

The

November-December 2009

No. 30

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# Internationalist



## Imperialist Chief Obama: Deeper Into the Quagmire



**Break with the Democrats – For Workers Strikes Against the War!**

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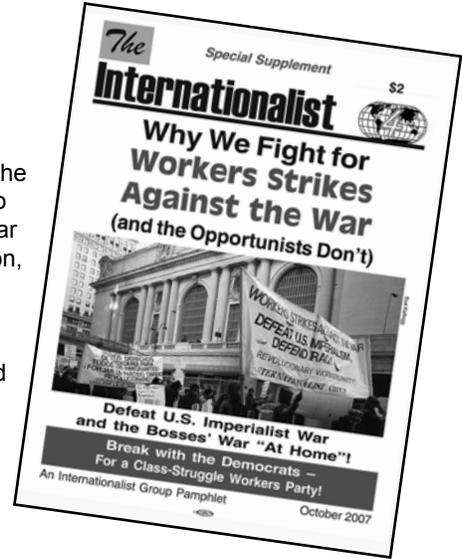
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## The Internationalist



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## Appeals to Obama's Top Cop Eric Holder Spread Deadly Illusions

# Mumia's Life Is On the Line: Mobilize Labor/Black Power to Free Him Now!



Internationalist photo

**Internationalist Group at Harlem rally for Mumia Abu-Jamal, 8 May 2009.**

The threat to Mumia Abu-Jamal's life is increasingly ominous. The former Black Panther Party spokesman, author and world-renowned radio journalist has been held on Pennsylvania's death row since 1982 for a crime he did not commit. After federal district court judge William Yohn in 2001 set aside the death sentence pending a new sentencing hearing, many felt the danger of Mumia's execution was past. Not so. In a November 11 legal update, his lead attorney, Robert Bryan, wrote: "There is an escalated effort by the authorities to see him die at the hands of the executioner. This is the most dangerous time for Mumia since his 1981 arrest." While the U.S. Supreme Court has turned down Jamal's two appeals, it has yet to decide whether to hear the prosecution's appeal seeking to overturn Judge Yohn's order. If it were to rule in favor of the prosecution, this would open the way for Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell to issue a third warrant of execution, which he has vowed to do. Even if the high court lets the decision of the Third Circuit Court stand, a new sentencing hearing could not

rule on Mumia's innocence but only decide between the death penalty or life imprisonment without parole.

Contrary to the misplaced expectations of many, the Obama administration is not about to save Mumia. It is up to us to mobilize in action the wide support internationally among workers, blacks, intellectuals, defenders of democratic rights and opponents of the racist death penalty to prevent them from silencing the "voice of the voiceless."

Mumia was a marked man in the eyes of the ruling class long before 9 December 1981, when he was shot in the chest and savagely beaten by Philadelphia police. He was a thorn in the side of local rulers who run the city with massive police power. Republican mayor (and former police chief) Frank Rizzo warned Mumia in 1978 that "you're going to have to be held responsible and accountable" for his reporting of cop assaults on the predominantly black MOVE organization. Charged with killing police officer Daniel Faulker, Jamal was railroaded in

a frame-up trial and sentenced to die the following year. (Democrat

**Abolish the Racist Death Penalty!**

Rendell was at the time the district attorney who oversaw Mumia's prosecution.) He has been in isolation on death row ever since, while the cops, the media and the government howl for his blood. But Mumia is innocent. The ballistics, forensics and photographic evidence all contradict the prosecution's claims. Another man confessed to the killing and explained the circumstances, while multiple eyewitnesses saw the killer flee the scene on foot as Mumia sat on the curb, bleeding nearly to death from a police bullet to his lung. *Mumia's "crime" is that he survived.*

Around the world, hundreds of thousands have marched for this courageous champion of oppressed. Trade unions representing millions of members have rallied to the defense of Mumia. His dispatches from prison ("Live from Death Row") are broadcast and reprinted internationally. He has been made an honorary citizen of Paris. But in the U.S., Jamal has been the object of a bipartisan ruling-class assault. When a suburb of Paris named a street after him, Congress passed a resolution by 368 to 31 condemning this and declaring Mumia a murderer. Many left groups have been calling for a new trial, as if the racist U.S. judicial system would allow Jamal to demonstrate his innocence. With that avenue closed off, they are currently petitioning Barack Obama's attorney General, Eric Holder, to order a civil rights investigation of Mumia's case. Yet Obama supports the death penalty, specifically in the case of "cop killers," as Mumia has been labeled. Now right-wingers are revving up a propaganda barrage with the launching of a sinister pseudo-documentary film, *Barrel of a Gun*, to retail the web of lies that has been spun to justify the legal lynching.

The case of Mumia Abu-Jamal has come to symbolize the racist death penalty in the United States, a heritage of slavery that is ever present. The Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International, of which the IG is the U.S. section, have fought for working-class mobilization, including strike action, to free Mumia. Our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, on 23 April 1999 sparked a first-ever work stoppage for Mumia's freedom, a statewide action by the teachers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (They did so again on 7 May 2008.) The next day the ILWