, although perhaps one that has some protections for the Iraqi bourgeoisie from the full force of foreign competition.

### **No class stand in the US**

Nor does the *Letter* have a class stand in the US. At first, this may seem a surprising statement. Doesn’t the *Letter* oppose various imperialist and racist stands which the bourgeois parties and their representatives put forward?

But the *Letter* doesn’t itself refer to the bourgeois parties having these stands, nor does it refer to the class differences in the American anti-war movement, or in the minority communities in the US. Nor does it call for the workers as a whole to take up the struggle. Instead it paints a picture of the problem in the anti-war movement being that it takes place in the US. Supposedly “the movement in the US has stood alone” in having differences with respect to the issues of Iraq and Palestine, and on the question of the treatment of “Arab and Muslim voices”.

Is that so? Is there really no other place in the world where some voices say that the “occupation of Iraq must be internationalized” and call for UN intervention? Indeed, isn’t the call for UN intervention even heard from some quarters in Iraq itself?

And is there no other movement in the world where the issue of the treatment of Arab and Muslim minority communities arises? Hasn’t a substantial part of the French left shamefully backed conservative President Chirac’s ban of the head scarf in French schools? Didn’t even some left-wing Iraqis do so? Yet Chirac’s real aim is to stir up anti-Islamic bigotry under the banner of defending secularism. Fundamentalism isn’t fought by infringing on people’s right to religious belief or lack of belief, and Chirac is not really defending secularism but the intolerance of the Christian French bourgeoisie.

The differences in the American anti-war movement don’t occur just because this movement is in the US. They are a reflection of class differences that take place all over the world, and they are also a reflection of the ongoing crisis of orientation in the revolutionary and working class movements around the world. This results in differences and controversies in “the global movement for justice” everywhere. The answer to these differences is to strengthen working class participation in the movement, and to build an anti-imperialist section of the movement based on work among the working class, students, and progressive activists.

Indeed, class and political differences appear in the minority communities as well. It is important for the anti-war movement, and for the working class movement in general, to deal with the concerns of the minority communities. This is essential to develop class-wide unity. But the movement will have to deal with differing ideas in the minority communities, as it does among working people in general. Just as among the working class in general, the minority communities and even minority workers are split on their attitude to the bourgeois parties, and on the orientation for struggle. The Arab-American and Muslim communities are not united, for example, on the demands for the Palestinian people. The *Letter* calls for the right of return. But are the signers in favor for a two-state solution for the Palestinian struggle, or do they envision a single, secular state comprising the territory of today’s Israel and occupied territories, a single state in which everyone will be an equal citizen? Probably they don’t agree on this. More generally, what attitude does the *Letter* have to the struggle of Arab and Muslim working people against the spread of fundamentalism? It is silent on these issues, probably because there is disagreement among its signers.

### **The attitude to anti-war activists and the working class**

The *Open Letter* also seems to call anyone who disagrees with it a racist. It does not distinguish between the confused ideas of the working people, who will eventually come over to the side of the class struggle and who will form the bastion against imperialism, and the deeply ingrained imperialism of the liberal bourgeoisie and pro-capitalist politicians, who may object to a bungled intervention, but for the sake of having more skillful and successful ones.

The *Open Letter* calls for expelling various unnamed organizations and movements from “the global justice movement”. It demands that “any organization or movement that finds it acceptable to minimize or disregard for political expediency the struggle of any people” should be thrown out. But wait a minute! This isn’t a reference to enemies of the struggle, but to those who “minimize” the struggle for reasons of expediency. One wouldn’t say, for example, that Sharon massacres Palestinians out of mere expediency. It is his goal to suppress the Palestinian people. The charge of abandoning one’s beliefs for the sake of expediency would presumably be raised against certain organizations that claim to support the Palestinians. So the *Letter*’s is actually talking about organizations or movements that disagree on what are the appropriate or “politically expedient” slogans at anti-war demonstrations.

Moreover, it is hardly likely that the authors of the *Open Letter* really wanted to expel a whole series of organizations from the demonstration coalitions. Indeed everyone knows that WWP and ANSWER, which have promoted the *Open Letter*, are anxious to draw in as many liberal personalities and organizations as possible. The *Letter* is simply being used to pressure other organizations to agree with some slogans by labeling them racist and threatening to throw them out of the movement. Once these organizations agree on slogans, they will be embraced again. Their racism and/or zionism will be forgiven.

Thus the problem with the *Open Letter* isn't that it is too strong against racism, but that it plays with the charge of racism. This brings its own problems. It distracts from a more serious struggle against racism, and from explicitly targeting the racism and imperialism of the Democratic and Republican parties and the American bourgeoisie. And it might inculcate a bullying attitude to the masses. In practice, it is not just in coalition planning meetings, but among the working class and anti-war demonstrators, that there are questions concerning the *Letter's* demands. There will be resistance to various of the wrong views in the *Letter*. But there will also be questions raised concerning the Palestinian question, how to struggle against Bush, the various forces in the occupation, and the issue of multilateral intervention. Not everyone is already an anti-imperialist. This raises the issue: how should anti-imperialist activists approach working people who are upset about the war but unclear about anti-imperialism?

It is necessary to go among the working masses and use the present political and economic crisis to win them to the positions of class struggle and anti-imperialism. One has to seek to build class-wide unity by continually seeking to develop support both of the workers of other lands that are under attack by imperialism and of the Arab-American, Muslim and other minority communities here. One has to search for what will help move the masses forward.

In this regard, it isn't simply an annoyance that there are different views among the demonstrators. This reflects the situation among the working class and even radical activists. And it shows that the anti-war movement is bringing people into motion, and helping bring working people into contact with anti-imperialists and communists. This gives activists a chance to help move people forward.

This work among the masses must include giving them an accurate picture about what is going on in the world. But look what happened with respect to the March 20th demonstrations. Two of the coalitions involved in organizing for March 20th did agree on joint demonstrations and on including a slogan for Palestine. But the flyers for these demonstrations put out by the WWP/ANSWER just had a few slogans and no explanation or elaboration. This isn't real anti-imperialist work. And this superficial approach isn't something that was forced on WWP and ANSWER. No one stopped them from having some content in their flyers, but that's not their way. They prefer to avoid content in order to facilitate their alliances with liberal bourgeois figures, fundamentalists, and other political trends. This shows a conception of the movement where the masses are simply supposed to be a passive cheering-squad, while the real politics is reserved for the leaders of WWP/ANSWER and other groups, who rig up their alliances at the top with the same groups that the

*Open Letter* seems to denounce as racist.

## **For anti-imperialist work in the anti-war movement**

What is needed is for activists to work to build up a serious anti-imperialist pole in the anti-war movement. The present large national coalitions are dominated by liberal bourgeois trends. This will not be changed simply by adopting the five general slogans from the *Open Letter*. There has to be the development of consciousness among activists about the different class stands in the movement, and there has to be protracted work to bring the working class into the struggle.

The *Open Letter* seems to suggest that if only certain very general slogans are adopted, there will be a militant, global united front in favor of anti-imperialist stands. This isn't realistic. It's not an accident that there are different class and political trends in the movement. And far from glossing over this, anti-imperialist work should bring consciousness of this to the masses. There will be a protracted struggle in the movement between anti-imperialism and liberal imperialism. Victory will be measured not by how far one can get some liberal representatives to give vague left slogans, but by winning the support of workers and youth for the position of class struggle and anti-imperialism. There has to be direct discussion of the role of the Democratic Party in the movement, of the nature of imperialist multilateralism, and so forth.

Activists don't need to wait until some major coalition agrees to take up some good slogan, if ever. The anti-imperialist section of activists, even if modest in number, should join together in every locality. They should continue to take part in demonstrations called by broader groupings, or in broad anti-war groups, but they should have their own organization as well, and their own activities, demonstrations, and contingents at broader demonstrations. Otherwise they will be waiting forever for the national coalitions, or those local coalitions under the influence of the pro-Democratic Party or pro-opportunist trends, to agree to do serious work. Anti-imperialist activists can circulate their own leaflets at demonstrations, workplaces, communities and schools. They should decide themselves what is important to say, and not be bound by what is acceptable to the leadership of the broad coalitions.

The only solid base for anti-imperialism is the mass of workers and minorities. Every effort should be made to bring the workers into the anti-war struggle, as well as to extend solidarity to the specific struggles of workers in Iraq and elsewhere. The anti-imperialists will have to build up their own base among workers, rather than rely on the present leadership of the unions, as they are led today by a pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy, which is closely tied to imperialism.

It's isn't just the liberal Democrats and reformists who oppose an anti-imperialist and class stand. Non-class anti-imperialism, while it may sound militant, leads to a dead-end. Thus the "anti-imperialism" of the WWP also leads nowhere. The WWP seeks a quiet alliance with fundamentalism, and it has also quietly backed various tyrants, such as Saddam Hussein, when they were in struggle with US imperialism. But far from this showing how independent WWP is from the American



bourgeoisie, in fact WWP is notorious for chasing and promoting liberal bourgeois figures.

The *Open Letter* may appear on the surface to be a step towards anti-imperialism. And that's why various activists may have signed it. They may see in it only such things as support for the Palestinian struggle, denunciation of an internationalized

occupation of Iraq, and a call for struggle against racist organizations. But in fact, the *Letter* provides a poor orientation for its signers and for all those looking for real anti-imperialism. Serious support for the Iraqi and Palestinian peoples and the minority communities here must include a class stand. □

## Open letter from the Arab-American and Muslim community to U.S. anti-war movement

*This letter is reproduced from the January 29, 2004 issue of the Workers World newspaper. It is critiqued in the article starting on page 21.*

Dear peace and justice organizations and activists,

On March 20, 2004, the world will mobilize against war and colonial occupations. The significance of this historic day is evident to all and requires no further elaboration. The political clarity and character of this mobilization in the U.S., however, remains illusive.

This is where our community stands:

In confronting war, the people of Palestine and Iraq have paid dearly. They stand against the imperial project shoulder to shoulder with communities of color and the working class in the United States, along with a great many subjugated peoples around the globe—from Afghanistan to Colombia, and from the Philippines to Vieques, and on. Without a doubt, the Palestinian and Iraqi people are both welded together in an inextricable unity at the forefront of the global anti-war movement, transforming themselves as a whole as its embodiment and paying in its defense with the dearest of all—their very existence. Yet, despite every home destroyed, child murdered, acre confiscated and tree uprooted, town colonized and ethnically cleansed, wall built, refugee remaining nation-less, and incremental robbery of their self-determination, they remain the very antithetical formulation of empire and with a vision of justice for all.

In the United States, we, Arab-Americans and Muslims, have been maliciously targeted, stripped of our rights, and positioned outside the constitutional framework of this country. A new COINTELPRO has been unleashed against our homes and living rooms, as our fathers, mothers, sons and daughters are plucked away and thrown into unknown prison cells. Thus, in a continuum of history, we stand with African Americans, Japanese Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and all others in the painful struggle for justice. From them all, we take our cue, for they are our predecessors and our partners in this long march.

Accordingly, we the undersigned hereby declare that:

1. We do not accept de-linking the struggle of the Palestinian people from the anti-war movement, and regard the struggle in Palestine, as it is viewed worldwide, to be central to any peace and justice mobilization.

2. We insist that the Palestinian right to return and to self-determination are the key anchors of the Palestinian struggle,

and that organizations that attempt to diminish, sidetrack, or abrogate these rights, regardless of any other position they may take on Palestine, are acting contrary to the will and aspiration of the Palestinian people.

3. We view all attempts to relegate our collective presence to the margin and to tokenize our participation in the movement to be racist in character. In its attempt to silence the Arab and Muslim voices for decades, particularly that of the Palestinian people, the movement in the U.S. has stood alone in the global movement for justice. We see ourselves as full partners in leading the movement as signified in the heavy price we continue to pay along the way, and reject any attempt to objectify our presence.

4. We regard the positions that the “colonial occupation of Iraq must be internationalized,” or that ending the occupation must be conducted over a period of time until the “Iraqis are able to secure their democracy,” as implicitly colonial and racist. These are positions that are rooted in the construct of “manifest destiny” and the “white man’s burden” to “civilize.”

5. We call on our people everywhere to hold all organizations accountable to the positions they take, especially those that depict racist attitudes towards us, implicitly or otherwise, particularly those that tokenize and objectify our struggle. Any organization or movement that finds it acceptable to minimize or disregard for political expediency the struggle of any people should not be allowed to function within the global justice movement. Justice is neither selective, nor partial or conditional.

We are firm on these principles for the March 20<sup>th</sup> mobilization and beyond as well call on all communities and organizations to mobilize and stand in force under the following unifying five slogans:

1. End all colonial occupations from Iraq to Palestine to everywhere!
2. Bring the troops home NOW!
3. No to internationalizing colonial occupations!
4. Stop the attacks on civil liberties!
5. Money for jobs, education, and health care, not for war!

As we salute and stand empowered with sectors of the movement that have taken a principled stand on justice, we seek to participate in the empowerment of all as we call for a genuine global untied front against war.

**All out on March 29, 2004!** □

# Behind the empty bravado of non-class anti-imperialism

On November 29-30, Portland's John Paul Cupp posted around the Internet a statement calling for a united front of anti-imperialists to support the Iraqi resistance. It caught our attention because building more unity of anti-imperialists for actions, contingents, campaigns, and so on is something we strive for. But Cupp's statement was a sectarian screech against the work to build a political movement against the war, and he also advocated support for reactionary forces in Iraq. This would include the Baathist remnants of the Hussein regime and fundamentalist clerics.

Cupp ran into immediate opposition on Indymedia. But his stand represents a certain trend of thinking. Certain others on the left, most notably many of the Trotskyists, also defend support for local reactionaries by claiming that this is anti-imperialism. Usually they are not as forthright as Cupp. They may claim to give only "military not political support" to these reactionaries, or they may gloss over precisely which forces they are supporting. But forces like, say, WWP/ANSWER will essentially use the same appeal that American activists supposedly have no right to do anything but support the supposed local leaderships.

Such thinking as Cupp's is the sorry result of a politics that ignores the class struggle. It is not based on considering the interests of the workers and other toilers. And in reality, beneath the anti-imperialist phrases of this tendency lies a very demoralized way of thinking. Faced with the horrors that U.S. imperialism is forcing on the Iraqi and other peoples, such people lose faith in the ability of the working people to resist. Instead of making every effort to assist the working people of this country and Iraq to build a movement independent of the bourgeoisie, they look for salvation by siding with one reactionary fighting another.

This is the same thinking that leads reformists to demand that the movement back the Democrats under the banner of "anyone but Bush". The reformists have lost faith in the ability of the workers of this country to stand in their own interest, so they devote themselves to backing one or the other pro-capitalist politician. In its way, John Paul Cupp's statement, despite its red and anti-imperialist bravado, only represents the flip-side of this. He comes along to say "anyone but the Bush/imperialist-installed government in Iraq" while sloughing over the reactionary nature of the leaders he says U.S. activists should have "unconditional solidarity with".

We reproduce below excerpts from Cupp's appeal and two replies which it met from anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninists in the Northwest. Some typos have been corrected.

## On the need for a pro-Iraq united front in the US

by John Paul Cupp  
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It is clear that invasion of Iraq was an act of unprovoked

aggression. As such, the people of Iraq, and their leadership, whatever our differences, deserve our unconditional solidarity as they resist this attack and further occupation. This includes solidarity with the very armed resistance that is sending "our troops" to their justly deserved body-bags.

The Zionists and neo-con war hawks have literally mapped out a plan for "regime change" throughout the Arab and traditionally Islamic world. Is it not then understandable that the banner of Anti-US/Anti-Zionist struggle is carried highly by Arabs, Muslims, and all genuine anti-imperialists throughout the world? Is it not then understood that whatever our differences, these comrades-in-arms, are entitled to our unconditional support?

All pretenses of the invasion of Iraq, have been shown to be blatant lies, and the real nature of this so-called "liberation" mission is all too clear to see. Absolutely no one, can on one hand call themselves anti-imperialist, and at the other not only oppose the continued occupation, but also not side with the anti-occupation resistance, including armed resistance.

In the era of fierce anti-imperialist class struggle, the primary mode of resistance is the gun, that is armed resistance centered on the masses themselves, as the army of national-liberation. . . We call on the Popular, Leftists, and worker-based forces to understand this truth, and to take a principled stance in solidarity with Iraq. May the Imperialists and their GI Mercenaries find their throats slit and their heads bashed in with concrete!

While most of the Left has its head up its ass, trembling in fear at the misnomer of "antisemitic" which the Zionist Enemy dishes out at it each time it comes closer and closer to standing with Palestine, and its Arab and Muslims inhabitants, the Muslim Comrades, whatever our differences, within in the Imperialist Countries, are applauded the world over for their willingness to combat the Zionist Enemy. For this, whatever our religious differences with Islam, we must applaud our Islamic Brothers for their courage, and stand in the trenches with them, no matter how much our hated common enemy calls us "antisemitic" or "third-positionist" ( fascist), for we know that Zionists and their capitulators are the real third positionists!

As Iraq is a traditionally Islamic country, it is only understandable that the Muslim Ummah (unity of Islamic people) around the world would stand with Iraq. In standing for Iraq's right to self-determination, we stand for it unconditionally, no matter what religion(s) it chooses for its self. The Muslim People of Iraq, and in fact, just about no one in Iraq has harmed the working class of the US, particularly the Black, Chicano, and Native American Working Class. It is clear that whatever our differences, the Islamic Community, is a highly oppressed community, and that the so-called "left" controlled by traditionally Judeo-Christian elements, has an unjust bias against Islam. Even comrades, who are atheists, agnostic, or "secular", should be able to recognize that this undemocratic bias is counter-productive to our goal of building genuine anti-imperialist people's movements. What is even clearer is that, like it or not, the Islamic Community is a major part of the pro-resistance forces that should be built in the US.

We call for Red-Green Unity, that is the unity of Worker-based popular forces, and Islamic popular forces in the US. This mirrors the on the ground realities of Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq. An injury to one is an injury to all. We should oppose "green-baiting" in order to build a Pro-Iraq United Front as much as we would have opposed "red-baiting" of socialists, communists, and anarchists, during the McCarthy era. Also the Geopolitical ramifications of Iraq are great. It is unlikely that the Imperialists and Zionists will "cut their losses" and accept defeat in Iraq easily. Therefore, it is necessary that all pro-Iraq Forces are on page with one another, have warm normalized relations, and that centralized co-ordination occurs. United we can aid in the Military/Political Defeat of the US, consolidate gains with the Iraqi Resistance, and share with the world, the liberation this brings!

We call for further strengthening ties, directly with the Iraq Resistance Forces, including Armed Resistance Forces, whether this is legal or not. The sons and daughters of John Brown and Nat Turner, must not care! It is clear the primary factor leading to the end of the war in Vietnam, was not the US anti-war movement, but the number of GI's that The NLF and Vietcong sent home in a body-bag. Such is the case with this war. It is noble that 100,000 or more would stand together with signs to oppose a war in Iraq, or the further occupation, but it is cosmetic at best. Furthermore, without principled stances, we are not in a position to actually create gains, that is to aid in the military/political defeat of Iraq. In fact in a country such as ours, with wanton opportunism, a group of 20, or even 3, is more capable than the large sectors of the Anti-war movement to create gains, both at home and abroad.

Below are some suggestions for what would concretely define a Pro-Iraq Camp, and what would be an immediate exclusion. . . .

1. Withdrawal of all support for US Troops, up until they on some level resist. While most of the anti-war movement wishes to show its loyalty to "our troops", we recognize two diametrically occurring antagonistic forces exist. We stand with Iraq, and not US Imperialism.

2. Co-ordinated solidarity campaigns for Troops of any country stationed in Iraq, which either mutiny or refuse to fight. By demonstrating that cannon fodder does not have our support unless, it resists, and that by resisting, not only does it have our support, but it will be able to "get away with" its actions, we are draining the fish pond of the imperialists. We do not recognize the validity of the law, of any country which wages or aids in the waging of an unjust war of aggression in Iraq, and as such we stand for resistance unconditionally.

3. Refusal to tolerate Opportunism, and Chauvinism, Principally, Pro-US Sentiment and Zionism. Without a fighting platform based on principle we are nothing. By letting the "enemy within" to foster, we are aiding our own demise.

4. Unconditional Solidarity With Iraq and Its Leadership. Whatever our differences, the People of Iraq, and the People of Iraq, alone, are the master of their own destiny. They do not need Chomsky, Zinn, or any other Western Leftist to think for them. They are entitled to our solidarity no matter what our differences. The Iraq people have shown that they are light years more advance in the concept of anti-imperialist class struggle, and are the ones most capable and deserving of choosing the strategies

and tactics they choose in their glorious anti-occupation struggle. This may be last but far from being least, it is first and foremost. To the comrades of Iraq, WE ARE WITH YOU!!!

## Real anti-imperialism, or sham?

by Wilhelmina 12:10am Sun Nov 30 '03

By way of introduction, I'll say the title "On the Need for a Pro-Iraq United Front In the US" itself should make a reader wary. It doesn't say an united front in "support of the Iraqi masses", or in "support of the Iraqi peoples' anti-imperialist resistance", or a similar formulation. No, it calls for a "pro-Iraq united front". But during the past year we've seen the same call given by various Trotskyists who used it as the banner under which to give the Hussein tyranny support in its war with U.S. imperialism (a war which was reactionary on both sides). Moreover, both the Baathists who would like to once again lord it over the masses but have not become part of the occupation regime (as many have) as well as various religious fundamentalist forces who would like to rule on behalf of the Iraqi bourgeoisie in the form of an anti-democratic theocracy can not only agree with, but whole-heartedly support "a pro-Iraq united front in the U.S." However, they cannot support a united front which stands with the interests of the Iraqi masses against both the U.S. imperialist occupiers, and their former (or would-be) reactionary oppressors. They cannot support a united front supporting the development of the revolutionary democratic movement in Iraq. They cannot really support a united front which works to support the tens of thousands of Iraqis who came into the streets during the first days of the occupation shouting "No to Saddam, no to the U.S.!". Nor can they really support a united front which supports the right of the Kurds to self-determination.

Thus, Cupp's title is, at best, unfortunate and worrisome. But beneath it we find things which real anti-imperialism (and real anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism) just can't sign on to. The prime example is the call for "Unconditional Solidarity With Iraq and Its Leadership".

What leadership is being referred to? There are many forces fighting the U.S.-led imperialist occupation, all with leaderships of some type. Some of these are democratic and anti-imperialist, some reactionary and either would-be imperialists or former imperialists trying to make some kind of come-back. Thus, I don't think anti-imperialists should give the pro-Hussein forces still resisting the occupation ANY solidarity, let alone "unconditional solidarity". The Baathists have proven over and over that they're allies of world imperialism in oppressing the Iraqi people, and, when in power, that they're regional imperialists in their own right. (It was this regional imperialism which led them into conflict with the world super-imperialists headquartered in Washington to begin with.)

What about the religious fundamentalists that oppose the occupation but have also sent gangs to attack demonstrations of unemployed workers demanding relief from the occupation authorities, and have attacked activists and offices of left-wing groups organizing among the workers? I don't think anti-imperialists can give them any solidarity either, let alone "unconditional solidarity".

The social forces in Iraq (and in the world) whose interests



are truly anti-imperialist are the workers and oppressed peasants. It is they with whom we have solidarity. We should wholeheartedly support the development of the revolutionary democratic current in the Iraqi resistance because it serves the interests of these forces in Iraq, and worldwide. But does this mean that we give "unconditional solidarity" with whatever leadership comes to the fore, or with whatever policy is adopted by it? I don't think so, not if it means that we can't publicly criticize what we think are wrong things it does, i.e., violations of democracy by these leaders, or unprincipled compromises they might make with Iraqi reactionaries. Our unconditional solidarity is with the resistance struggle itself. It's therefore our DUTY to oppose things which we think are harmful to it. This is real proletarian internationalist support for the Iraqi masses' struggle.

John Paul Cupp's last paragraph, however, is a demagogical tirade against the very idea! The people of Iraq "do not need western leftists to think for them", "the Iraqi people have shown that they are light years more advanced in the concept of anti-imperialist class struggle"...etc. He writes about the People (capitalized), but it's a call for robotically trailing behind whomever Cupp eventually tells us is the Iraq leadership that we must (according to him) give "unconditional solidarity". . . .

## On the need for a pro-WORKER front

by Nick 10:49pm Sun Nov 30 '03

Cupp makes a series of statements, many of which are unquestionably correct, but these are mixed in with a bunch of incomprehensible drivel, and worse, a whole bunch of truly bad, even reactionary trash.

Yes, the invasion of Iraq was an act of unprovoked aggression. There are few, even among the ruling circles, who do not admit to this truth. These days their only claim is that it was justifiable aggression. Yet, Cupp's next statement does not flow from this truth, and could hardly be wrong. Just because the US attacked Iraq without provocation, it doesn't follow that any and every leadership of the Iraqi people deserves our support. . . . Cupp's post is peppered through with this sort of bait and switch, starting with an indisputable statement, and then drawing questionable conclusions from it, conclusions which are founded in a blurring of the lines between class interests in the struggle:

\* Because the Zionists and US imperialists have mapped out a plan for regime change throughout the middle east (true and indisputable), we have to unconditionally support the "Arabs and Muslims", as a whole (despite the fact that some are horrifically exploitive and oppressive to others of them)..

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\* Iraqi self-determination might swing toward Islam, and we need to support their right to do so, if it is their choice, therefore we have to uncritically support them in doing it, despite the fact that Islamic fundamentalism is an anti-worker, pro-bourgeois trend, and an ultra-reactionary one at that (anti-imperialist Marxist-Leninists do not relinquish our responsibility to analyse the class relations and forces, and to push for a resolution most advantageous for the working class in that country and internationally, just because we repeat the incantation of "self-determination").

\* We need to oppose "green-baiting" (true. This can be simply stated as "fight the oppression of Muslims", and in this form it is nearly universally recognized as a value of the anti-imperialist left), therefore we need a "red-green unity" (what does this mean? Leninist united front tactics? Then of course. Never criticising Islamic fundamentalism? Then of course not. United front tactics, not as twisted and distorted by various revisionist trends, but as described by Lenin, involves cooperation wherever possible, but always always always on the basis of principled stands. Lenin particularly dwells on the need to never trade away your right to publicly criticize those you are working with, in the interest of "unity" — really capitulation to the ruling class).

There are more examples in Cupp's post, where he takes a commonplace assertion (often wrapped up in militant, or even just odd, phraseology) that no anti-imperialist could disagree with, and draws exactly the wrong conclusion from it. . . .

Cupp is dismissive of "stand[ing] together with signs", saying yes, it is "noble", but "cosmetic". This is a part of his over-enthusiasm for our short-term prospects. Today, the prospects for defeating imperialism in Iraq are tiny. And Cupp's formula, "red-green unity", supporting (unspecified) Iraqi leadership, etc. will not bring us closer. Only patient building of an independent working class anti-imperialist movement here, and encouraging a true anti-imperialist movement in the middle east will bring us closer. . . .

In the four points of unity for a "pro-Iraq" faction, again, Cupp blurs over distinctions which need to be made. Yes, we must not fall for the "support our troops" garbage, yes, two "diametrically occurring antagonistic forces exist [sic]", but these are not Iraq and US imperialism. These are the workers of the world, and world imperialism, in whatever form it exists, be it US, Iraqi, Israeli.

Yes, we must support those troops who resist US imperialist adventures. Yet, realistically, we do not have the forces to help the resisters "get away with it". This is pure delusion to intimate that we do today. The movement has to be far more developed than it is today for this to be true.

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# Palestinians resist the attacks of Bush and Sharon

by Pete Brown

Everyday brings news of a new atrocity against the Palestinians, another brutality, another assassination. This is a campaign to destroy the spirit of the Palestinians and their very existence as a people. The latest atrocity is the Israeli Defense Force's murder of Sheikh Yassin, one of the most popular leaders in the Gaza Strip. This was part of an Israeli campaign to kill off as many Palestinian militants and leaders as possible. Yassin was the leader of Hamas, a backward fundamentalist trend. But it was a criminal act to kill him, an act designed to suppress the Palestinian people as a whole. The Israeli government began boasting about who they would kill next, would it be Arafat or someone else.

But as Bush and Sharon come up with new forms of repression against Palestinians in the occupied territories, the Palestinians develop new forms of resistance. Sharon's Wall, which he touts as a guarantee of Israeli security, is now a focus of protest and an internationally recognized symbol of apartheid. Imperialism and zionism are stymied in their efforts to quash Palestinian resistance, and they have been unable to sell their new plans for repression as "peace plans" to the Palestinians. All the U.S./Israeli peace plans are based on preserving the present character of Israel forever and having the Palestinian people give up their struggle. But as long as Israel remains a theocracy based on subordinating and excluding the Arab masses, there will be no solution to the crisis. The Palestinians are facing a major crisis of orientation, but no one can stamp out their struggle.

## Bush's road map still dead

Bush's road map to peace in Israel/Palestine has been dead since last summer. During the first steps of Bush's road map the Israelis were supposed to disengage from the occupied territories, stop carrying out raids, and dismantle outposts set up by Israeli settlers. The Palestinian prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, secured a ceasefire from armed Palestinian groups to create conditions for negotiations to move forward.

But the Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, was not serious about peaceful negotiations. He continued launching raids and targeted killings in the occupied territories. As a result the Palestinian ceasefire collapsed after six weeks, and since then there has been no return to the road map. The armed Palestinian groups refuse to agree to another ceasefire without guarantees from the new prime minister, Ahmed Qurei, that he will accomplish something in negotiations. And Qurei refuses to meet with Sharon until he is given assurances that Israel will make some substantial concessions. But Sharon is not making any promises.

So Bush's road map, one of his major foreign policy initiatives, remains a dead letter. Bush organized big summit meetings of his Mideast allies to initiate the road map, but now, with all the hoopla gone, the Palestinian people are left with the

same situation on the ground that they faced a year ago. Only worse. Today many more people have been killed, the Israelis have pushed forward with building their barricade around the West Bank, and another year of normal life for Palestinian workers and schoolchildren has been lost. The Israelis have destroyed the civil and governmental infrastructure in the West Bank, and the result is impending chaos.

## Geneva Accord dead

After the collapse of the road map there were a number of private attempts at peace negotiations in the fall of 2003. One of them was co-sponsored by Ami Ayalon, former head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, together with Sari Nusseibeh, a prominent Palestinian bourgeois. Another one was called the Swiss plan, because it was backed by Swiss diplomats and resulted in the Geneva Accord between private Israeli and Palestinian parties. Both of these plans would have Israel make some concessions on the status of Jerusalem. But expatriate Palestinians would have to give up the right of return to Israeli territory, and another major sticking point, the issue of Israeli settlements, was left unresolved. These were attempts to get things moving again by going around the roadblock of prime minister Sharon. Actually, as a final resolution, which is what they were intended as, both plans were unacceptable to the Palestinians. Yet even these plans went too far for much of American bourgeois opinion. Colin Powell met with the people involved in the Geneva Accord, and drew a lot of right-wing flack for doing so.

But eventually these initiatives too died out for lack of support from the major parties. The Egyptian government has also tried to revive negotiations from time to time, but these efforts have come to naught.

One reason for the popularity of these unofficial peace plans among the Israeli establishment figures in Israel was the fear that Sharon's policies might lead to a dilution of the Jewish state and an end to the Israeli theocracy. By smashing all independent Palestinian political organization and creating a political vacuum in the occupied territories, it was felt that Israel might have to step in and completely take over — that is, annex — the territories. First of all, this would get Israel denounced around the world as an expansionist aggressor state — nothing new, of course, but the level of criticism would intensify. But secondly, Israel would then be faced with the prospect of granting Israeli citizenship to all Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, which would mean Jewish citizens shortly becoming a minority inside Israel.

Of course even if Israel did annex the territories, it would still be very reluctant to grant citizenship rights to the Palestinians. But it would be difficult to justify this in the international arena, and Israel would face increased pressure similar to the way South Africa faced pressure from the anti-apartheid movement. Hence some Israeli bourgeois figure it would be better to grant the

Palestinians some distinct political organization, to keep them at a distance in order to preserve Israeli theocracy.

There are other reasons for the popularity among ordinary Israelis of the private peace plans. Some Israelis are sick of the constant state of war and insecurity; some are worried about the financial costs of Sharon's military adventures and construction of the Wall; and among liberal circles there is some genuine desire for improvement in the horrible living conditions of the Palestinians. These plans offer the hope, if not the reality, of a solution. But for now Sharon's policies remain in control, and he is in no hurry to negotiate.

### **U.S. elections will change nothing**

One question that comes up is whether the 2004 presidential election in the U.S. will change anything as far as Mideast peace plans go. Liberal publications recall with fondness president Bill Clinton's enthusiasm for negotiations and his energetic pursuit of a peace plan with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. The liberals imply that a change of administrations, with a new Democratic Party president, would break the Mideast logjam.

But this impression overlooks the fact that Clinton, too, failed to come up with a plan that was acceptable to Palestinians. Yasir Arafat would have been happy to sign on to any plan that he could sell to the Palestinians, but the so-called compromises offered by Israel at that time were beyond what Arafat could stomach. And since then the Israelis have destroyed much of Arafat's proto-government Palestinian Authority.

During the primary campaign season the Democratic Party candidates had very little to say about the Israel/Palestine question except general platitudes in favor of peace. The only interesting discussion among them on this issue came last September when Howard Dean, presuming to take seriously the talk by Bush and Clinton about the U.S. being an "honest broker" for peace in the Mideast, made a statement to the effect that the U.S. should treat Palestine and Israel "equally". The implication was that a Dean presidency would get tough with Israel and demand that Sharon negotiate in good faith.

Right away Dean's opponents smelled blood. Joe Lieberman jumped all over his statement, charging that it violated a basic principle of American foreign policy, the "special relationship" with Israel. The liberal media weighed in, charging that Dean didn't know what he was talking about. John Kerry agreed, sniffing at Dean's statement with his sophisticated nose and bragging that he himself was too "experienced" in foreign policy issues to commit such gaffes, that a Kerry presidency would be more "nuanced." Dean's own campaign manager started issuing apologies, explaining that his candidate sometimes "shot from the hip." (It turns out that Dean's campaign manager was himself formerly chairman of the American-Israeli PAC.) Within days Dean was forced to meet with American Zionist leaders and explain himself, in the course of which he backed down and adopted the mainstream political position of unconditional support for Israel.

That was the end of any substantive talk about Israel/Palestine. The candidates now do not deviate from the script of U.S. imperialism, that the U.S. must dominate the Mideast, and Israel has the major supportive role.

### **Sharon plans unilateral disengagement**

Sharon's new plan for the occupied territories is "unilateral disengagement", meaning that Israel will withdraw from some of the occupied territories without a negotiated peace settlement, without a Palestinian political structure being put in place. With the new wall in place, Israeli forces will withdraw behind it and leave the Palestinians to deal with the chaos created by years of Israeli attacks.

This will not mean the end of Israeli interference. Sharon will maintain the option of re-invading and carrying out targeted killings of Palestinian leaders. Nor will it mean the end of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. On the contrary, Sharon is overseeing a feverish construction campaign as settlements expand and build roads and tunnels to connect with other settlements. Sharon does plan to close a few small settlements located inside the Gaza Strip, settlements which are somewhat isolated and hard to defend, but the major West Bank settlements will remain, as well as those just outside the Gaza Strip.

Far from annexing the territories and giving Palestinians an opening to agitate for citizenship rights, Sharon is building a wall of separation between Israel and the Palestinians. Sharon is also talking about expelling long-term Arab citizens of Israel to the territories, removing entire villages to the West Bank and stripping their Arab residents of Israeli citizenship. Thus unilateral disengagement does not mean an end to Israeli interference in Palestinian affairs, but stepped-up repression and discrimination.

Sharon's plan is an ultimatum to Arafat's Palestinian Authority that if they want Israel's cooperation in setting up a state structure they must make an agreement with Israel within the next few months. The PA is already dissolving — the PA's mayor of the major city of Nablus resigned the end of February, which could mean the end of PA authority there and the takeover of the city by armed gangs; and the PA has been largely replaced in authority in the Gaza Strip by Islamic fundamentalist groups. But with Sharon holding all the cards, any agreement Arafat makes at this point will be an abject surrender, with Israel maintaining the settlements, the territory behind the wall, Jerusalem, and overall control over any territory ceded to the PA.

### **Palestinians protest the Wall**

The collapse of negotiated peace plans has not meant the end of the Palestinians' movement against Israeli oppression and the inhuman living conditions imposed on them. For months the Palestinians have organized an international protest movement against the wall being built around the West Bank by Israel. These protests reached a climax the last week of February coinciding with hearings on the wall being held at the International Court of Justice at The Hague. Masses of Palestinians came out to demonstrate against construction of the wall, and in the course of these demonstrations they had sharp confrontations with Israeli troops. A number of Palestinians were shot and killed by the Israeli army. Confrontations also took place in Jerusalem and other cities.

## Prospects for struggle

Sharon's plans for unilateral disengagement dramatize what was wrong with the plans for a two-state solution in the first place. Supposedly having their own state would have allowed the Palestinians self-determination. But Israel would not agree to the Palestinians having anything like true independence. Israel's unilateral withdrawal will impose this situation on the Palestinians; they will be "free" of Israeli occupation, but it will be a freedom without political or economic self-determination. There will still be checkpoints, borders, military outposts, and Israeli settlements dividing up one Palestinian area from another.

Nonetheless, there will remain possibilities for struggle against segregation and discrimination in Israel and the territories. Israel will maintain overall control of the area and will continue to use the territories for economic exploitation. Palestinians living in the territories will still work inside Israel or in industrial zones along the borders. This means a potential for economic struggles among Palestinian workers along with struggles for civil and political rights.

On Feb. 7th, 400 members of Fatah (Arafat's party) resigned en masse to protest corruption, bad leadership, and a lack of direction in how Fatah handles the Israeli conflict. This dramatizes the crisis of orientation in the Palestinian movement.

One of the main complaints of those who resigned is that Fatah has not even held elections for its officers since 1989, even though its party constitution calls for elections every five years. This is a reflection of the dead-end situation facing Fatah and the PA. Fatah is committed to a separate Palestinian state, but Arafat cannot get Sharon's assistance in setting up such a state. Even if he could, such a state in present conditions is bound to be a bantustan dependent on Israel. And meantime Arafat and his bourgeois cronies have done very little to help the masses, preferring instead to focus on profiteering and sectarian infighting.

Palestinian activists need to revive the vision of a unitary democratic secular state for all of Israel/Palestine. Of course for Israel to simply annex the territories, thereby creating a single state, would not bring justice to the Palestinians. They would still be harshly oppressed and discriminated against, whether they were a minority or the majority in such a state. But the orientation toward a democratic secular state for all peoples in the area creates the possibility of forging working class unity between Arabs and Jews and also gives the orientation that Palestinians will not be satisfied with separate-but-unequal status. □

*No to imperialist occupation!*

## Down with US intervention in Haiti!

by Joseph Green

US imperialism is brutally interfering in Haiti again. The Bush administration has backed a revolt against the government of President Aristide and forced him out of the country. It has sent in troops to suppress Aristide loyalists and keep order. This is yet another American occupation — for how long is unclear. The shape of the new government will be determined mainly, not by the Haitian people, but by what is acceptable to Bush.

Haiti is one of the poorest countries of the world. And for a long time the people were held down by death squads like the Tontons Macoute. For a time the people thought they saw an alternative to their economic misery and lack of political rights. After decades of dictatorship from first the Duvaliers and then a military regime, they managed to elect Aristide president in late 1990. The masses of the poor backed him because he denounced their oppressors, called for reforms, and organized the Lavalas movement among the poorer majority of the people. He was, however, overthrown by the Haitian military in September 1991. He returned to office when in October 1994 the Clinton administration carried out a US invasion of Haiti and overthrew the military junta. Aristide finished his term of office and was succeeded in office at the end of 1995 by one of his supporters, Rene Preval. Then Aristide was elected to office again in the presidential elections of late 2000.

Meanwhile imperialism was losing patience with the Aristide government. An international cut-off of direct aid to Haiti had

begun in protest against electoral fraud in the mid-year 2000 legislative elections, and indeed there was such fraud. The cut-off hit Haiti hard as aid constituted a large part of the government budget, as well as providing direct assistance to individual Haitians. The Bush administration continued the pressure on Haiti, as it preferred to get rid of Aristide altogether. And finally, as a revolt spread against Aristide, US marines removed him from the country.

Does this mean that Aristide is an anti-imperialist leader? No, it doesn't. Although he is hated by the conservative wing of imperialism, he had relations with Clinton and the liberal wing of US imperialism. The Clinton administration had restored Aristide to the presidency in Haiti in 1994, but it had a price for doing this. It insisted that Aristide carry out a neo-liberal economic policy of privatization and austerity. And since then, Aristide had moved in the direction of the economic course imposed by the US and the world agencies. This intensified especially during Preval's presidency, and continued during Aristide's second term. Meanwhile, even after the aid cutoff that began under Clinton, a section of the Democratic Party has continued to have hopes in Aristide.

Although the Bush administration sent in Marines to remove Aristide by flying him out of the country, the revolt against him was not simply a creation of the US government. Aristide had been immensely popular with the poverty-stricken majority of the Haitian people. But since 1994 he and Rene Preval have sacrificed most of his promised reforms to a neo-liberal econom-



ic policy, and they sought to work in conjunction with part of the Haitian elite. They came into conflict with various of the organizations and self-help groups of the Haitian masses who had previously supported Aristide. The Lavalas movement itself split into two parts, as Aristide organized a new group, the Fanmi Lavalas (Lavalas Family), and left the OPL (formerly the Lavalas Political Organization but later the Organization of People in Struggle). The Fanmi Lavalas no longer represented a mobilization of the people with its own initiative, as the Lavalas movement originally was, but became a personal instrument of Aristide's will. The government itself ruled roughly, through a system of gangs (Chimeres), patronage, and personal power. It became corrupt, and its leaders lived very well indeed while Haiti sunk deeper into poverty and despair.

Thus Aristide came into conflict with a wide variety of forces. Already under Preval, the split in the Lavalas movement had resulted in a governmental crisis; for the last part of Preval's term, parliament was shut down and he ruled by decree. As a result of the disputed election of 2000, this crisis continued. Aristide came into sharper conflict with organizations of the working poor who were seeking to improve their conditions, and his government also had bloody clashes with students. The opposition contained groups with conflicting political views, including former Lavalists, political trends with a mild reformist viewpoint, opportunist groupings, and those with the viewpoint of "civic society". He also faced opposition from conservative businesspeople, much of the traditional elite, and sympathizers of the old dictatorships. And of course the leaders of the old death squads, many of whom had gone into exile, wanted to see him go as well.

When the revolt began this year, there were few left willing to stand in Aristide's support. He retained a good deal of popularity among the poor, but this was a passive support: the Lavalas had long before ceased to be an instrument of mass mobilization, and it was the gangs that were active. Thus it was not until he had fled the country that one saw signs of mass anger in the poor urban districts.

The active forces of the revolt against Aristide were also weak. The best-armed forces of the revolt was led in large part by notorious former rightists, stained with the blood of the Haitian poor. They may well take revenge again on the Haitian people. US imperialism, even when restoring Aristide to power in 1994, had made sure to keep these forces in reserve. For example, when it raided the offices of the death squads during its brief occupation of Haiti in 1994, the American military had captured 160,000 pages of documents about the atrocities of the army and of the death squads of FRAPH. These included trophy pictures of atrocities, kept by the death squads to boast about their crimes. The US removed the documentation from Haiti, and never allowed them back. It thus shielded the murderers and torturers from exposure and prosecution.

Now the US is setting up a government in Haiti. It wants to ensure that the death squad leaders relinquish power to the

civilian government that the US wants. The Bush administration wants to put the death squad leaders in reserve for use on another day. US imperialism talks about democracy; it deposes governments in the name of democracy; but it always preserves the gun and the noose as its own means of bringing countries to heel. After all, there is always a chance that the masses will rise again. And the Bush administration doesn't even quite dare to altogether count out Aristide as a force yet. It flew him to Africa, but then twitched nervously as Aristide came back to the Caribbean, reaching Jamaica.

Alongside US imperialism, French imperialism has been particularly active in the last phase of the removal of Aristide. Because the French government put some obstacles in the way of a unilateral US invasion of Iraq, it has been seen by reformist forces in the anti-war movement as almost anti-imperialist. But only the French anti-war activists, not the French government, were concerned with the plight of the Iraqi people. It is the French working masses whose class interests incline them to international solidarity; the French government merely sought to ensure that its own imperialist interests were protected. And hence the same French government that squabbles with the Bush administration over Iraq, has joined together with Bush in dealing with Haiti. Meanwhile the UN is looking into how to play its usual role of cleaning up after US intervention.

The Bush administration wants a government in Haiti that will carry out the neo-liberal policy even more faithfully than Aristide did. It wants a government that will abandon Aristide's rhetoric against the bourgeoisie and the foreign exploiters, and loyally follow the twists and turns of US policy. And it wants a government that will keep Haitians from fleeing to the US, as the American bourgeoisie is racist. To these ends, it is carrying out the occupation.

Aristide has always promised social reform and denounced the foreign oppression of Haiti. Aristide and the Lavalas movement promised a lot in the days of the struggle against the death squads and the old elite, and back then they persisted in dedicated struggle for this despite threats and repression from the then-existing dictatorship. But despite his rhetoric, Aristide thought he could accomplish reform through reconciliation with the Haitian elite and compromise with imperialism. He joined with the Clinton wing of imperialism, and he joined with a section of the Haitian elite. The result has been another tragedy for Haiti. Aristide turned his movement from a rallying point of the poor into another fetter on their activity, and he established a regime of personal enrichment. Meanwhile the dominant force in the opposition coalition mainly fought with Aristide over the spoils of government. What the Haitian workers and poor need now is a class movement in their own interests. Only such a movement can stand up to the Bush administration, world agencies such as the IMF and World Bank, and all foreign imperialist pressure. And only such a movement can provide the social reform that the masses sought from Aristide. □

**For your reference: from the days of Aristide's return to power in 1994**

# **Freedom will come from the Haitian workers, not the occupiers!**

The following leaflet is from *Detroit Workers' Voice*, October 15, 1994. It relates some of the history that shows why Aristide gained the support of most of the Haitian poor. It also pointed out that there wouldn't be freedom in Haiti unless the conditions of the toilers improved, and yet Aristide had agreed to the privatization and austerity demanded by the Clinton administration and the World Bank. This set the stage for the subsequent tragedy. Aristide did abolish the Haitian army, but Haiti was bound hand-and-foot by the international aid agencies and the agreement of Aristide to neo-liberal reforms. He eventually established a personal rule, and his "lavalas" movement became a fetter on the activity of the toilers. Thus the masses did not come out into the street in his support during the recent coup as they had earlier.

For three years the Haitian workers and poor suffered torture and murder under the rule of the military dictatorship that overthrew President Aristide on Sept. 30, 1991. Today the Haitian toilers hope for something different. They are bravely coming out in the streets to denounce the thugs that for years murdered them at will. Workers and other progressive people in the U.S. are cheered by the sight of poverty-stricken Haitians raising their heads again.

The American establishment mass media say there's little for the Haitian masses to do except to cheer on the U.S. occupation. Sometimes they say that, now that Cedras [head of the former military regime—*CV*] and some other military leaders have stepped down, Haiti already is pretty free from the old tyranny. The American occupation is supposed to have given democracy a chance.

But Haiti has seen interludes of parliamentary democracy before. Ever since the Duvalier dictatorship was overthrown, Haiti has seen one coup and one atrocity after another. Aristide was elected by an overwhelming majority of Haitians only to be overthrown by Cedras. Today Cedras has stepped down, and Aristide is scheduled to come back. But what guarantee is there that another assassination, another atrocity, another coup won't take place?

Even today, it requires courage for the Haitian toilers to go into the street. One day, a paramilitary thug throws a hand grenade into the middle of a pro-Aristide demonstration. The next day, a member of FRAPH drives a van into the middle of a demonstration, killing 14 people. Army leader Cedras may have stepped down, along with chief of staff Philippe Biamby, but the military and police apparatus is still there. And the paramilitary thugs are still armed.

It is not sufficient to have a lull in the killings in order to have freedom. Only the action of the Haitian toilers can cleanse Haiti of the reactionaries. The American troops are under orders to keep things quiet. But only if the Haitian toilers succeed in sweeping away the military and paramilitary thugs, improving their social conditions, and breaking the power of the old Haitian

elite, will freedom come to Haiti. Only then will the Haitian toilers enjoy rights that enable them to live with their heads up, that further open up the fight against the exploiters, and help them organize for complete liberation.

## **Who is for Haitian freedom?**

The American government says it occupied Haiti to ensure freedom. And today many Haitians believe this to be so. But as time goes on, a different story will emerge.

In fact, in occupying Haiti, the U.S. has removed leaders who were fostered with American money. The American bourgeoisie never really liked Aristide who sounded too radical to them. So although the American government may have been uneasy about the overthrow of Aristide's government three years ago, many of the people who staged the coup were on the CIA payroll, and the CIA continued its contacts with them. The notorious organization FRAPH, which murders Aristide supporters and Haitian toilers, was organized and led by a CIA contact, Emmanuel Constant. And this CIA connection continues to the present.

The U.S. hoped that it would just remove a few military leaders, stop the worst excesses, and the masses would be passive. It wants to dictate the limits of Haiti's economic and military policies, and who are acceptable leaders of Haiti's government. But Haitian toilers are using the occasion to put forward their own idea of freedom. By coming out in the street, the Haitian toilers are making a brave stand. Even if many Haitians now think the U.S. supports them, they will learn differently as time wears on. They have seen the U.S. military commander arm-in-arm with Cedras. On Sept. 30 they saw the U.S. troops stand aside for hours and refuse to intervene as FRAPH thugs shot at the big demonstration in the Haitian capital. Port-au-Prince, on the anniversary of the coup. The masses' view of the occupation will change rapidly as soon as the U.S. troops turn on them.

Whatever they think now of the occupation, the Haitian toilers are seeking to take things in their own hands when they come into the streets, when they beat up the reactionary thugs who are still armed and oppressing them, and when they denounce the so-called "honorable" generals. In practice, they are going against the wishes of the occupation. Eventually, to continue doing this, they will have to consciously realize the contradiction between their interests and those of the American occupation.

The Haitian toilers will only get the liberation that they themselves fight for.

## **Imperialism and Haiti**

For the real U.S. interest in Haiti has never been freedom.

The American government is interested in Haiti because it is a low-wage sweatshop for American corporations. 100,000 Haitians labor for a variety of international firms for rock-bottom

wages. Aristide's proposal to raise the minimum wage by another \$1 A DAY (NOT hour) was one of the reasons that the Haitian elite overthrew him. The Clinton government wasn't comfortable with the military rule of Cedras, but it wants to see the low wages continue.

The American government is interested in Haiti because it regards the Caribbean as its own "backyard". Imperialism is alive and growling in Washington, and it believes that the U.S. bourgeoisie can determine the big decisions of other countries. Congress debates whether Aristide should be president of Haiti – not whether he is supported by the Haitian masses. It debates whether Aristide will impose an austerity program on Haiti – not whether the Haitian masses want this program. The Republicans oppose the occupation – but only because they thought that the Cedras way of shooting down demonstrators was a sufficient guarantee for U.S. interests.

The American government is interested in Haiti because it believes it has the right to invade and bully other countries in its "backyard" at will. It has invaded Panama, waged a dirty war on Nicaragua; propped up a decade-long civil war in El Salvador; overthrown the government of Grenada; etc. Now American troops are in Haiti. The U.S. may have a "liberal" president, and maybe a "conservative" Congress after the next election, but both are imperialist. Both Democrats and Republicans believe in the U.S. as world cop – they simply disagree sometimes over which country to invade.

The American government is even interested in Haiti for racist reasons: in order to prevent a flood of Haitian immigrants. Welcoming black Haitian immigrants clashes with racist immigration policy. The government is more interested in keeping out black Haitians than in Haitian freedom.

The Clinton government wants a parliament in Haiti, but it wants a conservative parliament. The workers are to continue slaving at low wages. The reactionary army is to be reorganized, not swept away. One day the American plan is to "retrain" the thugs who have the blood of Haitian laborers on their hands. The next day they promise to bring in new people. And the day after, they promise something else. Basically, the foreign occupation is obsessed with training new police and military forces to ensure that the people will not be too free, will not be boisterous, will not be active in their own interest.

### **What do the Haitian toilers want?**

The Haitian laborers and poor want freedom. They want the right to say what they want, to demonstrate as they choose, and to organize as they please, without fearing torture and rape and murder.

And they can only achieve this by cleansing Haiti of the military and paramilitary thugs.

From 1957 to 1986 the infamous Duvalier dictatorship ruled Haiti: first "Papa Doc" Duvalier, then "Baby Doc". They relied on an organization of murderers called the Tontons Macoute. But the Haitian masses fought back and eventually "Baby Doc" Duvalier had to flee. The masses wanted to punish the Tontons Macoute through such movements as the "dekouchaj" (uprooting) and, later on, the "lavalas" movement. But they only accomplished part of this. And so the old terror apparatus continued to exist, and was revived. Cedras overthrew Aristide and relied on "attaches"(plainclothes murderers "attached" to the

army and police) and on FRAPH, a reorganized form of the Tontons Macoute. If there is to be freedom now, the military and police apparatus and the paramilitary thugs have to be disbanded, disarmed, and punished for their many murders and crimes.

The Haitian laborers and poor want a decent life. They want schools and health care and clean water. They want higher wages so they can eat and have reasonable housing.

The Haitian elite supported dictatorship in order to enforce utter poverty and destitution on the Haitian laborers. There can be no freedom in Haiti unless the Haitian laborers have a better life. A "democracy" that rules over a nation of semislave serfs is a sham and a fantasy. The Haitian laborers need human living and working conditions.

The Haitian laborers and poor want to break the stranglehold of the old Haitian elite. It is the material interests of these parasites that were reflected in the military government. The military ruled, but its leaders weren't the only ones who raked in the money.

### **The Aristide movement**

The Haitian laborers and poor rallied behind Aristide because he preached against their miserable conditions. He also denounced the American role in oppressing Haiti. He called for social reform, and he persisted despite violent repression against him and his supporters. This is why the poor risked life and limb to support him.

But Aristide had a reformist idea of how to accomplish this. He believed he could reconcile the laboring poor with a part of the Haitian elite who, he hoped, would agree to reform. He might call for a movement of the people, but he would try to keep it calm. He was elected President at the end of 1990, and his reforms would have been of use to the people, but he could not bring them about. He was accused by American politicians of wanting a reign of terror against the old order, but this is precisely what he did not do. Despite his distrust of the old military apparatus, it wasn't dismantled. The old order remained in Haiti, just under the surface. And the old order staged a coup. It is said that the Haitian wealthy paid many millions of dollars to various army units to buy this coup. Aristide was overthrown by the Lieutenant General Cedras, whom Aristide himself had appointed as army chief.

Today Aristide has bowed to the American economic plan of privatization and misery. A plan circulating among his ministers calls for drastic steps and talks of creating a good investment climate. At the same time, Aristide says he is for reforms in education and health care. But how would he pay for it if World Bank-ordered austerity is the watchword? And Aristide still tries to calm the toilers down, rather than preaching the need for military action of the toilers: he calls for "reconciliation" and "no vengeance". At the same time, he says "no to impunity", i.e., that he is not for a total amnesty for Cedras and the other killers. In short, his interests are different from those of the Clinton government or the Haitian right wing, but he still thinks he can reconcile the masses with the elite and with the international bourgeoisie.

The Haitian toilers are going to have to go beyond Aristide, if they wish to free themselves of the Haitian terror apparatus. If they are to achieve even the reforms Aristide originally promised, they will have to go beyond Aristide and Aristide's

deals with imperialism and the wealthy. If they even want a chance to block the austerity plans, the toilers will have to take to the streets. They have to organize in their own interest.

### **Support the Haitian toilers**

The sight of the Haitian toilers in the street cheers every worker with the least concern for the plight of the workers abroad. It used to be that every day brought another story of Haitian bodies piling up in the streets of Port-au-Prince. Today the Haitian toilers are fighting back. They are still shot at, but now they sometimes shoot back (as they did on Sept. 30 in Port-au-Prince). They are still attacked by thugs at night, but they often seek them out and beat them up in the daytime. The paramilitary organizations like FRAPH still exist (despite a well-publicized American raid on its Port-au-Prince headquarters), but the toilers have their eyes on them.

Will the Haitian toilers succeed in getting rid of the reactionaries? Will they succeed in getting better conditions for themselves? Or will the poorest people in the hemisphere be tortured by yet more misery and cutbacks? And will Haiti be doomed to go through another cycle of brief relaxation and then more terror?

The Haitian toilers face a difficult task. They must overcome not only the Haitian elite but the attempts of the occupation to restrain them. They must succeed in developing a wave of

struggle throughout Haiti, from the rural villages to the streets of Port-au-Prince, despite the advice of Aristide to stay clam and avoid "vengeance". They must organize, despite the loss of so many activists over the last few years. And they must not be disheartened as they learn the true nature of the occupation and of Aristide's reformism.

But whatever the outcome of the next round of battles, the Haitian toilers are the real heroes of the struggle for freedom in Haiti. We should support them against the occupation. We should support their attempts to go beyond Aristide's recommendations and build a militant movement in Haiti.

And we should study their struggle, learn from their daring and learn from the weaknesses in their struggle. If the Haitian toilers must go beyond reformist leaders, in the U.S. we must break out of the bounds put on our struggle by pro-capitalist trade union leaders and by Democratic Party politicians. If the Haitian toilers must contend with an American occupation which wants to preserve low-wage exploitation in Haiti, we must organize against U.S. imperialism and its warfare state. If the Haitian toilers display daring and initiative, we must learn to show initiative in developing workers' organizations here too.

**Freedom for the poverty-stricken Haitian toilers!**

**Only the Haitian masses can rid Haiti of local tyrants and foreign occupiers!** ☐

## **The elections are no solution to imperialist occupation of Iraq**

The following article, along with another one denouncing the imperialist occupation of Iraq, made up a leaflet distributed prior to and at the March 20 demonstrations by the Seattle Communist Study Group.

A year ago, Bush was pushing to attack Iraq, pressuring other nations to join, but signaling clearly that with or without their support, the US was going to invade. On February 15th last year, anti-war activists staged a massive world-wide demonstration against Bush's naked imperialism, the biggest demonstration ever, with tens of millions marching. Bush earned the hatred of the masses by brushing this aside as a "focus group".

Today, some who participated in those demonstrations have turned to fighting Bush's re-election, putting forth the slogan "anybody but Bush". It is essential to understand what "anybody" means: what it is the Democrats (and Nader) represent, and what kind of supposed opposition they present to Bush's policies. Playing on the hatred of Bush, some voices are loudly declaring that any action except an all-out fight for the Democrats' candidate is an outright betrayal of any progressive goals, because anything short of this consists of "handing Bush another term", the worst imaginable future. The reality is somewhat different.

In order to really oppose what Bush represents, the masses need to understand the nature of that war in particular, and of

imperialism in general, and they need to recognize that the Democrats are imperialist in their own right. They need to fight to build an independent anti-imperialist movement.

### **Kerry wants to be a better "war president" than Bush!**

Kerry is now declared as the Democratic nominee to run against Bush in November. He made his name as an anti-war protester in Vietnam Veterans Against the War, demonstrating, and testifying to congress that US soldiers were committing war crimes in Vietnam. Back then his position was as a liberal reformer within the anti-war movement. Today, he is campaigning on his record as a decorated veteran, and brandishing his medals as proof of his supposed greater authority to wage imperialist wars than Bush.

In seeking the Democratic nomination, Kerry says up front that he tried to sound more radical to draw the left into his campaign, but, now, as he looks to November, he will position himself to the right, to draw in the Independents and moderate Republicans. When asked about some of his more left-sounding slogans during the nomination race, he says of the November campaign, "You have to begin to talk to America in a broader way. I understand that. I think the message will become more broad based. . . ." This clearly, shows Kerry's shameless oppor-



tunism.

On a variety of issues, Kerry shows that he holds many of the same sorts of pro-big business and pro-imperialist positions that Bush does. What differences exist between them are differences in how best to pursue the capitalists' imperialist needs. If his rhetoric is any guide, Kerry may well pursue the Iraq occupation and/or the "war on terror" more, not less vigorously.

Various opportunists assert point-blank that if a Democrat were in office, we would not be occupying Iraq. The Democrats might have pursued the imperialist control of Iraqi resources through the UN, but remember that Democrats in congress overwhelmingly voted for the Iraq war resolution, Kerry among them. Their backpedaling now while they are seeking reelection, just shows their dishonesty. In justifying his vote for the Iraq war, Kerry says, "I voted for the resolution to get the inspectors in there, period. . . . Did I think Bush was going to charge unilaterally into war? No. . . . Am I angry about it? You're God damned right I am."

Kerry's wounded-sounding complaint that he was taken in by Bush is hardly believable, given that it was obvious to everyone in Washington that Bush was lying, and would say anything to justify war against Iraq. His actual position in support of the war is more strongly pro-imperialist than he tries to sound. The Progressive Policy Institute formulates policies for the "New Democrats", who rank among their members Kerry, Clinton and Gore. The PPI wrote a foreign policy paper hardly distinguishable from the Bush doctrine of "preemptive" invasion anywhere anytime. This paper calls for "the bold exercise of American power", based on "muscular internationalism". This phrase suggests the full gamut of imperialist power projection, from back-room bullying, to multilateral or unilateral military action.

One of the loudest arguments for supporting Kerry heard from Democrats at anti-war events is that, supposedly, the US would not have invaded Iraq if Gore were in office. Yet, in November of 2001, one of Gore's top advisors was arguing that the US should "destroy the Iraqi regime, root and branch", and "that the United States should strike while we have the opportunity". As well, Gore's running mate, Lieberman fought to push the Iraq war resolution through congress. In this election, Kerry has called for 40,000 more active troops in Iraq, and complained that Bush has underfunded the military. Thus, the assertion that the Democrats definitely wouldn't have invaded just doesn't hold water. They might have intensified the murderous sanctions regime, they might have invaded multilaterally, but they were certainly fully on board with the Bush-led invasion, and with the occupation.

Sometimes Kerry sounds more extreme about the war on terror than Bush. He says, "At the core of this conflict is a fundamental struggle of ideas. Of democracy and tolerance against those who would use any means . . . to impose their narrow views. The War on Terror is not a clash of civilizations. It is a clash of civilization against chaos. . . ." At least in rhetoric, this is hardly "Bush lite". Kerry is clearly a hard line warrior against "terror", someone who will carry the fight worldwide with gusto. Kerry makes clear that he will take up the "war on terror" where Bush leaves it off.

While Bush was widely criticized for claiming that 9/11 gave him a blank check for an unending, worldwide war, Kerry claims the same for himself, saying, "America cannot rest until Osama bin Laden is captured or killed. And when that day comes . . . it

will be a victory in the War on Terror, but it will not be the end of the War on Terror." The PPI argues that "like the Cold War, the struggle we face today is likely to last not years, but decades". Kerry and his ideologists see this as a blank check to extend US control anywhere the US bourgeoisie sees fit, under the name of "fighting terrorism". The PPI also ups the ante on "America's national security strategy" (code for US military and political interventions at home and abroad), saying that "while some complain that the Bush administration has been too radical in recasting America's national security strategy, we believe it has not been ambitious or imaginative enough. We need to do more, and do it smarter and better. . . ." Furthering this, Kerry complains that Bush is under funding the National Endowment for Democracy, a CIA organization for destabilizing governments disliked by the US bourgeoisie. These are not the words of a closet anti-imperialist. If we want to oppose the Iraq occupation and the war on terror, we can't be sucked in to working for his election, on the feeble excuse that "at least he isn't as bad as Bush".

### **Nader and the left-Democrats: Pro-Capitalist "anti-Capitalist" and Pro-war "anti-Warriors"**

Disgust with the Democrats' brand of imperialism has drawn some to "independent" Nader's run for president. He denounces Bush's "corporate paymasters", and talks of the Democrats "dialing for corporate dollars". However, Nader is not independent of the capitalist system which drives imperialism. While he calls for more caution about the negative effects of US imperialist attacks, this reflects his support for the aims of imperialism. He is only concerned that these aims will be undermined if Bush isn't careful. Thus, he is concerned about the "potential for 'blow-back'" resulting from Bush's aggressive brand of imperialism, but not concerned about the imperialism itself. As well, he was concerned that pursuit of the Iraq war "diverts and distracts from the war on terror", but unconcerned that the war on terror itself is a cover for world-wide imperialist adventures.

Nader has said that his real reason for running is to "revitalize" the Democrats. He calls his campaign "a liberation movement" for the Democratic Party, aimed at "turning the rudder" of the party. This suggests that the Democrats have merely "lost their way", that they have "forgotten their traditional constituency" among the workers and poor. The argument goes that his campaign will force the Democrats to turn back to that constituency. He argues that his candidacy will force the Democrats to return to that constituency, and not take the left for granted. His real goal in running, then, is to strengthen the Democrats.

Yet, all of this idea misses the big picture: the Democrats, like the Republicans, are a party of the exploiters, not a party of the workers, and this has always been so. Their differences with the Republicans do not include certain givens regarding full support for capitalism. Inducing Kerry to add a couple of left sounding phrases to his speeches during the campaign will not change this fact, nor will it in any real way change Kerry's policies if he is elected, just because he might have made certain promises during the campaign.

Fundamentally, the Democrats are willing participants in the capitalists' reactionary offensive over that last several decades,

and not because they have “lost their way” as liberals. They have moved right because the needs of the capitalists demand it. Several decades ago, the Democrats made more frequent appeals to the left, because the world situation was different then. The least of these differences is the attacks of September 11th, 2001. Those attacks were taken as a justification for intensifying shifts in policy which were already underway under Clinton and before. Also, the mass upheavals of the 60s and 70s are no longer with us, and today resistance is at a low level and disorganized. Thus the ruling class has less need for political deception, less need for the Democrats to appeal to the left.

But today there *is* the anti-war movement. And left-wing Democrats like Kucinich, McDermott, and others have worked to turn it into a pro-multilateral war movement, and a pro-U.N. occupation movement, serving the same imperialist ruling class that Bush serves. More, Kucinich’s campaign played the usual left-Democrat role of trying to co-opt activists moving toward opposing the entire establishment into work for the Democratic Party. Thus Kucinich campaigners at many anti-war events passed out flyers saying he was a fierce opponent of the occupation. However, “Dennis’s” big cry was “US out, UN in”, calling for imperialism under the cover of the UN. Then Kucinich affirmed that he would support any of the Democratic candidates against Bush. Now, to the surprise of few, “anybody but Bush” turns out to be not Kucinich, but “more troops” Kerry. The former only worked to deliver him voting-fodder and campaign workers.

### **Building the movement**

The only way to effectively fight imperialism is to build the

movement independent of the Democratic Party and Nader. The election offers no choice for those who seek an end to the occupation of Iraq, and the end of imperialism in general. Even so, it is important to follow and understand what the candidates are actually saying, and how this translates (or doesn’t) into public policy. This can help workers to see clearly the duplicity of the candidates, and to recognize their actual class allegiances, how capitalist power is reinforced through the election process.

For the widespread anti-Bush sentiment to be effective it needs to be channeled into activities to build independent motion and organization in society. To actually fight the capitalists’ anti-people imperialist offensive involves participating in demonstrations and more. Anti-imperialists should link their struggles with workplace struggles, anti-racist struggles and struggles to fight attacks on immigrants, environmental struggles, and so on. They can use the events of this election to spark discussions and raise anti-imperialist, pro-worker politics. They can organize groups to study both the theory and the reality of imperialism. For example, Lenin’s *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* shows that imperialism is not a misguided policy, but as a necessity for modern capitalism. As well, workers opposed to the capitalists’ offensive can write and distribute their own literature, build connections to other workers and activists, and so on. All of these activities help to build toward a much-needed independent anti-imperialist movement.

**The alternative to Bush, Kerry and Nader is political independence and mass struggle!**

Seattle Communist Study Group, March 15, 2004 □

## **A comment on Noam Chomsky’s endorsement of Kerry**

by Jeff Stacks

The cynical and superficial mantra of “anybody but Bush” has caused sharp debate within petty-bourgeois democracy and has even caused doubts among the bourgeois democrats. This is a time when we should be working to tear down the illusions about the Democrats. And yet in this controversial period support for the Democratic champion of the day comes from surprising places, from the likes of the renowned anarchist critic Noam Chomsky, in a recent interview published in *The Guardian* (March 16). (True, most anarchists wouldn’t agree with Chomsky on this. Chomsky is a very moderate anarchist, an “anarcho-liberal”.)

Chomsky’s defense of “anybody but Bush” in his interview is more indicative of an attempt to strengthen his links with the liberal establishment in America by becoming more “respectable” than of any reasoned consideration of the matter. (Remember that Chomsky has asserted that the corporate media has “opened up” since 9/11 because CNN had invited him on. Never mind that what he said on CNN was completely tame.)

Nevertheless he is an influential figure and the mere fact of his support, however baseless, will lend added legitimacy to the “anybody but Bush” campaign.

Basically Chomsky just repeats the canned “argument” that Bush is bad and Kerry is not Bush. Sure he says that the Dems are a party of “big business”, and that there is only “a fraction” of a difference between Bush and Kerry. This has enabled some to claim that professor Chomsky is not really endorsing Kerry. “Look”, they say, “he also says nice things about Nader and Kucinich”. But the main thing Chomsky is trying to get across in his interview is that there really are big differences between Kerry and Bush, that a vote for Kerry will lead to a “large outcome”. Hence he implies that the neoliberals around Kerry are not “committed to dismantling the achievements of popular struggle through the past century”, that they are not devoted “to a narrow sector of wealth and power, no matter what the cost to the general population”. This lying endorsement of Kerry is an exposure of Chomsky’s complete lack of perspective and his total inability to conceive of a political course that is independent of the parties of big business. □

# An outline of Trotskyism's anti-Marxist theories (part two)

by Joseph Green

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The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe left the Trotskyists as one of the main forces claiming to be Marxist-Leninist. In the December 2002 issue of *Communist Voice* we began a survey of Trotskyist theory. We dealt especially with the theory of "permanent revolution", the "transitional program", the right to national self-determination, and the anti-fascist struggle. This time we continue onto the issue of "socialism in one country" and the nature of the transitional economy established after a socialist revolution. Trotsky agreed with Stalin that, provided the old bourgeoisie was overthrown, state ownership was inherently socialist, whether or not the working class was in control. Here too, Trotskyism, far from being Leninist as it claims, is largely the flip side of Stalinism. In the next issue we will conclude by dealing with Trotsky's non-partyism, his cult of pure administration, and some other issues.

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## The issue of "socialism in one country"

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This was Trotsky's main charge against Stalin — that he stood for "socialism in one country". At times Trotsky boiled down just about all of his objections to Stalin to this one issue, writing that "Either permanent revolution or socialism in one

country—this alternative embraces at the same time the internal problems of the Soviet Union, the prospects of revolution in the East, and finally, the fate of the Communist International as a whole."<sup>1</sup> Here was the magic answer as to why Stalin went wrong, and as to what separated Trotskyism from Stalinism.

From then to the present, whatever the Stalinists did, the Trotskyists would criticize it on the grounds that its motive was to consolidate socialism in one country. Whatever the Trotskyists did, it was OK because its motive was the world revolution. This is repeated on issue after issue, not just or even mainly with respect to Soviet diplomacy, but on how to deal with united fronts, how to solve the economic problems of a revolutionary socialist regime and how to organize the international proletariat. But one knows very little if one knows only that the Stalinists made errors because they believed they could establish "socialism in one country"; one has to know something about the particular issue at stake, and about what policy should really be followed. Engels long ago commented wryly about revolutionaries who answered every question about setbacks and defeats "with the ready reply that it was Mr. This or Citizen That, who 'betrayed' the people. Which reply may be very true, or not, according to circumstances, but under no circumstances does it explain anything". He added "what a poor chance stands a political party whose entire stock-in trade consists in a knowledge of the solitary fact, that Citizen So-and-so is not to be trusted."<sup>2</sup> And does one know much more if one knows only that Comrades So-and-so should not be trusted, because they believe in "socialism in one country"?

But if the Trotskyist discussion of "socialism in one country" consists largely of simply attributing bad motives to their opponents, it is still true that this controversy brings a number of serious issues to the mind of other activists. These include the question of the material prerequisites for socialism, the issue of the timing of a revolutionary rising, the effect of the size of a revolutionary country or group of countries on the prospects of it standing up against imperialist encirclement, or the character of the revolution and the nature of the economy that it will establish. Serious consideration of these issues requires close attention to the level of a country's economic development, to the specific class alignments of a particular time and place, and to the experience of the attempts of the last century at building revolutionary economies. But, as we shall see, Trotsky's theorizing brushed aside concrete consideration of these questions as opportunism. It answered them instead with mechanical formulas, supposedly good for almost all times and places.

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<sup>1</sup>From the "Introduction to the first (Russian) edition", November 30, 1929, of *The Permanent Revolution*. See p. 135 of the pamphlet *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*.

<sup>2</sup>See the end of the second paragraph of "Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany". For example, *Selected Works of Marx and Engels in Three Volumes*, vol. I, p. 301.

## The timing of the revolution

In some circumstances, it might be a major question whether a particular country, if it rose in revolution, would have the necessary resources to hold out against foreign intervention and to build a new economy. This would depend on many factors, including the size of the country concerned, the level of the revolutionary struggle in its neighbors, and the general world situation. For example, the revolutionaries of a small country might feel that they would immediately be crushed by a nearby large predatory power, unless they could ensure coordination with at least some of their neighbors. The revolutionary party of such a country might then decide, if it had the choice, to delay any uprising until favorable international circumstances. True, the revolutionaries often don't have a choice. Revolutions generally spring from profound crises, not from the arbitrary will of a party or even of a single class. But there are times when a party can choose whether or not to utilize a revolutionary crisis for the sake of carrying out an uprising. And insofar as there is a choice of timing, a revolutionary party would be well advised to consider the circumstances.

The Trotskyist condemnation of "socialism in one country" might sound as if they held that revolutionaries should time their action in accordance with such circumstances. But this was not what Trotsky had in mind. He wrote:

"That no country in its struggle must 'wait' for others, is an elementary thought which it is useful and necessary to reiterate in order that the idea of concurrent international action may not be replaced by the idea of temporizing international inaction. Without waiting for the others, we begin and continue the struggle nationally, in full confidence that our initiative will give an impetus to the struggle in other countries . . ."<sup>3</sup>

He goes to say that "if this does not occur", then the cause of the original revolution is hopeless. Yet, according to Trotsky, revolutionaries were not supposed to take account of the likelihood of international support beforehand, but simply count on such support as their birthright.

## The social character of the revolution

There is also a serious question of the character of any particular revolution. Is the country facing a socialist revolution, or will there first be a bourgeois-democratic revolution? One would think that any theory about prerequisites for socialism would be concerned with assessing the type of revolution that could take place given the existing conditions. But the Trotskyist version of "permanent revolution" regards the very posing of this question to be a betrayal, a dread manifestation of the theory of "two-stage revolution". Mind you, Trotsky didn't say that there can never be a non-socialist revolution, just that it won't be of any real use or interest to the working class.<sup>4</sup>

The theory of permanent revolution ignores that the nature of a revolution is determined, not simply by what the revolutionary

party wants, but by the economic conditions of the country involved. Instead it holds that, ever since the rise of monopoly capital, all revolutions will either be defeated, or they will become socialist revolutions. The Trotskyists think that this ensures the revolutionary character of their tactics and strategy. But actually, it results in their either deprecating various struggles or, if they are to participate, pretending that they are socialist. In any case, it means that they don't see the need for any concrete assessment of the stage of revolution, for that assessment is the same all over.

## The material basis for socialism

No doubt millions of discussions have taken place over how developed a country's economy has to be to provide the material basis for socialism. It might be thought that Trotsky's denunciation of "socialism in one country" would be based on a careful assessment of what is required. But just the opposite is the case.

Trotsky's *Results and Prospects* is one of his main theoretical works putting forward the idea of "permanent revolution". Chapter VII is "The pre-requisites of socialism". Here Trotsky said that, since socialism "is not merely a question of equal distribution but also a question of planned production", it requires "co-operative production on a large scale". But, he says, "this first objective pre-requisite of socialism has been in existence a long time". He cites a proposal in 1696 (that's not a typo—he really was talking about the late seventeenth century—almost one hundred years *prior* to the Industrial Revolution) by Bellars, a English Member of Parliament, to reorganize the economy into co-operative societies of a couple of hundred people each. Trotsky conceded that it was impossible for us to know now whether this plan would have worked, but nevertheless holds that "what is important is that collective economy, even if it was conceived only in terms of groups of 100, 200, 300 or 500 persons, was regarded as advantageous from the standpoint of production already at the end of the 17th century." While Marx and Engels saw the material prerequisites for socialism arising from the development of large-scale industry in the nineteenth century, Trotsky went on to say that "sufficient technical pre-requisites for collective production have already existed for a hundred or two hundred years". Bearing in mind that Trotsky was writing in 1905, this indeed referred to the level of industrial technique of two or three hundred years ago, that is, back perhaps almost to the time of Bellars.<sup>5</sup> This makes a mockery of any careful considerations of the prerequisites for socialism.

Trotsky did go on to say that the material prerequisites for socialism included more than the "productive-technical relations", but also "social-economic ones". He referred to especially the percentage of proletarians in the economy. He discussed several different countries and noted that the predominance, by the 1890s and early 1900s, of the town "in the chief European countries". He didn't thereby distinguish one country from another, but concludes that the "social-economic relations" needed for socialism existed in some generality. The implication is that once such factors exist overall, there is no need to look

<sup>3</sup>"The Peace Program", 1915. Cited in Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin*, Part I, Section 3.

<sup>4</sup>See the section "Permanent revolution" in Part One of the *Outline of Trotskyism* in *Communist Voice*, Dec. 15, 2002.

<sup>5</sup>See the pamphlet *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, pp. 89-91.



that closely as to whether they exist in any particular country.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, in the same work he also suggested that such factors weren't that important anyway. He referred to the fact that Marx and Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 (that is, long before the "social-economic conditions" Trotsky pointed to were ripe) and expected the revolutionary wave of 1848 to lead to socialist revolutions, but that such revolutions hadn't happened. Trotsky ridiculed the idea that this failure had something to do with the level of economic development of the time, such as the small number of "large-scale undertakings". He implied that to think such a thing would mean to say that "Marx in 1848 was a Utopian youth". He implied that, since Marx and Engels had looked for socialist revolution as early as the mid-19th century, there was no longer an issue of bothering about the prerequisites for socialism.<sup>7</sup>

By way of contrast, in 1895 Engels, in reviewing his and Marx's views about how revolutions of 1848 would proceed, wrote that they had been wrong due to the low level of economic development and the lack of big industry. He said that "the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production; it [history] has proved this by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has seized the whole of the Continent, and has caused big industry to take real root in France, Austria, Hungary, Poland and, recently, in Russia, while it has made Germany positively an industrial country of the first rank . . ."<sup>8</sup> Engels didn't see anything horrible or shameful in having believed in socialist possibilities in 1848, but he believed that the socialist movement should base itself on materialism and pay attention to the economic basis of revolutionary activity.

### The internal basis for socialism

Since Trotsky theorized that it was impossible for there to be "socialism in one country", he didn't have to examine whether the material basis for socialism existed in this or that country. Any country — unless totally bereft of proletarians — could simply make up its economic deficiencies, and transform its class situation, with aid from other countries.

So Trotsky wrote that

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 85-6. Trotsky was arguing against Rozhkov's assessment of the situation in Russia on the eve of the 1905 revolution. Rozhkov appealed to the level of economic development in Russia and to the extent of class-consciousness in the Russian proletariat. Trotsky didn't simply disagree with Rozhkov's assessments, but ridiculed the idea that the strategy for the revolution need bother with such assessments.

<sup>8</sup>Engels' introduction to the 1895 edition of Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850, Selected Works of Marx and Engels in Three Volumes*, Vol. I, pp. 191-2. Engels also argued strongly in this introduction about the need for the conscious organization of the proletariat for socialism, and particularly of the need for proletarian parties. He said that the masses "were still absolutely in the dark as to the path to be taken" in the revolutions of 1848, explained why he and Marx thought that the revolution might be able to proceed to socialism anyway, and showed that this plan was wrong. Meanwhile Trotsky, in his exposition in *Results and Prospects* of the lessons of the revolutionary wave of 1848, was just as cavalier about the need for socialist consciousness and organization as he was about the material prerequisites for socialism.

"Does it follow from what has been said that all the countries of the world, in one way or another, are already today ripe for the socialist revolution? No, this is a false, dead, scholastic, Stalinist-Bukharinist way of putting the question. ***World economy in its entirety is indubitably ripe for socialism.*** Then what is to happen with the dictatorship of the proletariat in the various backward countries, in China, India, etc.? To this we answer: History is not made to order. A country can become 'ripe' for the dictatorship of the proletariat not only before it is ripe for the independent construction of socialism, ***but even before it is ripe for far-reaching socialization measures.*** One must not proceed from a preconceived harmony of social development. . . . A reconciliation of the uneven processes of economic and politics can be attained ***only on a world scale.*** In particular this means that the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat cannot be considered exclusively within the limits of Chinese economics and Chinese politics.

" . . . Not only backward China, but in general no country in the world can build socialism within its own national limits: ***the highly-developed productive forces which have grown beyond national boundaries resist this,*** just as do those forces which are insufficiently developed for nationalization. The dictatorship of the proletariat in Britain, for example, will encounter difficulties and contradictions, different in character, it is true, but perhaps not slighter than those that will confront the dictatorship of the proletariat in China. Surmounting these contradictions is possible in both cases only by way of the international revolution. ***This standpoint leaves no room for the question of the 'maturity' or 'immaturity' of China for the socialist transformation.***" (emphasis added)<sup>9</sup>

Thus the particular economic conditions of any locality weren't regarded as that significant. Nor was there that much significance to the existence of "highly-developed productive forces" — this could pose just as much of a problem as a backward economy. It didn't even matter to Trotsky if the conditions weren't ripe for "far-reaching socialization measures". Nothing mattered but that the world in general had reached a certain level. His standpoint denigrated the need for a serious consideration of the internal factor in determining what could be achieved by a local revolution. And despite his constant appeal to world revolution as the solution to all problems, his standpoint didn't even allow a serious consideration of the concrete possibilities of mutual aid and support between the revolutionary struggle of different countries.

The implication is not simply that there can't be socialism in one country, but that there can't be socialism anywhere unless

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<sup>9</sup>"Section 7: What does the slogan of the democratic dictatorship mean today for the East?", *The Permanent Revolution*, in the book *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, Pathfinder Press, pp. 254-5.

the whole world is socialist. But this implication is not generally spelled out, so that different viewpoints and assessments can all be reconciled as supposedly compatible because, at least, they all agree there can't be socialism in merely one country. In various declarations over the years from Trotskyists and non-Trotskyists that are supposed to bear on the issue of "socialism in one country", sometimes it was argued that a revolutionary regime couldn't hold out in one country. But later it was argued that it was only full socialism that couldn't exist in one country. Sometimes it was argued that it was precisely the Russian revolution that couldn't hold out without aid from a socialist Germany. But it was also argued that a socialist Germany couldn't hold out "against the world". And Trotsky finally argued that, in any country, "reconciliation of the uneven processes of economic and politics" would require the triumph of the revolution "on a world scale".

### The relationship between a revolutionary regime and the world movement

The relation between a revolutionary regime and the revolutionary movement in other countries is an important question. In general, they are part of the same movement. A proletarian regime in one or more countries should serve as a major encouragement for workers everywhere, both by example and by finding ways to support the revolutionary movement of other lands. In turn, not only will the successes of the revolutionary movement elsewhere generally weaken the efforts of hostile capitalist countries to strangle proletarian regimes, but these regimes also deserve the direct support of the world proletariat. In practice, however, many difficult decisions have to be made concerning their relations.

Trotsky held that belief in "socialism in one country" would lead to subordinating the interests of the world revolution to the needs of a proletarian regime. In his view, the belief in "socialism in one country" was the root cause of all the errors of the Stalinists in foreign policy. But Trotsky himself, who claimed to uphold world revolution against the Stalinists, also subordinated the interests of the world revolution to that of the Soviet Union. Indeed, he would even subordinate the interests of the world revolution to the needs of factional fighting within the CPSU leadership.

Trotsky, for example, would eventually bitterly denounce Stalin for supporting the entry of the CP of China into the Kuomintang. Leaving aside the issue of whether he was correct about this, it is clear that he regarded it as a central issue for the Chinese revolution. But he kept his views on it under wrap for some time, rarely mentioning it until the very end of March 1927. But then, in May 1927, he wrote the "Declaration of the Eighty-four" which vehemently raised differences over China, but *denied* that he and others demanded a "break with the Kuomintang" (KMT). He thus lied to the communist movement in order to cement a factional alliance with Radek and Zinoviev, who did not, at this time, want the CP to leave the KMT. He thus subordinated the interests of Chinese revolution to his fight for leadership in the Soviet CP. He wouldn't bring his views on the CP-KMT alliance out into the open until May 1927, after Chiang

Kai-shek had carried out his anti-communist massacres.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequently, Trotsky denounced all major developments in the Chinese revolution. In another of his confident but wildly inaccurate descriptions, he even wrote in 1938 that "not only the peasant 'Red Army' but also the so-called 'Communist' Party" had been completely subordinated to the Kuomintang and the Chinese bourgeoisie, presumably because the CP sought to build a united front against Japanese aggression. He didn't see anything positive in anything the Chinese communists had done since 1927, and he didn't note that a gigantic revolutionary force was being built up in China. Whatever the pluses and minuses of the Maoist policies that now led the Chinese CP, the Chinese communists were clearly not a force subordinate to the bourgeoisie, and by 1949 they would overthrow Chiang Kai-shek's regime in a revolution of world significance. But for Trotsky, the Chinese revolution wasn't of much interest after 1927 except as a cudgel to use against Stalin.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Trotskyist groups have made a profession of calling on the revolutionary movement to subordinate itself to the interests of this or that supposed workers' regime. In the 1970s and 80s, during the period of the long stagnation that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Trotskyist groups gave repeated calls to subordinate the interests of various movements to the Soviet Union. Many world events would be analyzed, not mainly from the point of view of their effect on the people directly involved, but on the basis of whether they would help or hurt the Soviet regime. The Spartacist League went so far as to suggest that the defense of the Soviet Union began in Central America, while various Trotskyist groups competed over how ardent they were to "defend the Red Army" in occupying Afghanistan. Most Trotskyist groups subordinated the world movement on various issues to the interests of Stalinist regimes they took as supposed workers' state, albeit deformed or degenerated ones.

Nor did they rest content with slogans that subordinated the revolutionary movement to supposed workers' regimes. They

<sup>10</sup>"The Declaration of the Eighty-four", *The Challenge of the Left Opposition* (1926-27), Pathfinder Press, p. 226. Trotsky's views on the Chinese revolution are discussed somewhat more in part one of the *Outline of Trotskyism in Communist Voice*, Dec. 15, 2002, p. 35, col. 2 - p. 36., col. 1. While Trotsky criticized some absurdities of Stalin's policy toward the KMT, he basically opposed the policy put forward at the Second Congress of the Comintern concerning temporary alliances with the bourgeois-democratic liberation movement. Instead of clarifying the temporary character of these alliances and the need for communist vigilance, he held that there was no way to take part in them without carrying out an opportunist policy.

<sup>11</sup>For Trotsky's denunciation of the Chinese CP, see the section "Backward countries and the program of transitional demands" of "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International" in the pamphlet *The Transitional Program for socialist Revolution*, Pathfinder Press, p. 98. Typically Trotsky, who was fond of blaming his followers for what were essentially the faults of his own position, accused a number of Trotskyists of being sectarians who "consider it necessary to preserve 'neutrality' in the war between Japan and China" (*Ibid.*, in the section "Against Sectarianism", p. 108). Now where could the Trotskyists of those times have gotten the idea that the war was irrelevant? Could it have something to do with Trotsky's contemptuous attitude to the Chinese revolution and to the communists who really were fighting Japanese fascist and imperialist aggression?

gave calls to support various tyrannies under the guise of giving “military but not political support” in the anti-imperialist struggles. Some Trotskyist groups realized that the Soviet Union and other Stalinist regimes were not workers regimes, but state-capitalist ones. But they zealously joined in the general Trotskyist practice of giving slogans that subordinated the movement to various supposed anti-imperialist tyrannies.

All these groups were opposed to the theory of “socialism in one country”. Yet, in one movement after another, they repeatedly gave slogans that called on the movement to orient itself to defense of various backward regimes. They not only wrongly defined the nature of these regimes, but they tended to degrade the movement to the role of being an adjunct to various regimes.

Thus the Trotskyist denunciation of “socialism in one country” has provided no help at all to those who wish to find the proper way to combine the interests of the world revolution with those of the local revolutionary movement. The idea that an individual revolutionary regime or movement, independent of its circumstances, can never survive on its own was supposed to ensure a policy oriented to world revolution. But a proper internationalist policy requires deep respect for the interests of the various local sections of the world proletariat, painstaking attention to their local conditions, and careful study of the objective laws governing revolution. Without that, the desire for support from abroad might simply lead to attempts to artificially speed up or foment revolutions elsewhere in the hope that it will help one’s local movement — and this would amount to playing with the interests of the world revolution. In practice, however, the Trotskyist movement has more been known for simply subordinating the movement to the interests of various regimes, and finding ways to claim that this is all for the interests of world revolution.

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### “Non-capitalism” in one country

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Thus Trotskyist theorizing on the issue of “socialism in one country” has not provided answers to the serious questions of revolutionary tactics and orientation with regard to the relationship between individual revolutionary regimes or movements, and the world movement. But moreover, the Trotskyist denial of “socialism in one country” is, in large part, a mere quibble. While Trotsky held that there couldn’t be “socialism in one country”, he simultaneously held that there could be socialist revolution in one country. Indeed, his theory of “permanent revolution” is based on the idea that no revolution should be anything but a socialist revolution, and it should immediately establish a workers’ state, a proletarian dictatorship.

Thus Trotsky didn’t call for the USSR (Union of Soviet *Socialist* Republics ) to drop “socialist” from its name. He held it was a workers’ state, and moreover he held that the state sector of the Soviet economy was socialist. For that matter, he believed, even after a new bourgeoisie (he saw it only as Stalinist bureaucracy) took political power from the working class, that the Soviet Union was still a demonstration of socialism to the entire world; he wrote in 1936 that

“socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of *Das Kapital*, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth part of the

earth’s surface—not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity.”<sup>12</sup>

So, according to Trotsky, something that he held was essentially socialist could, and did, exist in a single country (albeit a giant one, the USSR). It was simply that it was only part-way to full socialism, and should sometimes be called socialist (as when demonstrating the victory of socialism), and sometimes (as when denouncing the Stalinists) should not. But in any case, whether this regime should be called “socialist” or a “workers state” or even “a contradictory society halfway between capitalism and socialism”, Trotsky held that it had already departed from capitalism, and it could only be drawn back on the “road to capitalism” by a counterrevolution and a “capitalist restoration”.<sup>13</sup>

### Only full socialism

Thus Trotsky held only that full socialism — including the abolition of classes, money, commodity production, and the state — couldn’t be achieved in one country. But he held that a proletarian dictatorship, or workers’ state, could be achieved in a single country. Indeed, he held that the Soviet economy had already become a new economic system. In his view, it remained such even under the Stalinist system that consolidated in the 1930s. But aside from the issue that he mistook state-capitalism for workers’ rule, the point is that he believed that workers’ rule could exist in a single country, and that a single country could depart from capitalism.

And this is the time-worn, orthodox Trotskyist position. It is also argued, for example, by the late Ernst Mandel in his book *Marxist Economic Theory*. When he wanted to refute the view that the Soviet Union was socialist, he compared it to full Marxist socialism. But at the same time, he stated that it wasn’t capitalist either, and did “not display any of the *fundamental* aspects of capitalist economy.” It only shared mere “forms” and “superficial phenomena” with capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

The present-day Trotskyist movement is divided over whether the Stalinist regime was a workers’ rule. But they are not divided over the issue of whether it is possible that a single country might depart from capitalism. Even those Trotskyists who recognize the Stalinist regime was state-capitalist nevertheless hold that a single country (although not a Stalinist regime) could depart from capitalism. It is a fundamental point of Trotskyist doctrine that a socialist revolution can establish a

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<sup>12</sup>*The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?*, Ch. 1, “What Has Been Achieved”, Section 1, p.8 (Merit Publishers edition). The “sixth part of the earth’s surface” is, of course, a reference to the USSR.

<sup>13</sup>*The Revolution Betrayed*, Chapter IX, “Social Relations in the Soviet Union, Sec. 2 “The Question of the Character of the Soviet Union Not Yet Decided by History”, pp. 254-5, 285.

<sup>14</sup>*Marxist Economic Theory*, 1968, vol. II. See Chapter 15, “The Soviet Economy”, section “The ‘economic categories’ in the U.S.S.R.”, p. 560 for the assertion that it is not capitalist. See pp. 564-5 for the assertion that it is not socialist. Also see Ch. Eighteen “Origin, Rise and Withering Away of Political Economy”, section “An apologetic variant of Marxism”, p. 724 for criticism of the view that “the construction of socialism had been completed” in the Soviet Union.

proletarian dictatorship in a single country, and that this workers' rule would be non-capitalist and socialistic.

### What's the difference?

But Trotsky's recognition of the possibility of socialistic regimes in one country empties most of the content from his denial of "socialism in one country". The main question is what regimes represent the interest of the working class, and deserve support from their own working class and from the world working class. Can there be such a regime "in one country"? Whether such a country had full socialism, or was simply a workers' state making progress on the way to socialism, it would deserve support from the world proletarian movement.

The question of when a country should be said to have reached full socialism is a secondary issue, provided the country really is a revolutionary regime of the working class. There probably will be different shades of working-class opinion on this question, and even different shades of socialist opinion. But it is unlikely to be a dividing line between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries.

This question does bear strongly on the analysis of the economy of the transitional period between capitalism and full socialism. But as we shall see later on, Trotskyism does quite poorly here, and is similar to Stalinism on this question.

Yet Trotskyism claims that belief in the possibility of "socialism in one country" is the root cause for betrayal of the revolution, and that it leads to subordinating the world movement to safeguarding the supposed socialist state. But if so, why wouldn't Trotskyist belief in the possibility of "non-capitalism in one country" have similar consequences with respect to the supposed non-capitalist state?

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### On the nature of socialism

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The Bolshevik revolution gave rise to the first sustained attempt to dispossess the bourgeoisie and build a socialist society. The experience of millions of workers and activists in trying to build a new economic system gave an immense impetus to communist thought about the problem of the practical economic steps that have to be taken after a proletarian revolution in order to actually replace capitalism with socialism. It especially raised the question of the period after the old bourgeoisie has been displaced but commodity production, classes and a sort of mixed economy still exist. With the death of the revolution and the consolidation of a Stalinist state-capitalist order in the Soviet Union, an additional issue arose of distinguishing between state-capitalism and a revolutionary economy moving towards socialism. Both these issues have only become more important with the experience of the other revolutions of the last century.

Trotskyism claimed to represent the alternative to Stalinism. But it is notable is how little Trotskyism differs from Stalinism as far as it's analysis of the basic structure of the Stalinist economy or of the nature of the transitional period.

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### Apologists of Stalinist state-capitalism

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It may seem strange to say that the Trotskyists, who accuse Stalin of every crime they can think of, are apologists of Stalinist state-capitalism. Who doesn't know that Trotskyists denounce Stalin, and that Stalin murdered many Trotskyists? But the vehemence of their denunciations of Stalin as an individual covers over their support for the basic structure of the Stalinist economy. Trotsky regarded the Stalinist Soviet Union as being a workers' state, but with bad leaders. Since then, orthodox Trotskyists have regarded the Soviet Union, and other Stalinist regimes, as workers regimes, albeit degenerated or deformed workers regimes. They have continually called on workers and activists to defend these regimes.

Trotsky's main idea is that, in a country where the old bourgeoisie has been displaced, the state sector is inherently socialist. If the state sector is dominant, then the country is, in his view, a workers' regime. And it is such, whether or not the workers actually control the state sector. In the 1930s, Trotsky saw the consolidation of the Stalinist system in Russia, but he also saw that the state sector became stronger and more dominant than ever. So, while bitterly denouncing Stalin, Trotsky nevertheless put forward a series of arguments to defend Stalinist society from the charge of being state-capitalism.

### Trotsky denied the possibility of a new bourgeoisie

For example, Trotsky denied that the Stalinist state and party bureaucracy could coalesce into a ruling class, whose power was based on its domination of the state and the state sector of the economy. Had the Soviet bureaucracy taken all power into its own hands and rendered the workers passive? This, according to Trotsky, wasn't relevant to whether the bureaucracy had actually become a ruling class. The simple existence of the nationalized economy was supposed to prove that it was the working class which was the ruling class, no matter whether it seemed to have a voice on any decision at all. Trotsky thought that the power of the Soviet bureaucracy merely meant that this bureaucracy was somewhat more independent of the supposed real rulers than is typical in other countries:

"... In no other regime has a bureaucracy ever achieved such a degree of independence from the dominating class. ... The Soviet bureaucracy has risen above a class which is hardly emerging from destitution and darkness, and has no tradition of dominion or command."<sup>15</sup>

For Trotsky, the dividing line was always the existence of the state sector. There could be no capitalist restoration, there could be no new ruling class, unless the state sector was supplanted by some other form of property. He wrote that

"The bureaucracy has not yet created social supports for its dominion in the form of special types of property. It is compelled to defend state property as the source of its power and its income. In this aspect of its activity it still remains a

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<sup>15</sup>Chapter 9 "Social Relations in the Soviet Union", Section 2 "Is the Bureaucracy a Ruling Class?", *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 248.



weapon of proletarian dictatorship.”<sup>16</sup>

### Trotsky denied the possibility of state-capitalism

Indeed, when he was arguing about the nature of the Stalinist system, Trotsky went so far as to declare not only that the Stalinist system wasn't state-capitalism, but that there couldn't possibly be a system of “integral state-capitalism”, not anywhere, not anytime. (By “integral” he meant a complete or comprehensive system, rather than the state-sector being only one of many sectors of the economy.) He wrote that

“Theoretically, to be sure, it is possible to conceive a situation in which the bourgeoisie as a whole constitutes itself a stock company which, by mean of the state, administers the whole national economy. . . . Such a regime never existed, however, and, because of profound contradictions among the proprietors themselves, never will exist. . . .” And, he wrote, “State capitalism means the substitution of state property for private property, and for that very reason remains partial in character.”<sup>17</sup>

As we have seen, Trotsky didn't even consider the possibility that a new bourgeoisie might arise based on its control of the state sector. He didn't imagine that either capitalism or the bourgeoisie could take on new forms, different from that of traditional capitalism. His argument is that the rule of a new bourgeoisie couldn't be state-capitalism because, according to his definition, state-capitalism must refer to *the previous proprietors* joining together to administer the economy through the state and through *such old forms as “a stock company”*.

Now, whether the old proprietors would ever feel threatened enough to nationalize the economy is irrelevant to the analysis of the Soviet economy. Here the question is whether a new bourgeois class can come into being, a class which exploits the working class based on its control of the state. Trotsky himself admitted that the Soviet bureaucracy defended nationalized property “as the source of its power and its income”. So if this group ruled the working class based on its control of nationalized property, and if it did so in an economic system which was based on commodity production, why wasn't this state-capitalism?

Trotsky's reply was that there's nothing new under the sun. There wasn't such a class in the past, so *by definition* state-capitalism must refer to the *old proprietors*. Yet, when a factory is seized by one owner from another owner, whether by means fair or foul, it doesn't mean that capitalism has been abolished, only that the ownership has changed. It is only when the working masses take over the factories that capitalism is threatened.

### Trotsky's “political, but not social” revolution

Thus Trotsky didn't see a problem with the basic economic structure of Stalinist state-capitalist society. This is summed up in his view that there had to be a “political revolution” in the

USSR, but not a “social revolution”. This meant, in effect, that he only wanted to replace the Stalinist leaders, and replace them with Trotskyists. He wrote that

“it is not a question . . . of changing the economic foundations of society, of replacing certain forms of property with other forms”, and compared what he wanted to historical “political revolutions which, without destroying the economic foundations of society, swept out an old ruling upper crust”.

When he said that there would be no change in property relations, he meant that there would continue to be a dominant state sector, and he didn't recognize that the social nature of the state sector would change if the workers actually came to control it and the economy as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

Of course Trotsky promised that such a political revolution would not be “a question of substituting one ruling clique for another” and there would be “deep social consequences”.<sup>19</sup> But he did not recognize the fundamental thing — that the social nature of the Soviet Union depended on whether the workers actually controlled the economics and politics. He didn't recognize any economic distinction between the transitional economy of a society moving towards socialism and the Stalinist system, and he declared that the Stalinist Soviet Union was a “a transitional, or intermediate” one, between capitalism and socialism.<sup>20</sup>

### About those Trotskyists who recognize the existence of state-capitalism

As mentioned above, there are some Trotskyist groups who do recognize that the Stalinist countries are state-capitalist regimes, and not workers' states. But they still try to follow Trotsky's general standpoint on the nature of socialism.

For example, the trend around the SWP of Britain (the International Socialist trend) follows the theories of Tony Cliff, who held that Stalinist Russia was state-capitalist. But Cliff also held that, as the state sector was dominant in Russia, capitalism intruded upon the Soviet Union only due to its relationship to the world market. Otherwise, he believed, the Soviet state sector would have functioned harmoniously as a single large factory, and produced simply for use-value. This brings his conception of the state sector close to Trotsky. True, Cliff believed that Stalinism would still have been a system of exploitation, but a non-capitalist one. But Cliff didn't see the internal forces of competition and anarchy in the Soviet state sector.

The League for the Revolutionary Party is one of the few Trotskyist groups that recognize the competition and anarchy that sprang up from inside the Soviet state sector. This is developed in Walter Daum's book *The Life and Death of Stalinism*. But due to his holding fast to various Trotskyist dogmas, Daum can't analyze the Soviet economy consistently. Thus Daum will at one point stress the competition and anarchy

<sup>18</sup>Ch. XI. “Whither the Revolution”, section 3 “The Inevitability of a New Revolution”, in *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union And Where Is It Going?*, p. 288.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 288, 298.

<sup>20</sup>*The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 254.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>17</sup>Chapter IX “Social Relations in the Soviet Union”, Section 1 “State Capitalism?”, *The Revolution Betrayed*, pp. 245-6.

that arises internally in state-capitalism, and at another point denigrate this competition and say the Soviet economy should be looked at from the point of view that it formed a “single national capital”. Sometimes he says that the law of value is good, sometimes bad. And so on.<sup>21</sup>

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## From capitalism to socialism: the transitional economy

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The transitional economy is one of the most important issues in dealing with the nature of workers’ rule. The issue was posed especially sharply when the Soviet Union switched over to the New Economic Policy in 1921. This marked the end of the period when it was thought that the emergency measures of “War Communism”, implemented to deal with the crisis of the Civil War, might provide a direct transition to a socialist society in one jump. In some respects, it marked a return to the original plan, attempted at first after the Bolshevik Revolution, of a gradual transformation of the economy. But the original plan didn’t go far before it was cut off by the Civil War, whereas NEP was extensively developed during most of the 1920s.

A transitional period with various NEP-like features — the dispossession of the traditional big bourgeoisie, a multi-sector economy (a dominant state sector but also other sectors), commodity production, the use by state enterprises of certain capitalist methods of cost-accounting and profit-making (“khozraschet”), and so on — is likely to be a general feature of any socialist revolution, even in a developed country. But communist theory has to go beyond the original formulations of the time of NEP, and draw a clearer picture of the transitional period. This is necessary in order to distinguish between a transitional economy and the Stalinist economies, and it is needed in order to help strengthen actual working class control during the transitional period, so as to avoid the tragedy of the Russian NEP.

In dealing with NEP, two separate issues get intertwined: the specific experience of the Russian NEP in the 1920s and the general idea of a transitional economy. In Russia, NEP had mixed results. It rescued the Soviet Union from the disaster that was threatened by the continuation of War Communism. It provided for the recovery and growth of the economy. The ability of the government to plan the economy grew, and the methods of planning and the debates over policy had a tremendous influence over subsequent economic theory around the world.

But NEP was also supposed to resuscitate, after the devastation of the ranks of the working class by World War I, the Civil War and economic ruin, the ability of the working class to control the economy. Instead, the working class grew more passive as years went by, the class basis of the Bolshevik Party eroded, and a privileged bureaucratic elite consolidated. NEP in

Russia was followed by the development of Stalinist state-capitalism. This tragedy was due to particular features of the Russian situation, and without NEP the revolution would have died out much sooner. Yet this history shows that it is not the repetition of the historical NEP, but the general idea of the transitional economy, that must be part of the general program of the socialist revolution.

It has been a common idea, both among the Bolsheviks and still today, to discuss the transitional period as combination of both capitalist and socialist elements. But the transitional period is more than this. It needs to be regarded as an economic and political formation in its own right — not simply a mixture of two other systems. The transitional society has some features of its own that are not typical of either capitalism or socialism. It is not socialism, because it still has the capitalist shell of commodity production, including capitalist cost-accounting and other bourgeois features. Nor is it ordinary capitalism, because no stable system of commodity production is compatible with the controlling role of the working class. It is a temporary, revolutionary economic formation, and the extent of its progress towards socialism is measured mainly by the extent that the workers actually run the economy and the society.

Such workers control is not ensured simply by expanding the state sector or by the formal control of the proletarian party. It requires changing the way the state sector works, developing the organization and consciousness among the workers that allow them to run both enterprises and the economy as a whole, and transforming the situation of the petty-bourgeois working masses so that they gradually become integrated into the working class. This isn’t a matter simply of economic growth, but also of class changes.

Trotskyism has had difficulty with the question of the transitional period. It’s not that Trotsky or the Trotskyists don’t ever use terms like “transitional economy”. But despite their occasional use of terms like “transitional” or “intermediate”, they either dream of a direct jump to socialism or imagine that the transitional period (the workers’ state) as basically like Soviet state-capitalism. This is why Trotsky didn’t want a “social revolution” against Stalinism, as he understood the transitional economy to have same “social” content as the Stalinist system.

### Trotsky’s blindness towards the class nature of NEP

Trotsky himself accepted the need for NEP, but he had a limited view of its class nature. He saw that it was needed to prevent economic crisis, and he had some idea of why financial measures were needed. But he didn’t see that NEP had any affect on the internal character or class nature of the state sector. Instead he saw the state-sector as not just a component of a transitional economy, but as a fully socialist feature that was already present.

Lenin had commented that NEP, in introducing the use of certain capitalist measures to state enterprises, affected the class character of the state sector, resulting in a certain conflict of interests between the managers of state enterprises and the

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<sup>21</sup>See “On Walter Daum’s ‘The Life and Death of Stalinism’: Competition among Soviet enterprises and ministries, and the collapse of the Soviet Union” in *Communist Voice* #19, December 8, 1998. It is also available on the internet at <[www.comunistvoice.org/19cDaum.html](http://www.comunistvoice.org/19cDaum.html)>.

workers.<sup>22</sup> Trotsky, however, never accepted this. This doesn't mean that he agreed with everything the managers of the state sector did, but he believed that their errors were simply the errors of some leaders and of their belief in "socialism in one country"; in his view, the problems with the state sector had nothing to do with its class nature, and could be solved simply by replacing Stalinist managers with Trotskyist ones.

Thus, Trotsky repeatedly identified the progress of socialism with the growth of the state sector in and of itself. So he regarded anything the state sector did, even if it used the traditional financial methods of capitalism, as essentially socialist. Thus he even described some of the financial methods used under NEP as "socialist economic methods".<sup>23</sup>

### The "commodity-socialist society"

Preobrazhensky was the main Trotskyist economic theorist during NEP. His view was that the transitional economy was a "commodity-socialist society", that is, a mixture of two parts, an already socialist part, which was the state sector, and the commodity part, which was the rest of the economy. He thus didn't see the transitional economy as a unique economic formation in itself, but simply as an amalgam of two parts. In this conception, the state sector didn't itself need to be transformed during the transitional period, but only needed to grow to take over the entire economy. So Preobrazhensky measured the progress towards socialism simply by the increase in the size of the state sector.

But, it was asked, how could the state sector be socialist when, under NEP, the state sector used categories like profit, interest and rent? Preobrazhensky replied by arguing that these categories were only a surface appearance. They didn't reflect the essence of the state sector. Similarly, he brushed aside any consideration of the contradictions that arose between the workers and the state sector. He claimed that the managers and directors of the state-sector were just workers like any other worker, and — he asked — how could the workers exploit themselves?<sup>24</sup> These views were in line with similar views that would be developed by the Stalinists in the 1930s and later.

### Trotskyist doubts about the transitional economy

Certain other Trotskyists, while paying lip-service to the need

<sup>22</sup>"The role and functions of the trade unions under the New Economic Policy", *Collected Works*, vol. 33. See Section 3, "The state enterprises that are being put on a profit basis and the trade unions", pp. 185-6.

<sup>23</sup>"Towards Capitalism or Socialism" (August 28, 1925), *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)*, p. 340. It is one thing that financial measures, such as the shifting around of financial reserves praised by Trotsky, were absolutely necessary at that time. It is another to describe them as socialist measures. See a brief discussion of this article of Trotsky's in "Preobrazhensky—ideologist of state capitalism (part two)" in *Communist Voice*, August 1, 1998. See section III: "The Trotskyist Opposition and the Soviet state sector".

<sup>24</sup>Preobrazhensky — *Ideologist of State Capitalism* (part one), *Communist Voice*, April 20, 1998. See section II "Economic categories and the state sector".

for a transition period, are even more doubtful about it. This is based on the overall implications of Trotsky's reasoning. As we have seen, under the banner of "permanent revolution" Trotsky argued that socialist revolution should be carried out even if there wasn't the possibility of doing much in the way of progress towards socialism, even if one couldn't carry out "far-reaching socialization measures". He distinguished between the conditions needed to seize power, and those necessary to carry out social change. His idea was that the victory of the world revolution would eventually compensate for the lack, in individual countries, of the material conditions for socialism. This implies that one might seize power and simply try to hold on as best one could, and eventually the world revolution would allow progress towards socialism. Or at least, it denigrates careful consideration of the class and social changes needed in the transitional period, because it is not these changes, but eventual aid from the rest of the world, that will lead to socialism. This way of thinking might encourage some people to believe that world revolution could replace the need for a transitional economy. If only there were world revolution, there would supposedly be no need for any substantial transition period.

Thus, in his *Marxist Economic Theory*, Mandel devoted a chapter to the "economy of the transition period". It has a section entitled "Need for a transition period". But he began this section by claiming that the transition period would be unnecessary if only there were a world revolution. He wrote that

"if the capitalist mode of production were to be abolished on the world scale it would be possible to go over at once without any transition other than that required by political events, to the organisation of an economy in which commodity production is abolished and which adapts men's productive efforts to the satisfaction of current needs."

In fact, the necessity for the transition period follows from the internal class relations of society, not on lack of geographical spread of the revolution. Indeed, it is possible that the larger the area of the revolution, the more insistently class contradictions will make themselves felt.<sup>25</sup>

So, in the section of his book devoted to the transitional economy, Mandel proceeded to skip over the entire issue of the transitional economy prior to world revolution. He paid no attention to it at all. But, Mandel added, even with the world revolution, it is not possible to do away with the transitional economy, because this would mean that living standards would be restricted to an elementary level:

"men would have to be content with eating just enough to appease their hunger, dressing quietly, living in a rudimentary type of dwelling, sending their children to schools of a quite elementary kind, and enjoying only a restricted health service."

Whereupon Mandel devoted most of his attention to the technical aspects of economic planning in a world economy where capitalism has been overthrown.

So the transition period, in his view, is a matter of "advancing from expanded reproduction with a moderate

<sup>25</sup>Ernest Mandel, *Marxist Economic Theory*, vol. Two, Chapter 16 "The Economy of the Transition Period", p. 608.

growth-rate to expanded reproduction with a higher growth-rate". Thus he talked of "the key problem of the transition period: determining the optimum growth-rate." Class issues came in only secondarily to this discussion, and he implicitly assumed that the power stays firmly in the hands of the socialists no matter what happens.<sup>26</sup>

Tony Cliff seemed even more skeptical of the transition period. In his work *State Capitalism in Russia* he suggested that it should be identified with the lower phase of communist society described by Marx in his famous *Critique of the Gotha Program*. But Marx describes the abolition of commodity production as already taking place in the lower phase of communism. Thus

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<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, footnote on p. 608, p. 621.

Cliff appears to imagine that the revolution will directly jump to the abolition of commodity production.<sup>27</sup> □

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<sup>27</sup>See Cliff, Ch. 3: "The Economy of a workers' state", especially subsection "The relations of distribution in the transition period", pp. 131-3. For an analysis of *Critique of the Gotha Program* that shows that commodity production has already been eliminated in what Marx describes as the "first phase" of communism, see the Appendix "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work" to the article "State ownership is not sufficient to define the transitional economy" in *Communist Voice*, October 9, 1999.

# Correspondence: Continuing the discussion about the anti-Marxist-Leninist nature of Trotskyism

Our last issue carried a comradely exchange between the FRP (League for the Proletarian Party) of Sweden and the *Communist Voice* about Trotskyism. The FRP had previously supported Trotskyism and the League for the Revolutionary Party in the US. Its resolution “Back to the classics of Marxism-Leninism” put forward a criticism of some of the dogmas of Trotskyism. This gave rise to a discussion of communist theory. Their resolution, our views on it, and some other material appeared in our last issue. In this issue, we carry FRP’s reply to our views about their resolution, and our further comments. Since then, the

FRP has replied further in another thoughtful letter which we will carry in the next issue of *CV*.

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## Letters from the FRP of Sweden: discussion on the resolution “back to the classics of Marxism-Leninism”

23 November 2003

Dear *Communist Voice*,

Here is the first part of our reply to your mail of September 11. The reason why we divide it into two parts, is that we would like to avoid too much delay in proceeding with the discussion. We begin with some general remarks and then dwell somewhat longer on the question of program. Meanwhile, we are preparing the part dealing with united front tactics, permanent revolution and the question of “socialism in one country”. Here the two last-mentioned subjects are mentioned only in by-passing, among the general remarks.

You speak of Trotskyism as “Stalinism in reverse”. Yes — if we by that don’t mean Trotsky’s intentions, as he obviously fought to save the revolution, but his limitations, the framework to which he confined himself, then we agree. In Trotsky’s actions, as in his writings, there is a kind of ever-present tension between these aspects, which makes him very contradictory. While Stalin, on the one hand, was the representative of the rising bureaucracy, Trotsky, on the other, tried to counteract that development, because he could see that it was harmful; he did it in what appears like a rather groping manner, because he didn’t really know how. He acted as something of a “revolutionary conscience”, but his understanding of what happened, and why, was far too shallow (compare with Lenin, who on his death-bed sought to initiate a struggle which Trotsky then still refused to wage). You have called Preobrazhensky an “ideologist of state capitalism”, which is quite true — and Trotsky, himself a weak economist, seems to have been content to lean on Preobrazhensky’s ideas. Why? The framework to which Trotsky confined himself, is indeed to a great extent shared with Stalinism. It is a methodological heritage from the various shades of old revisionism prevalent in the Second International, and

constitutes the basis of modern revisionism. While Lenin was the one who stood for the most far-reaching and decisive breaks with the traditions of the Second International, it seems that neither Trotsky nor others ever really made these breaks to the same extent, but rather in mere form. That is, just as there must have been a wide gap between the understanding of Marx and Engels, on the one hand, and that of their followers, even of very prominent ones, on the other, a wide gap existed, as matters turned out, also between Lenin and all the rest of the Bolshevik leadership.

If so, then the theory of “socialism in one country” is not the essence of modern revisionism, as we suggested in our resolution, but the other way around: it is one of its fruits. Modern revisionism can and does exist even without that theory.

In the theory of permanent revolution there are frequently conclusions similar to those of Stalinists, even though in a roundabout way which makes it seem more radical, but the content of which is objectivist. For instance, while later-day Soviet revisionism (Khrushchev and onwards) came up with ideas about “non-capitalist paths of development”, which were allegedly something in-between socialism and capitalism, most Trotskyist trends had the concept of “deformed workers’ states”, and some of them also a further out-stretched designation: “workers’ and farmers’ governments”. Both the Soviet and the Trotskyist theories were based on things like sealing off from the division-of-labor imposed by the imperialist world order, nationalizing key industries, imposing a monopoly on foreign trade, and so on and so forth, although Trotskyists usually demanded more things for their labels to pass. Thus only a very few of the Trotskyist trends were prepared to go as far as to declare Syria, Libya, Burma and former South Yemen (and Iran in case the Hizbollahi faction of the Islamic Republic had carried out extensive nationalizations) workers’ states or workers’ and



farmers' governments; most other trends couldn't really determine what these countries were to be called. The Soviets could be much more "generous" in handing out their blessing, as much less far-reaching measures were required; if we are not mistaken, even Nasser's Egypt was, for a period of time, held by their ideologues and propagandists to be an example of "anti-capitalist development", simply due to its dependence of Soviet aid and to ambitious development projects like the Assuan dam. The reason for this difference is obvious: why, the Trotskyists didn't represent the big-power interests of the Soviet Union, who used "Marxist theory" in its diplomatic game for influence. Anyway, on this question, most Trotskyists are or have been, actually worse than such Stalinist trends which historically have criticized the late Soviet ideas and held that all countries without (what they considered to be) a Marxist-Leninist party in power are by definition capitalist, in one form or another.

The same with the fact that Trotsky advocated the theory of productive forces as the prime motor of history (rather than class struggle); so did Stalin, too, as he in *On dialectical and historical materialism* relegated class struggle to being merely a midwife as the development of productive forces have grown beyond the limits of the relations of production.

Or take the Transitional Program: despite all other differences, there is one basic similarity with Stalinist concepts of transition, like "people's democracy", or "anti-monopolist democracy" etc. in the sense that certain key measures are in themselves supposed to make a decisive turn in the fundamental power relations in society.

Now let's go into your comments on transitional demands. As mentioned in our resolution, we have seen that the concept was launched, for the first time, by Comintern in the early 1920's, in connection with united front tactics. We know very little, however, about how they were used then. Again, they are mentioned in the program adopted by the 6th congress of Comintern; there it is stated explicitly that they are to be used in revolutionary situations only and that they would get a completely different, opportunist character if put forward under other conditions. What is your general, or overall, view on transitional demands? Are there circumstances under which such can be useful, or was Comintern's discussions about them more of an experiment which has proven to be a sidetrack? Our view is that transitional demands are not wrong in themselves.

The point is to be able to show a line of action which opens a path forward, so that the struggle can move on towards more and more centralized and politically advanced forms of struggle until the labor bureaucracy is overwhelmed: let there be a whole "hierarchy" of partial demands – some of them fairly simple and immediate, perhaps defensive; other ones with are to be applied in a bigger scale and offensively, and still others of a more advanced kind, and so on and so forth, until finally, on the top, the most advanced slogans are of transitional character, to be applied in a revolutionary situation. For instance, let's say there is a struggle against concessions, for wages, job conditions and other things, and then the plant is moved away somewhere and the workers fired – while the labor hacks will say "we told you so", "you're banging your heads against the wall of reality", etc. It seems that in such case we need somehow to step up the scale of the demands, e.g. to demand state investments to keep up employment and production. That, in turn, would raise the

question as to how to achieve it legally and financially, and then we could demand confiscation of capital not invested in socially useful enterprises. And so on and so forth. Yet, this doesn't mean that we at present are clear about exactly how this should be formulated. It is one of those things that we are "wrestling" with.

In the Trotskyist world of concepts, there is a definition of "program" which encompasses almost everything that has to do with strategical aims, regardless of whether there is an actual program or not. There is a certain fetishism, which not only encourages beliefs to the effect that the perfect program can solve everything, can secure what actual struggles, party organisation etc. cannot grant, but which also tends by definition to reduce all matters to program, like in the famous statement by Trotsky: "The program is the party". In this way, Trotskyists can close down their organisations, engage in various entryist projects or "diplomatically" negotiated amalgamations, etc., and still claim that there is nothing liquidationist about that since "the program" is allegedly still at the forefront of their activity! The Transitional Program is, we think, to be understood in the same reductionist and substitutionist context. A crucial difference between 1938, when the Transitional Program was written, and later times, is that then there was a situation in which Trotsky expected a big, broad labor party to come into being in the U.S., and also that in the wake of the coming war there would be a huge wave of revolutions once again, just as in 1917-19. As mass consciousness generally lags behind mass action, and the Trotskyist organisations were just recently founded, small, and relatively unknown, Trotsky saw a wide gap opening up between the objective conditions and the ability of first building up strong revolutionary parties. So, the idea was to put the Transitional Program forward as a kind of "general workers' program" in a so-called "algebraic" way, i.e. seemingly open-ended; then the broad masses of workers and toilers would be able to actually wage a revolutionary struggle even if they didn't have any such intentions. That's the "bridge": you're fighting as if you fought in just a more advanced manner for your immediate demands, but in fact you're fighting for socialism! It is thus not merely an action program with partial demands at the most advanced level, when they become transitional, but is rather an entire revised conception of what a revolution is.

Trotsky said, on the one hand, that the Transitional Program shows the way only to the threshold of socialist revolution, but, on the other hand, that it is revolutionary since none of its demands can be realized under capitalism. This is a logic which, if extended, leads to conclusions like those of the Lambertists (a French Trotskyist current; its U.S. affiliate is the group around the paper *The Organizer*), who hold that the path of reformism is nowadays closed due to the capitalist crisis and that, therefore, even classical reformist mobilizations might serve as a "battering ram". Beyond the "leftist" phrases, there is opportunism. The same thing, only less crudely, with demands like, say, "workers' inspection of state finances", put forward in a situation which is not revolutionary. Who is going to make that inspection, concretely, and what happens with the result of it? To put the demand to the established reformist leadership? But what, under tense revolutionary or pre-revolutionary conditions, might have challenging and exposing effects, will otherwise just channel off any militancy and support class collaboration.

With many currents, the Transitional Program has become a

dogma to be applied just as it is, regardless of actual conditions and with little concrete explanation except for pious repetitions of what was said in 1938. Most groups, even very small ones, put forward the Transitional Program on all occasions, probably not serving any other function than as a criterion of “orthodoxy”, or, possibly, as a means of displaying some “attitude”, looking bigger than they actually are. As for those who hold that it might be used at certain times and at other times not, they differ over when. The LRP-USA say (although they are not entirely consistent on this) that transitional demands are to be used only under conditions of much sharpened class struggle; otherwise it wouldn’t be able to serve as a “bridge”. In their view, it is rather the general strike that plays the role of elevating workers’ struggles up to the level in which it becomes sharp and advanced enough.

However, we don’t believe, as you do, that Trotsky’s motivation was directed primarily against the minimum program. If it had been, then he would rather have said that “instead of the old division into maximum and minimum programs, we’ll now have a maximum program and a transitional one”. Why didn’t the Fourth International adopt a maximum program? Especially given the struggle the Trotskyists waged against the Stalinists, the attention Trotsky paid to the question of “socialism in one country”, etc., it should have been absolutely imperative to concretize these differences by writing a maximum program. Yet it wasn’t done! All that was said was that the Transitional Program is that of the Fourth International, and period. This makes sense only if viewed in the light of Trotsky’s ideas about the workers’ state: the reason, according to him, why Stalinist counterrevolution can deform or halt a transition towards socialism but not restore capitalism as long as private property is not restored, is that once a workers’ state is established, then it’s not just the bourgeoisie, but capitalism, that has been overthrown. If so, then the Transitional Program would be more than a program for taking power – it would be the program for the abolishment of capitalism! Trotsky said that Stalinism arose

because of the isolation and backwardness of Soviet Russia – and in 1938 he expected an immanent wave of revolutions in the advanced countries, and so there would be no material conditions for a new Stalinist degeneration to take place. Does this mean that he thought the transition towards socialism would run on straight tracks, propelled more or less by its own dynamics? We can’t tell, we simply don’t know for sure, but given his pre-1917 spontaneism and the similar picture he drew up in 1930’s in his article *If America Would Go Communist*, the question is not unreasonable. So, we maintain that Trotskyism must be, first of all, a rightist deviation, not a “leftist” one.

As for the criticism you make about the way in which we spoke of the maximum program, it is justified. Obviously, we couldn’t really see through programmatic fetishism yet – and therefore replaced the Transitional Program just by an alternative, more radical concept: a supposed maximum program, as if that would solve the matter. As you point out, we still wouldn’t get away from the question of how to relate to the actual day-to-day struggles. Methodologically, it seems to us that what we did resembles, at least to some extent, the superficial and neat-penstroke manner in which Trotsky frequently dealt with Stalinism. In our case it would lead either to “left communism”, as you suggest – especially the Bordigist brand – or, perhaps, to something like petrified propaganda groups of the American SLP or the British SP type. And since we wouldn’t like to sit on the sidelines with folded arms, or, worse still, approach strikers by delivering abstract patronizing lectures about the need to immediately abolish wage labor, all that would remain for us would be to paint the daily struggles in flaming revolutionary colors (as a good many Trotskyists do well with their Transitional Program!).

With Communist regards  
FRP □

## From FRP: Second part of the discussion on the resolution

December 11, 2003  
To *Communist Voice*.

Dear Comrades,

Thank you for your notification of December 11. Here is the second part of our reply to your comments on our resolution. We are sorry for the long delay.

First, to the question of permanent revolution. As we have noted, we think Trotsky from the very outset differed much less than Lenin from the established Second International set of concepts. Trotsky did, to be sure, take a position far to the left of the Mensheviks, but he was a prisoner of the same method that they used; in that sense, he represented merely the extreme left wing of Menshevism, and his centrist, conciliationist position on the struggle within the RSDLP was thus no accident and can not be separated from his overall strategy as Trotskyists try to do. Both Lenin and Trotsky wanted to find an alternative to tailing

the bourgeoisie, but Trotsky had to imagine the revolution as socialist (through its “permanence”) to conceive of the possibility of workers overthrowing the bourgeoisie; if what he saw as the absolute precondition for a socialist revolution – the spread of the revolution to West Europe – would not materialize, then only the Menshevik tail-ending behind the liberals would remain. Since Lenin, on the other hand, held that although the revolution was still at the bourgeois stage, the bourgeoisie itself could be overthrown nevertheless and a democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants be established, he didn’t have to choose between either tailing bourgeois forces or painting actual struggles in flaming socialist colors. So, as we see it, he and not Trotsky was the real innovator and the one who was furthest to the left. Trotsky’s claim to the contrary was false; after all, even the Mensheviks made some demagogical attempts to attack the Bolsheviks from the left, comparing the idea about workers taking power with Millerandism!

Methodologically, we think the essence of Lenin’s view, as

opposed to those of the Mensheviks and Trotsky alike, is that he regarded class struggle as the prime motor of history, instead of reducing it to the role of a midwife for the productive forces; therefore, once it had been established (already in the 1890's) that Russia was a capitalist country (even if with strong feudal and other vestiges), the overall relations of strength within that framework became decisive in determining the stages of the revolutionary struggle. We expressed ourselves in a very muddled way about that in our resolution, which appeared rather voluntaristic. You are right that "the economic structure of society and the extent of development of the various classes is crucial for grasping the possible relations of strength"; what we mean is that since these factors remained essentially the same before and after the point, in early 1917, when Lenin changed to call for a socialist revolution, his previous slogan about the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants was approximate and had to do with the constellation of forces rather than with an abstract overview of the degree of Russian backwardness.

And we believe that, for precisely this reason, that slogan may still carry validity in many cases — it is by no means outdated, but a matter of concrete assessment in each case. (By "anti-imperialist united front", referred to in our resolution as something quite different, we mean the term used by Stalin and Bukharin in mid-1920's as a cover for their assessment of Kuomintang in China, for instance — a term nowadays used also by certain Trotskyist trends, notably Lambertists and Morenoites, who downplay the concept of "permanent revolution" in favour of support for petty-bourgeois nationalism in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere).

As for the original concept of permanent revolution, used by Marx in 1850, you are right in your criticism of how we refer to it in the resolution. Yes, Marx did mean that there were different stages, which would be following one after the other like an ongoing process. And we believe that if any line in early 20th Century Russia could be compared to it, then it's Lenin's line, not Trotsky's, since Marx spoke of backing up the proletarian struggles by what he called a second edition of the peasants' war. In Trotsky's underestimation of the role of the peasantry, there is the same mechanical view of history that Kautsky and the Mensheviks held: the peasants' struggle for land is a struggle for private property, thus it is petty-bourgeois, and is backward in relation to the historical tasks of the proletariat, and so it is not an ally to the struggle for socialism.

You write that one of the main errors of Trotsky's theory is that it obscures the changes in class alliances which takes place between the democratic and socialist revolutions. We agree, and, as you also point out, we, too, make this error. The reason is that we have not understood exactly how the decisive changes in the relations of strength in Russia through the February Revolution worked — the changes which made it possible to leave the slogan of the democratic dictatorship and call for the socialist revolution. We can see fragments of it. There was the establishment of village soviets, which meant the peasants were emulating the workers' method of organizing dual power. And we can see that the Bolsheviks managed to seize the overall initiative by putting forward the call for land — in itself a democratic rather than socialist slogan, but which obviously helped strengthen the lead role of the working class to such an

extent that instead of preserving the democratic stage it made the transition to the socialist stage possible and made the democratic tasks its auxiliary. It seems to us that the difference between the October Socialist Revolution and the scenario envisaged by Lenin before 1917 is that in the latter case there would have been a soviet government but acting within the framework of such more unfavourable relations of strength that the possibility of socialist measures would have been very limited. We think the October Revolution could not abolish capitalism right away, but it could and actually did start a process in that direction, which — had it not been halted — would have led to a socialist society.

Thus we now arrive at the question of "socialism in one country". Here, too, our resolution spoke in terms of general slogans, and, obviously, what we said about that theory in our last mail was a step forward, but insufficient. Why? Because there still was no clarification as to what we mean by socialism — and so the sweeping Trotsky-style assessment was not altered, just modified. And now we can see the problem with Trotsky's argument. With him, socialism referred only to the first, or lower, phase of communism — the one in which bourgeois rights in distribution remain in force ("to each according to work performed" instead of "to each according to needs"). That "socialism" may refer also to the proletarian socialist revolution, to the process of transition that moves society forward from capitalism, i.e. the sense in which it was correct to call the Soviet state "socialist republic" — this understanding he obviously lacked. We have taken a new look at the discussion of "socialism proper" vs. "weak socialism" in *Workers' Advocate Supplement* of early 1989, and it seems to us that the points of view expressed there is correct. We believe Trotsky was right in considering "socialism proper" impossible in one country alone — it must require such a big-scale development of the productive forces that only the joint efforts of the proletariat in at least several of the advanced countries can achieve it. So far, he defended the original Marxist view of that society against Stalin's revisionism — that socialist society is the extension of state ownership to all spheres of industry and trade plus collectivization of agriculture, plus a state plan to supposedly administer and direct it all. Likewise, he was certainly right in his warnings that there was a connection between Stalin's more and more narrow national perspective already in mid-1920's and his cynical maneuvering on the international scene. But with his lack of understanding of "weak socialism" and his very general, abstract internationalism, Trotsky failed to grasp how it could be possible for one workers' state to take concrete in the direction towards "socialism proper" — just as he in 1905 hadn't been able to conceive of workers' power without world revolution — and so he thought everything bad flows from the theory of "socialism in one country". In our resolution, we wrote that Trotsky methodologically, instead of concrete analysis, frequently indulged in a kind of single-factor assessment, picking out one form of appearance and declaring it to be the all-decisive one — but we applied this insight poorly, as we didn't see that *Third International after Lenin* is an example precisely of that method.

Moreover, since Trotsky, at the same time, regarded the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, the establishment of monopoly on foreign trade, etc., as the abolishment of capitalism, the workers' state is put somehow in a limbo — neither capitalism,

nor even “weak socialism” — the transitional stage gets its own life, becomes a social formation in its own right: the transitional society. There we have a connection with the idea of his successors: that the existence of the “degenerated” and “deformed” “workers’ states” could continue on and on so long as there were no overturns of the system of state ownership. To

reject these ideas and at the same time uphold the way in which Trotsky criticizes “socialism in one country” is thus illogical.

In awaiting your response, Communist regards  
FRP □

## From *Communist Voice*: Transitional issues, the economic base, and socialism in one country

January 9, 2004  
Transitional issues etc. — intro  
Dear FRP,

I hope the new year finds all the comrades of the FRP well, and your work proceeding vigorously. Following this note, you should immediately receive my reply to your notes of November 23 and December 11. . . . it is divided into the following sections and subsections:

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. . . .

Sorry for the delay in my reply. But we have pondered your views here, and look forward to continuing the discussion. I deeply appreciate your serious attitude to re-examining revolutionary theory and practice. In turn, I have tried to focus on some of the basic theoretical issues which might lead our discussion forward.

Revolutionary greetings,  
Joseph Green □

Transitional issues etc  
Dear FRP,

Your replies of November 23 and December 11 are very helpful. They give a more extended exposition of your views. You have important passages on the similarity of Stalin and Trotsky’s frameworks, on Trotskyist fetishism of the concept of the “program”, on the need not to reduce matters to the maximum program alone, on various of the rightist practices of the

Trotskyist trends, etc. And I appreciate your openness to changing past views, and to re-examining past practice.

Your replies focus on the transitional program, the issue of socialism in one country, and your view of the basic methodological error of Trotskyism. But in some places they look at these matters too much through the mirror of how the various views and slogans were used in the various factional battles among the Russian communists, or how various later Trotskyist trends interpreted them. The problem with this is that we need to know what various strategies and slogans mean in and of themselves. One can’t always find this from the history of what various trends and individuals thought about these slogans. It requires a broader theoretical analysis and a broader view of revolutionary experience. It is possible, and it has happened over and over again, that this or that individual or trend may apply a theory in a mechanical or distorted way, or misuse a slogan. This history is important in evaluating these individuals and trends. But such a historical account is not the same thing as a theoretical analysis of the problems of revolutionary work.

I think that, insofar as we succeed in isolating — for a time — some of the major issues from the immediate back and forth of factional battles in the Soviet leadership, and deal with them in their own right, we will be able to gradually clarify some of the key issues of communist theory. In particular, I will deal with the issues of transitional demands, the relationship of demands and tactics to the economic base, the issue of the nature of the transitional economy which exists after the socialist revolution but prior to the achievement of a fully socialist economy, and with the nature of the controversy over “socialism in one country”.

### — TRANSITIONAL DEMANDS —

Your views and ours on transitional demands are moving closer. Trotsky wanted to replace the division between the minimum program (demands which might conceivably be achieved under capitalism) and the maximum program (demands which are incompatible with capitalism and are part of the demand for socialist revolution) with a “Transitional Program”. We both are agreed on the rightist consequences of the “Transitional Program”, but you had advocated that the mistake was that communists should base themselves solely on the maximum program. You now write that it is wrong to simply have a maximum program, and that this would lead either to “left

communism” or to something of the nature of a “petrified propaganda group”. So you accept the division into day-to-day struggles and the maximum program of the socialist revolution and the eventual achievement of communism. This is a very important theoretical point, and I’m glad that you have taken this step.

You ask about my overall views on transitional demands. In this, I strongly agree with you that “transitional demands are not wrong in themselves”. You referred, among other things, to the section of the program of the 6th Congress of the Communist International which referred to transitional demands. And you point out that “it is stated explicitly that they are to be used in revolutionary situations only and that they would get a completely different character if put forward under other conditions.” This is indeed an important point. And the brief passage from the CI program is pretty good:

“When the revolutionary tide is rising, when the ruling classes are disorganized, the masses are in a state of revolutionary ferment, the intermediary strata are inclining towards the proletariat and the masses are ready for action and for sacrifice, the Party of the proletariat is confronted with the task of leading the masses to a direct attack upon the bourgeois State. This it does by carrying on propaganda in favor of increasingly radical transitional slogans (for Soviets, workers’ control of industry, for peasant committees for the seizure of the big landed properties, for disarming the bourgeoisie and arming the proletariat, etc.) and by organizing mass action, upon which all branches of Party agitation and propaganda, including parliamentary activity, must be concentrated. . . .

“In passing over to new and more radical slogans, the Parties must be guided by the fundamental role of the political tactics of Leninism, which call for ability to lead the masses to revolutionary positions in such a manner that the masses may, by their own experience, convince themselves of the correctness of the Party line. . . .

“When the revolutionary tide is not rising, the Communist Parties must advance partial slogans and demands that correspond to the everyday needs of the toilers, and combine them with the fundamental tasks of the Communist International. The Communist Parties must not, however, at such a time, advance transitional slogans that are applicable only to revolutionary situations (for example workers’ control of industry, etc.). to advance such slogans when there is no revolutionary situation means to transform them into slogans that favor merging with the capitalist system of organization. Partial demands and slogans generally form an essential part of correct tactics; but certain transitional slogans go inseparably with a revolutionary situation. Repudiation of partial demands and transitional slogans ‘on principle,’ however, is incompatible with the tactical principles of Communism, for in

effect, such repudiation condemns the Party to inaction and isolates it from the masses. United front tactics also occupy an important place in the tactics of the Communist Parties throughout the whole pre-revolutionary period. . . .” (*Program of the CI adopted by the Sixth World Congress, Chapter VI “The Strategy and Tactics of the Communist International in the Struggle for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat”, Sec. 2. “The Fundamental Tasks of Communist Strategy and Tactics”*)

### On the objective basis for slogans

You also gave an example of how struggle proceeds from “a whole ‘hierarchy’ of partial demands...until finally, on the top, the most advanced slogans are of transitional character, to be applied in a revolutionary situation.” But I have some doubts about this formulation concerning the hierarchy of demands. It seems to me that on this question, you still are under the influence of some of the Trotskyist formulas, which see the advance of the struggle one-sidedly as simply a progression along a series of slogans. It seems to me that, instead, one has to judge the advance of the struggle through the increase of the fighting spirit of the masses, of their class organization, and of their consciousness. It might be seen in the spread of strikes and other struggles, or in the extension of trade union organization in countries where the workers are mainly disorganized, or in the change in the way unions are organized and in their leadership in countries where most workers are organized. And the creation and growth of an independent political trend of the workers, and of a mass communist party, are key measures of the development of mass proletarian consciousness.

Now, it might be asked, wouldn’t such changes also manifest themselves in better and more militant demands? In general, yes. But, for example, a broad extension of struggle from one workplace to many workplaces might also take place on very basic demands. In this case, it is the extension of the struggle to a broader or even class-wide struggle, and not necessarily the place of the demands in the hierarchy of demands, that would mark a major advance.

Also, the workers at an individual workplace or industry have to wage their struggle in the context of the mood of the workers overall. Thus, when they are successful in obtaining certain demands, there is a limit to how far they can escalate them. They have to consider the situation of other workers, and what demands can be spread among them, or else the militant section of workers may find itself isolated.

You gave the example of a struggle against concessions in which the plant is eventually moved elsewhere and the workers are fired. You raised that “it seems that in such case we need somehow to step up the scale of the demands, e.g. to demand state investments to keep up employment and production. That, in turn, would raise the question as to how to achieve it legally and financially, and then we could demand confiscation of capital not invested in socially useful enterprises.”

Now, whether one would put forward the demand for state investment depends on a number of things. It might make sense in a particular struggle. But in and of itself, in times such as the



present, this demand is not revolutionary. Indeed, reformist trade union officials here in the US often demand state aid for “their” capitalists, and they use this demand to blunt class consciousness and militant struggle. One might try to formulate the demand for aid to an industry as something different from aid to the capitalists, and you raise the issue of the confiscation of certain capitalists. But such confiscation can usually only take place at time of great ferment. So in the present situation, in most cases, it would create illusions to present that such aid might be provided by confiscating the capitalists. This doesn’t mean that the demand for state aid is always wrong, but it does mean that such a demand, at the present time, shouldn’t be presented as inherently more militant than other demands.

You raised, in your remarks, the significant point that the Trotskyists have a certain fetish concerning the concept of “program”, and that this “encourages beliefs to the effect that the perfect program can solve everything”. I think that you have put your finger on an important issue, and you raised various ways in which this fetishism manifests itself. It seems to me that this fetishism may also encourage the Trotskyists to measure struggles simply according to their own ladder of demands. This appeared in Trotsky’s writings about the transitional program, where he sketched progress as moving from one demand to another, and lost sight of the conditions needed for moving from one demand to another. He substituted a ladder of demands for the idea of the working class increasing its organization and consciousness. Instead of emphasizing that the working class develops its ability to fight on a variety of different issues, and develops its organization through all these struggles, he encouraged people to see a transition from one demand to the next higher demand. He thus saw the class struggle developing through moving the masses from one demand to another, rather than the demands changing in accord to the progress of the class struggle.

The idea of a hierarchy of demands has a certain plausibility, because there are times of upsurge in which one demand after another gives way to another more militant demand. Aside from transitional demands in a revolutionary situation, there are increasingly radical demands in many situations in which a significant section of the workers are swept up in struggle. But programmatic fetishism distracts from examining the actual conditions of the struggle, and thus determining which slogans are most suitable, and instead encourages the idea that the slogans alone will pull the struggle further and further.

Thus, returning to your example of the struggle at a workplace against concessions and plant-closing, I think that one has to consider a number of concrete circumstances before considering the slogan. There is the issue of how far the other workers in the country are involved in struggle, or might be on the verge of going into struggle. There is the question of whether the country is near a revolutionary upsurge, or whether this is a period of protracted work in a nonrevolutionary situation, or even in a situation of stagnation. There is the question of what organization already exists in the working class, and its relation to this situation. These considerations help determine the objective conditions for this struggle, and thus the possibilities for this struggle. They provide the basis for searching for slogans which might provide correct orientation to the struggle..

## **Bourgeois-democratic and socialist demands**

There is another aspect to the question of the distinction between the minimum and maximum program which is of some importance. Both the extract from the CI Program which I have cited above, and your remarks, distinguished between the maximum program of the socialist revolution and the day-to-day struggles. But strictly speaking, there is yet another possibility. Not just the day-to-day struggles, but the democratic revolution is part of the minimum program. This can be seen in, for example, the pre-1917 program of the Russian communists. As this revolution would not, in itself, go beyond capitalism, it was part of the minimum program. Under certain circumstances, a democratic revolution might prepare the way for and develop into, or be immediately followed by, a socialist revolution, but in itself it has a different social character.

Trotsky tended to present this distinction between the social and bourgeois-democratic revolution as a matter of the past, obsolete in the age of imperialism. But in fact, it is impossible to analyze the experience of the revolutionary movements of the 20th century without coming up against this distinction.

Moreover, this casts transitional demands in another light. Transitional demands aren’t simply demands intermediate between the day-to-day struggles and socialism. They are demands that facilitate the dissolving away, and direct assault on, the ruling class and its state apparatus. But such a revolutionary situation exists in a democratic revolution as well as a socialist one. Indeed, it may sometimes be hard to tell the difference between a democratic and a socialist revolution. A democratic revolution, if it is also a profound social revolution brought about by mass initiative, may at its height dispossess much of the old big bourgeoisie, carry out social measures in support of the working masses, and see a spectacular level of activity from the lower masses. It may be hard to tell the difference between simply uprooting the old bourgeoisie and proceeding on the path of uprooting capitalism as a whole. At such a time, if the communists are to maintain their political independence and stay distinct of even the most extreme bourgeois-democracy (which may manifest itself as radical petty-bourgeois democracy), if they are to be able to judge the likely course of the revolution, if they are to have the chance of helping the proletariat maintain its political independence and its own socialist organization, they need an understanding of the Marxist view of the different types of revolution.

Moreover, the distinction between bourgeois-democratic and socialist movements generally don’t appear today in a straightforward way. Currently, perhaps the most common situation is where there is no longer any basis for a radical bourgeois-democratic revolution, in that the country in question has become mainly bourgeois, but socialist revolution remains a thing of the future.

Back in the days of the Marxist-Leninist Party, we tried to analyze the revolutionary program for a number of countries. In the particular countries we looked at, we often found that bourgeois development had proceeded far enough that there was no longer the basis for a democratic revolution overthrowing a pre-capitalist class, and in that sense, the country faced socialist revolution. But we also started to worry about situations where, even if a political revolution took place and the masses were in

the street, it was unlikely that they could carry out a socialist revolution at this time. If I recall properly, I don't think that this question was posed very clearly, and it wasn't answered, but it began to bother some comrades.

Later, after the dissolution of the MLP, in the early days of the Communist Voice Organization, we were involved in a controversy with the *Chicago Workers' Voice* group over the assessment of the Zapatistas and of the struggle in Mexico. The one-party monopoly of PRI (the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution) was on the verge of breaking up. There was the possibility of an explosive situation. The peasants in Chiapas rose up; PRI's neo-liberal reforms were undermining the workers' conditions and causing strains in PRI's domination of the unions; PRI showed signs of breaking up, and some top PRI leaders were being assassinated by other ones; etc. There was an increase, to varying extents, in the political activity of all classes. The *CWV* and some left forces in Mexico, such as the journal *El Machete*, gave a socialist coloring to the movement. We argued that, given the conditions of the time, the breakup of PRI's domination would take place via a liberalization or democratization, not a socialist revolution. We also held that while there should be firm support for the peasant movement, it was not a socialist movement. We held that only recognizing the bourgeois-democratic social character of the overall movement would allow Mexican activists, while taking part in the ongoing democratic struggle, to also take up specifically socialist tasks, such as ensuring the political independence of the working class.

We did not hold that Mexico faced a two-stage revolution — it was simply that the working masses were too disorganized and the economic situation too undeveloped to provide the conditions for an immediate socialist revolution. The working class was faced with developing an independent class movement, and thus preparing the ground for an eventual socialist revolution. But this preparation was going to take place, in part, through working class participation in various movements of a bourgeois-democratic character, such as the struggle to break-up PRI's one-party state.

As it turned out, the liberalization in Mexico has proceeded by the slowest, the most conservative, and the most miserable path. The Mexican bourgeoisie has managed to prevent any radical changes. The presidency of Mexico didn't even pass to the liberal-bourgeois PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution), but to Vicente Fox of the conservative PAN (Party of National Action). I don't think that this meant that it was wrong to struggle for a more thorough change in Mexico: there were certain conditions for such a change, and a more radical change would have immensely benefited the class organization of the workers. But even if a radical change had occurred, the overall movement would not have been of a socialist character. Unfortunately, our call remained barren, in that few if any activists took up the struggle for proletarian independence that we called for. But I think that our call was a step towards working out the correct tactics for such a situation.

The reason Mexico faced democratization or liberalization, rather than socialist revolution, was not that the opportunists were unwilling to talk about socialism. On the contrary, some opportunists, such as the petty-bourgeois nationalists and Castroists around the journal *El Machete*, advocated an immediate socialist revolution. But to present the ongoing

movement as having a reasonable chance to carry out such a socialist revolution, they had to paint non-socialist and petty-bourgeois forces, such as the Zapatistas, in socialist colors. Their stand amounted to advocating that left-wing activists should simply be the most militant shock troops for the liberalization, rather than showing the activists the class contradictions within the ongoing movement. But they did this in the name of socialism.

I think that communists are faced with dealing with similar situations in many countries. Analyzing such situations requires dealing with the distinction between movements of different social character.

## Why Trotsky developed his Transitional Program

In your remarks, you raise the issue of why Trotsky developed his transitional program. You raise that Trotsky wasn't mainly aiming to oppose the minimum program, but the maximum program.

From the theoretical point of view, whatever Trotsky's motivation, the main issue is that he negates the division between the minimum and maximum program.

From the point of view of motivation, I think — I'm not sure, as I haven't yet re-examined enough of the relevant writings and history — that perhaps you're right about his immediate motivation. While he argued directly against the minimum program as obsolete, this is in line with what he had been arguing for a long time. So what's new about his Transitional Program is that the transitional demands are supposed to replace the direct demand for revolution.

The Transitional Program was written in 1938, and he was faced with the problem of adapting his rhetoric to the problems posed by the fight against fascism. His own predictions about the fight against fascism in France in the mid-1930s, although still regarded as brilliant by Trotskyists, had in fact proven wrong. For example, in November 1934 he wrote that "If the revolutionary proletariat does not take power, Fascism will inevitably take it!", and "it is not a question of years but of months." (*Whither France?*, Sec. 14, Nov. 1934, see the pamphlet by Merit Publishers with the overall title *Whither France?*, pp. 46, 47). This didn't happen. He then repeated such predictions in June 1936, writing that "events can unfold only either toward revolution or toward Fascism" while pretending that only some immature followers of his had made such predictions in 1934: "Following February 6, 1934, certain impatient comrades were of the opinion that the *denouement* would take place 'tomorrow,' and that on this account it was necessary immediately to perform some sort of miracle. Such a 'policy' could produce nothing but adventures and zigzags that have retarded in the extreme the growth of the revolutionary party." ("The Decisive Stage", June 5, 1936, in the pamphlet *Whither France?*, both quotations are on p. 146) But once again, Trotsky's prediction was wrong.

Trotsky needed a way to avoid the fiasco of declaring that the situation was immediately revolutionary, and there was presumably a limit to how many times he could hypocritically blame these predictions on errant followers. Moreover, even during the 1934-36 period, he had instituted the "French turn",

in which he demanded that Trotskyist groups join the social-democratic parties. This would probably also require an adjustment of rhetoric. The “Transitional Program” may well have been designed to accommodate these changes. The immediate appeal for the maximum program was to be replaced, as you say, by the transitional demands. At the same time, he did not abandon his theoretical crusade against the minimum program either. I presume that different Trotskyist trends and individuals interpret the “Transitional Program” in different ways. If the “Transitional Program” was designed to accommodate a certain rhetorical shift to the right, it was also the case that Trotsky’s left-sounding rhetoric could only be maintained if it were somewhat adjusted.

You raise that this shows that “Trotskyism must be, first of all, a rightist deviation, not a ‘leftist’ one.” Actually, what it shows is that Trotskyism leads to many rightist political results. But for that matter, so does “left communism”. So does anarchism. Sooner or later, if they take part in mass political life, the left-phrasemongering trends always reveal their rightist side or essence. Trotskyism is no different from the others in this. At the same time, Trotsky’s Transitional Program maintained a left-phrasemongering style as well as basing itself on some key views reminiscent of “left communism”. This left-phrasemongering wasn’t the new feature of the Transitional Program, but it was part of its basic structure and theoretical underpinning.

You are right to point to the many rightist aspects of the Transitional Program and to many rightist consequences of it in Trotskyist practice. It would be a mistake to regard Trotskyism simply as a leftist deviation, and no doubt much of time we are faced with fighting rightist stands of Trotskyism. But I think it is a mistake to regard Trotskyism as primarily rightism. I don’t think this corresponds to its overall theoretical structure, nor does it deal with its appeal to certain activists. In part one of my outline of Trotskyism, I tried to point to both its rightist and leftist sides. Indeed, when certain Trotskyist trends sneer at ordinary demands as reformist in favor of putting forward a panacea of “workers’ militias”, and they may base this on Trotsky’s “Transitional Program”, can we present this as rightism? And even when they give “military but not political support” to tyrants and oppressors, do they not present this in flaming anti-imperialist colors? From your and our point of view, the disgusting rightist treachery of their stand is very clear. And we should strive to make this clear to others. But does Trotskyism not clothe itself in leftist phrases and theories, a supposed leftism which still has credibility as such among many activists?

## — THE TRANSITIONAL ECONOMY —

I was interested that your remarks refer to the article by the Marxist-Leninist party on weak socialism in the *Workers’ Advocate Supplement* of January 15, 1989 (“On the Party-Wide Study of the Marxist-Leninist Concept of Socialism: Speech at the Third Congress of the MLP, Fall 1988”). This article opposed the view that state ownership on industry plus collectivization of agriculture suffices to achieve socialism. It was an important step in the evolution of the MLP’s views on both Soviet history and on socialism, and I think it still is useful.

But subsequent theoretical work concerning the transitional economy provides a much clearer picture of the transitional period between the socialist revolution and the achievement of Marxist socialism than does the concept of “weak socialism”.

Our theoretical views have evolved since 1989. There is a certain shift between the views presented in the article on “weak socialism” and those in my articles in *Communist Voice* on Preobrazhensky and on the issue of “state-capitalism under workers rule”. The later theoretical work brings out more clearly the nature of the transitional period. Although there is not yet full agreement in the Communist Voice Organization on the nature of this period, I think that we are moving towards a more concrete way of discussing the transitional economy than has previously existed. I think this new way is superior to such formulations as “weak socialism” and “state capitalism under workers rule”. It provides a clearer framework to the tasks of revolutionary transformation after the socialist revolution, and it makes it easier to distinguish a society moving towards socialism from revisionist state-capitalism.

You write, in criticism of Trotsky, that for him, “the workers’ state is put somehow in a limbo—neither capitalism, nor even ‘weak socialism’—the transitional stage gets its own life, becomes a social formation in its own right: the transitional society.” In my view, though, it is a mistake to think that Trotsky had a serious analysis of the transitional society; he did not seriously study it as a formation in its own right, and he confused Stalinist state-capitalism with a transitional society. The theoretical existence of a revolutionary transitional formation was, at most, granted grudgingly: Trotsky tended to think that there wouldn’t need to be much of a transition period if only Russia had received aid from Western Europe, if only revolution wasn’t restricted to a single country, if only, if only, if only. At most, it was regarded as a simple mixture of capitalism and socialism as, for example, in Preobrazhensky’s analysis of the “commodity-socialist economy”, which is simply a patchwork of capitalist and supposedly-socialist sectors. Thus Trotsky repeatedly identify the state sector with socialism, rather than seeing what the overall nature of a transitional society would be.

I think that the transitional society really should be taken as a social formation in its own right. To do this, one would have to study its fundamental features and contradictions, which Trotsky never does. As you point out, Trotsky never got beyond regarding the expropriation of the former bourgeoisie and the development of the state sector as a workers’ state. This means that his analysis of the supposed workers’ state left out the essential feature of the transitional society — the process of increasing control by the working class of the economy, and of the entire society. He confused Stalinist state-capitalism with a transitional society (his definition in Section IX.3 of *The Revolution Betrayed* being that it is “a contradictory society halfway between capitalism and socialism” with revolutionary “property relations” but bourgeois “norms of distribution”).

You are worried that to take the transitional society as a formation in its own right would lead, among other things, to “the idea of his [Trotsky’s] successors: that the existence of the ‘degenerated’ and ‘deformed’ workers’ states’ could continue on and on so long as there were no overturns of the system of state ownership.” I think that, on the contrary, a good analysis of the features of the transitional society would show the hollowness of

the Trotskyist identification of Stalinist state capitalism with workers' states. It's the Trotsky's idea of the state sector as essentially socialist in itself, an idea which goes against considering the transitional society as a formation in its own right, that has been maintained by most of his successors.

You implicitly regard that the article on "weak socialism" doesn't really develop the idea of the transitional society as a formation in its own right. I think you are right about that. That article does mention the word "transitional", but its basic idea is that of a period, "weak socialism", which has some socialist features and some capitalist features. It is concerned in large part with comparing the system of distribution (wages) to those under capitalism and socialism, rather than in seeking the fundamental economic structure of this period, the structure which will determine, among other things, the basic framework of the system of distribution. And it implicitly mixes together the issue of the transitional period, which is an inevitable feature of revolution, with that of the degeneration of the Soviet revolution.

By way of contrast, a series of articles in *Communist Voice* regard the transitional economy as something distinct, whose fundamental basis and whose laws of evolution have to be examined in their own right. The economy of this period, which is created sometime after the socialist revolution and lasts until the achievement of Marxist socialism (the elimination of commodity production, of classes, etc.), is not simply a mixture of carry-overs from capitalism that get weaker as capitalism recedes, and new features that grow stronger as socialism gets nearer. Instead it also has its own distinct features, some of which are different from those that exist under either ordinary capitalism or under Marxist socialism. For example, in part one of my article on Preobrazhensky, in considering his view of the "commodity-socialist economy", I objected to the views that the transitional economy simply combines capitalist features that are decaying and socialist features that are growing stronger and that the transitional economy differs from socialism mainly through the quantitative strengthening of the socialist features. For example, I pointed out that "the characteristic features of the transitional economy that pave the way for socialism won't themselves exist, or will have started to wither away, in what Marxism considers a socialist society", because their purpose was to fight capitalist conditions that no longer exist. (See the section "The commodity-socialist economy" in "Preobrazhensky — ideologist of state capitalism (Part 1)" in *Communist Voice* #17, April 20, 1998.)

The transitional economy still has commodity production, money, and so forth. In this respect, it is still capitalism. If one were to reason that an economy is either capitalism or socialism, then the transitional economy would have to be described as capitalism, indeed, as state capitalism. And that was how I briefly reasoned in an article in the *Workers' Advocate Supplement* where, in passing, I supported the formulation of "state capitalism under workers rule". ("Some notes on theory (2)" in the *WAS*, July 1992, under the subhead "Where to look".) But soon afterwards, I decided that such reasoning was wrong, although I didn't have the opportunity to publicly explain why until the article "The question of 'state capitalism under workers' rule'" (*Communist Voice*, #14, August 10, 1997)

It is true that the transitional economy has a capitalist economic frame, but it also has an increasing workers' control

that is incompatible with any stable capitalism. Thus the transitional economy is, in some sense, economically unstable. Its capitalist frame clashes with workers' control of the economy and the politics. It is only under particular conditions, ushered in by the socialist revolution, that this economic formation can exist. It must, generally speaking, keep moving forward or degenerate backward. Perhaps this is characteristic of transitional situations in general, which are temporary (they might last many decades, but this is still — historically speaking — temporary), special, and in some sense unstable. This instability gives a certain credence to the description of the transitional economy as "weak socialism", in the sense that its economic structure won't spontaneously evolve towards socialism, but requires the conscious development of workers' control, the proletarian dictatorship, etc. It is perhaps "weak socialism" in the sense that one might say that, if it weren't for the existence of a conscious revolutionary movement, the workers' control and other revolutionary features would succumb to the capitalist framework. But in another sense, "weak socialism" is a misleading term, just as it would be misleading to describe a fetus as a "weak adult", a pupa in a cocoon as a "weak butterfly", an explosion as a "weak equilibrium", or revolution as a period of weak stability. For that matter, the transitional society is not necessarily weak in the ordinary sense of the word. This is the society that is in revolutionary transformation, the society that is building on the political overthrow of the traditional capitalist class by carrying out the economic transformations that will lead first to the removal of the economic functions of the previous capitalists and managers, and then to the complete elimination of the foundations of capitalism as a system.

The particular contradiction at the base of this system is distinct from that of either ordinary capitalism or socialism. It is the clash between this system's capitalist frame and the increasing workers' control. This results in the specific features of this period, such as the proletarian dictatorship, the role of the workers party, and the new nature of the class struggle, which the workers can now wage from both above and below. It differs from both ordinary capitalism, where the bourgeoisie controls the economy, and Marxist socialism, where they aren't classes any more. It is not simply a mixture of these two, but something distinct, transitory, exceptional — and profoundly important. And of course the transitional economy is different from revisionist state-capitalism, which is not a transitional economy at all but the rule of a new bourgeoisie over the working class.

Let me give one example of the how the difference between the standpoint of "weak socialism" and that of the transitional economy as a distinct stage helps in opposing revisionist state-capitalism. The *WAS* article on "weak socialism" devoted, as mentioned, a good deal of attention to the issue of distribution. It recognized that full socialist principles can't be applied right away, but it didn't bring out the underlying factors that determine what type of distribution will take place. Probably the idea one would get is that wage inequality is simply a capitalist carry-over, an idea which is correct as far as it goes, and that the progress to socialism can be directly measured by the system of wages, an idea which is misleading.

In practice, changes in system of wages are not, in themselves, the measure of how close one is to full socialism. For example, the Castroist government has changed from one form

of wages to another over the years. Throughout all these changes, the gap between the ruling, privileged bureaucracy and the masses has always remained, and the bureaucracy developed into a new bourgeoisie. But the Cuban regime would, for this or that period of time, claim to be coming closer to communist principles regarding distribution among the working masses, or even to be using “voluntary labor”, and it periodically restricted private markets. Even though many of these changes involved a good deal of deception, they did affect distribution among the working masses. Yet these changes, which were implemented by decree and detached from the actual control of the workers over production, had nothing to do with getting closer to socialism. Instead, as the new bureaucratic class consolidated in Cuba, the economy moved further and further away from socialism, indeed further and further away from being a transitional economy, and became a full-fledged state-capitalist economy. A series of articles in *Communist Voice* trace this evolution.

What is crucial to measuring the approach to socialism is the actual control of the workers over production, and over the economics and politics of the society as a whole. Thus the continual development of the Cuban bureaucracy and the passive position of the Cuban workers are far more important criteria than the precise norms of distribution. Thus a truly revolutionary society might be moving closer to socialism even if occasionally the system of distribution seemed to go backward. For example, if more and more of the laboring population becomes workers, *and if these workers become active participants in directing the economy and society*, this moves the society a few steps closer to socialism. It does this even if the system of distribution moves somewhat backward in order, say, to accommodate a large influx of the petty-bourgeoisie into the working class. The continued existence of wage inequality shows the strength of capitalist carry-overs, and is one illustration of the gulf that still separates the transitional economy from socialism. But, assuming the wage system stays within certain limits, the extent of that gulf is not directly measured by the system of wages.

The standpoint of the transitional economy focuses attention on the key issues dividing the transitional economy from either capitalism or revisionist state-capitalism, such as whether the working class is actually exercising control. It provides a basis for understanding the features of a revolutionary economy from a scientific, class point of view, and not simply as an accidental jumble of capitalist carry-overs and socialist decrees. I think it thus helps distinguish between revisionist economies and revolutionary ones.

## — THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY AND TACTICS —

In your remarks, you say “once it had been established (already in the 1890's) that Russia was a capitalist country (even if with strong feudal and other vestiges), the overall relations of strength within that framework became decisive in determining the stages of the revolution struggle.” I think that this formulation still underestimates the continuing importance of the economic

factor. It reduces the economic factors to simply a decision on whether a country has entered in force upon capitalist development. After that, it counterposes the economic factors to dealing with the class struggle, rather than seeing that careful analysis of the economic factors remains vital to understanding and giving guidance to the class struggle.

I shall in a moment give a number of examples of the continuing importance to the Russian revolution, after the 1890s, of judging the economic factors. But first I will want to deal with some general considerations which stand behind your formulation. You are influenced in denigrating the need to analyze the economic base by the desire to contradict the argument of reformists that there couldn't be socialist revolution in Russia because the productive forces weren't sufficiently developed. You therefore write: “we think that the essence of Lenin's view...is that he regarded class struggle as the prime motor of history, instead of reducing it to the role of a midwife for the productive forces. . . .” You also write that Stalin saw the productive forces “as the prime motor of history (rather than class struggle); . . . he in *On dialectical and historical materialism*’ relegated class struggle to being merely a midwife as the development of productive forces have grown beyond the limits of the relations of production.”

But the relationship of the political superstructure, and of class struggle itself, to the economic base is a fundamental point of Marxism. Without this point, historical materialism vanishes. No doubt, reformists have given wrong assessments of what is possible in any particular economic situation. No doubt they have also denigrated the class struggle, and some may replace the tasks of revolutionary politics with simply facilitating industrial advance in the manner that any bourgeois might. But to their wrong assessment one must counterpose a correct assessment of the economic base, and of the revolutionary politics that it gives rise to, rather than cast aside materialist assessment of the economic factors. Lenin talked about the reformist “subserviency to the bourgeoisie in the guise of ‘economic analysis’” (this is a chapter heading in *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*), but he continued to uphold the need for materialist analysis of the economic base. Reformists may talk about the economic base in order to promote passivity and surrender, but Marxism analyzes this base in order to understand how to change the world.

The idea that the class struggle and profound revolutions serve as midwife to the development of the productive forces first arose, not from the Mensheviks or the reformist social-democrats, but from Marx. He wrote, in a passage that has been cited—not just by Stalin in *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*—by Plekhanov and Lenin as one of the foundations of materialism, that

“In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces.

“The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. . . . At a



certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. . . . In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.” (from the Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*)

In his article *Karl Marx: A brief biographical sketch with an exposition of Marxism*, Lenin quotes this passage more fully in the section “The Materialist Conception of History”. The next section of this article is “The Class Struggle”. In it Lenin stresses that Marxism is “the theory of the class struggle”, and he cites Marx’s well-known dictum from the *Communist Manifesto* that “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”. He doesn’t see any contradiction between the view that an epoch of social revolution arises when that the productive forces have outgrown the limits of the relations of production, and championing the class struggle.

Similarly, these views on the economic base and its relationship to the class struggle are developed at length by Plekhanov in Chapter 5 of his book *The Development of the Monist View on History*. He too cites and explains Marx’s view on the development of the productive forces, and he too regards it as a firm basis for the theory of class struggle and revolution.

You write that Trotsky “advocated the theory of productive forces as the prime motor of history (rather than class struggle)”. Actually, Trotsky cast aside as obsolete much of this basic Marxist theorizing that required one to pay attention to the economic base. Thus he believed that the division between the minimum and maximum program may have been acceptable in the past, but it was no longer in his day and age. Similarly for the Marxist theory with regard to different types of revolution (e.g., bourgeois-democratic and socialist). Similarly for the particular class roles of the peasantry and petty-bourgeoisie. The world was supposed to have reached a certain stage of economic development as a whole, and he tended to denigrate the need for further economic analysis. He was fond of global considerations that, he believed, sufficed for determining the general strategy of revolution. This may be obscured somewhat by the fact that he had to take account of local peculiarities in his practical activity, but it manifested itself in his overall theorizing, from the theory of “socialism in one country”, to his transitional program, to his view that the peasantry could simply be regarded as on the side of either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, and so forth.

In your remarks, you point to Russia reaching a certain stage of capitalist development by the 1890s. From then on, you say, the class struggle (“the overall relations of strength within that [economic] framework”) is decisive. Actually, the class struggle

was the mainspring of Russian politics even previously, while the evolution of the economic base remained important for determining “the overall relations of strength”. Let me give a few examples.

One of the key issues of the Russian revolution was the struggle in countryside. This was important in order for the Russian proletariat to have an ally, and the nature of the agrarian struggle also had a lot to do with the social character of the Russian revolution. But the material conditions in the countryside continued to evolve after the 1890s, and this evolution had to be taken account of. Thus, in discussing whether there was a basis for a democratic revolution in Russia, Lenin even took account of such issues as the progress of the Stolypin reforms, by which tsarism sought to dissolve the communal system. He believed that it was possible that the Stolypin reforms might change the nature of the economic base in the countryside, and if so, this would eliminate the basis for a democratic revolution.

Thus Lenin wrote in 1908 that:

“To proceed. What if, in spite of the struggle of the masses, Stolypin’s policy holds good long enough for the ‘Prussian’ way [of the bourgeois development of the Russian countryside] to succeed? Then the agrarian system in Russia will become completely bourgeois, the big peasants will grab nearly all the allotment land, agriculture will become capitalist, and no ‘solution’ of the agrarian question under *capitalism*—whether radical or non-radical—will be possible any more. Then Marxists who are honest will themselves will straightforwardly and openly throw all ‘agrarian programmes’ on the scrap-heap altogether, and will say to the masses: ‘The workers have done all they could to give Russia not a Junker but an American capitalism. The workers call you now to join in the social revolution of the proletariat, for *after* the ‘solution’ of the agrarian question in the Stolypin spirit *there can be no other* revolution capable of making a serious change in the economic conditions of life of the peasant masses.’

“That is how the question of the relationship between a bourgeois and a socialist revolution in Russia stands today . . .” (*On the Beaten Track!*, April 16(29), 1908, in *Collected Works*, vol. 15, p. 45, emphasis as in the original)

In the above statement, Lenin did refer to the relation of forces between the peasantry and tsarism. This relationship would be important in determining whether the Stolypin reforms would continue. But the main point of the above passage is that there is an issue of assessing what is happening to the economic base. And this assessment is decisive for determining revolutionary strategy. It was not sufficient to simply note that capitalism was in general developing throughout Russia, and had been doing so for several decades.

Now, perhaps it will be said that after the February revolution in 1917, Lenin turned to the task of socialist revolution, despite the fact that the bourgeois transformation of agriculture hadn’t been finished. So, it might be asked, what happened to the issue

of the economic base? But Lenin wrote:

“Before the February-March revolution of 1917, state power in Russia was in the hands of one old class, namely, the feudal landed nobility, headed by Nicholas Romanov.

“After the revolution, the power is in the hands of a *different* class, a new class, namely, the *bourgeoisie*.” (*Letters on tactics*, April 1917, in *Collected Works*, vol. 24, p. 44, emphasis as in the original)

This is an objective change in class relations. I suppose it might be said that this is simply a consideration of changes in relations of strength of various forces, namely, that the bourgeoisie had achieved power in the country. But it is also a basic change in the underlying situation upon which the alignment of forces takes place. And so it raised the question of re-examining the character of revolutionary movement.

Still, it might be insisted, the rise to power of the bourgeoisie didn’t solve the question of landlordism in the countryside. True, but this had consequences for the class character of the revolution. Lenin held that, while the overall revolution was socialist, it was not, at first, such in the countryside. He maintained, in October-November 1918, that

“All who are familiar with the situation and have been in the rural districts, declare that it is only now, in the summer and autumn of 1918, that the rural districts themselves are passing through the ‘October’ (i.e., proletarian) revolution. A turn is coming. The wave of kulak revolts is giving way to a rise of the poor, to the growth of the ‘Committees of Poor Peasants.’ . . . at the very time that this imbecile [Kautsky] regarded the secession of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries as a ‘narrowing’ . . . of the circle of those who support the Bolsheviks—at that very time the *real* circle of supporters of Bolshevism was *expanding enormously*, because scores and scores of millions of the village poor were freeing themselves from the tutelage and influence of the kulaks and village bourgeoisie and were awakening to *independent* political life.

.....

“A year after the proletarian revolution in the capitals, and under its influence and with its assistance, the proletarian revolution began in the remote rural districts, . . .

“Having completed the bourgeois-democratic revolution in conjunction with the peasantry as a whole, the Russian proletariat passed on definitely to the socialist revolution when it succeeded in splitting the rural population, in winning over the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians, and in uniting them against the kulaks and the bourgeoisie, including the peasant bourgeoisie.” (*The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, pamphlet edition, pp. 101-3, in the chapter “Subserviency to the bourgeoisie in the guise of

‘economic analysis’, emphasis as in the original)

Thus, the fact that the peasants may be an ally of the socialist insurrection, doesn’t allow one to disregard the particular social conditions in the countryside. The nature of the peasant struggle remains important, and it explains a lot about what steps the revolution will have to take. The fact that the peasants followed the proletariat in October 1917 in overthrowing the Provisional government did not mean that the peasants would follow the proletariat into socialism. This required another struggle. And the need for this struggle is explained by the economic base in the countryside.

Unfortunately, the Poor Peasants Committees didn’t live up to Lenin’s expectations, and began to decline. Thus, while the Bolshevik regime maintained itself, the socialist revolution in the countryside was delayed. In the Civil War, the peasants supported the Bolsheviks mainly in order to keep the achievements of the revolution against the landlords. So, subsequently, the question remained of how to spread socialism into the countryside. This would plague the Russian revolution right through to the time at which it died and degenerated into Stalinist state-capitalism.

## — ON SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY —

You write that “the theory of ‘socialism in one country’ is not the essence of modern revisionism, but the other way around: it is one of the fruits. Modern revisionism can and does exist even without that theory.” This moves us closer together, as it poses this question more as an issue in itself, rather than a general term for revisionism. However, perhaps you haven’t yet recognized the full extent of the empty, rhetorical nature of the Trotskyist theorizing on socialism in one country. Such theorizing doesn’t deal with determining the necessary economic and social conditions for socialist revolution in any country, nor with determining the social character of the revolutionary movement in various country. It replaces concrete attention to the problems which the revolution faces in any country with general formulae that are supposed to apply to every country in the world.

### Can there be socialist revolution in one country?

The most direct meaning of a controversy over socialism in one country would be whether there can be a revolution in a single country, or whether the revolution must take place simultaneously in some or most of the major countries. For example, when on the eve of the European-wide revolutionary wave of 1848 Engels discussed the question of whether there can be a proletarian revolution in a single country, he said that the communist revolution must take place “at least simultaneously in England, America, France, and Germany”. (*Principles of Communism*, Question 19). The question would arise, therefore, of whether there can be a profound revolution in a single country today (or, historically, in the 20th century), and whether that could be a socialist revolution.

Today this involves, among other things, two questions. One is whether either the neighboring countries, or the main guardians of the imperialist world order, would smother a particular

revolution. The other is the question of the social character of the revolution in particular countries at particular times, for example, would it be bourgeois-democratic or socialist. These questions require assessing the particular situation of each country. This involves a careful examination of the local economic base. It also involves assessing what type of pressure this country can expect from others, as well as what type of support it can expect from revolutionary classes in other countries. It also involves the size of the country, since clearly there is a vast difference between mini-countries and countries which are almost continents in themselves, such as China, the US, the Soviet Union yesterday (and perhaps still Russia today), and India, while there is also a whole range of countries of intermediate size.

It is quite possible, for example, that the proletariat in some countries might really regard socialist revolution in their country as quixotic without either *immediate* close coordination with a similar revolution in its neighbors, or some other favorable world factor that paralyze neighboring reactionary governments and world imperialism from strangling the revolution economically or by direct intervention. Therefore the revolutionary party of such a country might seek to put off any immediate uprising, if at all possible, until its neighbors were also ready for revolution. Such a party might make the greatest sacrifices for the sake of ensuring a common movement of several countries. The issue of revolution in one country would, for such a party, not an issue of what vision inspires party leaders, but a direct question of revolution strategy and timing.

This, however, is not what the Trotskyist theory is concerned with. Instead it asserts that it is impossible to achieve socialism in any single country, whatever its size or circumstance. However, this impossibility isn't supposed to stop revolutionaries of any country from organizing a socialist revolution in one country, or even to seriously affect the timing of such a revolution. Moreover Trotskyism asserts that, to determine the character of the revolution, it isn't necessarily to look closely at the economic base of any particular country. It is automatically socialist revolution, whatever the particular conditions in the country, because the Trotskyism believes that the world in general reached a sufficient level of development at least a century ago. All this leads the Trotskyists to the view that the socialist revolution will establish a workers' rule or proletarian regime, which will call itself "socialism" but will not be socialism in one country, but might be a workers' regime in a single country.

All this makes theorizing about the possibilities of revolution into an empty game. It rules out concrete considerations of either the nature or timing of revolution as supposedly Menshevik or social-democratic opportunism, and substitutes empty rhetoric. It teaches activists to engage in empty phrasemongering and to disdain serious consideration of the problems of revolution in individual countries or groups of countries. It sounds very leftist, but it's a "leftism" which is unable to connect with the practical problems of the revolutionary movement.

## Can Marxist socialism be achieved in a single country?

I think that your conception is while socialist revolution can take place in certain individual countries, they will not, so long as they remain the only revolutionary country, be able to achieve "socialism proper" — that is, communism. You write that "socialism proper" [is] impossible in one country alone — it must require such a big-scale development of the productive forces that only the joint efforts of the proletariat in at least several of the advanced countries can achieve it." Your conception appears to be that the revolution can achieve a good deal of social transformation, but it won't be able to reach the stage of a classless society without commodity production until "at least several of the advanced countries" have united in socialist revolution.

Now, strictly speaking, the issue wouldn't be whether one or several countries are involved, but how large an area of the world is involved. The Soviet Union, for example, encompassed the area of what are now a dozen or so countries. There are several countries which can probably boast of producing more industrial goods today than the entire world produced back in 1917, and certainly far more than dozens and dozens of other countries produce today. Presumably the practical issue would be whether most of the world has to join together before there could be Marxist socialism, or whether a fraction of the world would suffice. For example, would Europe alone be sufficient for this? Or North America?

But how likely is it that this issue would be a major dividing line among the communists activists of a country that carried out a socialist revolution? The issue facing the revolutionary movement is when there can be socialist revolution, and what economic steps the revolution could and should take. A revolution can't be regarded as socialist simply because of the intentions of some leaders or ideologists or even of an entire ruling party. It must actually carry out definite economic steps that construct a new economy and provide an increasing workers' control. It is important, therefore, to look into what the transitional economy would be. But how far the revolution goes towards socialism proper will be determined by history. So long as revolutionaries were agreed on the steps towards socialism, and so long as the transitional economy provided an alternative to the old capitalist system, time itself would show when socialism proper would be achieved. The revolutionary activists might have different expectations about how fast this process would take place, but such differences would seem secondary ones that shouldn't interfere with revolutionary unity.

Indeed, it is possible, and perhaps even likely, that there won't be any new socialist revolutions — except some short-lived attempts that may, however, have a tremendous influence on the thinking of working people — until a revolutionary ferment has spread throughout much of the world. The socialist revolution that ushers in the transitional economy is likely to require either some giant country, or a number of intermediate and smaller ones. Thus by the time that any revolutionary country has been able to develop a transitional economy for any period of time, there will likely be a significant section of the world rising in revolution. So it's not clear whether there ever will be

an occasion to test whether a small section of the world can pass by itself from the revolutionary transitional economy to “socialism proper” (Marxist socialism, or communism). This is especially because the transitional economy is likely to last for a substantial period of time, even if the entire world rose in revolution simultaneously. I think this lengthy preparation is required by the profound nature of the economic changes which are needed for socialist transformation.

### **“Socialism in one country” and world revolution**

Trotsky presented “socialism in one country” and support for the world revolution as two polar opposites. Belief in the possibility of building a socialist society in a single country, even if a giant one like the Soviet Union, was supposed to lead to betraying the world revolution by subordinating the world movement to the interests of the revolutionary country. Belief in Trotsky’s formulations was supposed to ensure loyalty to the revolutionary cause in other countries and support for the correction proletarian policies. Unfortunately for this theory, Trotsky himself practiced subordination of the interests of the world revolution to Soviet interests or even more restricted interests.

Naturally, of course, the entire revolutionary proletariat of the world will support, and justly so, countries that have risen in socialist revolution. In this sense, there is no opposition in principle between support for world revolution or for particular revolutionary countries. But while, in the long-run, anything that advances the revolution in one country aids revolution elsewhere, in practice one is faced with balancing the needs of different sections of the world movement. For all his rhetoric against national narrow-mindedness, Trotsky didn’t do particularly well at this. Indeed, he often subordinated the interests of the world revolution to crass factional interests.

Take the dispute over revolutionary policy in China. Trotsky subordinated this matter to his factional maneuvering inside the Soviet leadership. According to the ardent Trotskyist historian Isaac Deutscher, from 1924 until March 1927, Trotsky raised his misgivings on China only sporadically and only to the Politbureau of the CPSU, not even to the Central Committee, and certainly not publicly. Deutscher thinks this is because he couldn’t find support for his position in the Party leadership. (*The Prophet Unarmed: 1921-1929*, pp. 321-4.)

It wasn’t until May 1927, after Chiang Kai-shek carried out his anti-communist massacres, that Trotsky began his campaign about China. This can be seen in the *Declaration of the Eighty-four*, which, among other things, laid stress on differences about Chinese policy. But this document protested against the idea that the Opposition demands a “break with the Kuomintang”, and said this is part of the “systematic distortion of the Opposition’s views”. (See the collection of Trotsky’s writings entitled *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1926-27)*, Pathfinder Press, p.226.) Trotsky, who wanted a break with the Kuomintang, signed this document anyway, and he did so without adding any qualification. This is despite the practice, in some of the past statements of the opposition, to append reservations by various signers. By hiding his view on what he took to be the basic error

of communist policy in China, Trotsky subordinated the interests of the Chinese revolution to a temporary political maneuver — unity with Radek and Zinoviev. (I will leave aside the content of Trotsky’s views on China for another time.)

The *Declaration* also stated that “A defeat in China could have direct repercussions on the future of the USSR. If the imperialists unite for a long enough period of time to ‘pacify’ China, they will then march against us, the USSR. The defeat of the Chinese revolution could bring war against the USSR much, much closer.” Thus it pointed to the dire consequences for the Soviet Union of setbacks in China, just as much of Trotsky’s earlier arguments on the importance of the German revolution pointed to the need for support for the Russian revolution. This may not be wrong in itself, however the *Declaration of the 84* overstated the issue and also omitted the other side of the question — the sacrifice that, in the event of a victorious Chinese revolution, the Russian revolutionaries would have to make to support the Chinese comrades. Thus the “Declaration” pointed to the national needs of the revolution in one country, so to speak. Trotsky may claim that consideration of the national needs of the Soviet Union required revolution elsewhere, while claiming that the Stalinists saw those national needs as requiring the abandonment of revolution, but Trotsky raised the national needs of the Russian revolution as insistently as anyone else. Stress on those national needs is supposed to follow from a belief in “socialism in one country”, and here we see it follows just as easily from adherence to Trotskyist “permanent revolution”.

This is not simply an unfortunate passage in a single document. To this day, the Trotskyists have often subordinated various interests of the world revolution to the defense of supposed workers’ states. The Spartacist League was notorious in the 1980s for its slogans that put forward that the struggle in Central America was the front lines for the defense of the Soviet Union, and such ideas were current among many other Trotskyist groups with respect to the war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and other events.

It is also true that Trotsky showed little interest in the dramatic events in Indonesia in the mid-20s. In both China and Indonesia, the communist parties had at first grown rapidly in size and influence, and then faced disastrous setbacks — in China, with the KMT’s turn against the communists, and in Indonesia, with premature insurrections for socialism. Both from the point of view of revolution in Asia and from that of testing communist policy, it would be important not to restrict one’s sight to China. But it would have been hard to present the Indonesian events as support for Trotskyist politics; it wouldn’t have served Trotsky’s factional interests to discuss Indonesia; nor could one imagine that the Indonesian revolution would provide much support for the Soviet Union.

From this and many other examples, it appears that Trotsky’s rhetoric against “socialism in one country” doesn’t have much to do with avoiding national narrowness. Indeed, the stand on “socialism in one country”, for or against, clarifies just about nothing about past disputes on revolutionary policy. One might connect one policy with another on the grounds that Stalin advocated “socialism in one country” and also advocated a certain policy on united fronts, anti-colonial revolutions, etc. (although precisely which policy Stalin advocated varied from time to time), and Trotsky opposed “socialism in one country”

and advocated some other policy. But it is much more difficult to find an inner connection between being for “socialism in one country” and this or that policy. Thus Trotskyist narrative often amounts to that so-and-so advocated this at one time, and then that at another, and attention is focused on the history of the fights rather than on the content of the issue.

This comes up even with respect to the mid-20s. You remark that, even though you now see the issue of “socialism in one country” as not the cause, but just one of the symptoms of revisionism, still Trotsky “was certainly right in his warnings that there was a connection between Stalin’s more and more narrow national perspective already in mid-1920s and his cynical maneuvering on the international scene.” But doesn’t this type of connection, promoted by Trotsky, influence one to search for the psychological motivations of different leaders, whereas in fact there were objective reasons for certain issues arising in the mid-1920s? The decline of the post-World War I revolutionary wave certainly centered attention on whether Soviet Russia could hold out on its own. It also helped focus the attention of

communists around the world on the issues of united front tactics, alliances, etc. Revolutionary experience was gained through painful experience and many wanderings, and unfortunately the Soviet revolution itself was lost to Stalinist state-capitalism. But our concern has to be with what lessons these events holds for communist theory. In contrast, Trotsky’s method of reducing the matter to the controversy over whether socialism proper could be achieved in one country was empty, as it actually explains nothing; was hypocritical, as noted above; and obscured the fact that the immediate issue in the Soviet Union was not the possibilities for obtaining socialism proper, but for the creation and maintenance of the transitional society.

There are other important issues raised by your remarks, but my reply has been delayed far too long and has grown too lengthy. So I will these to another time. I look forward to the continuation of our discussion.

Communist regards,  
Joseph Green ☐



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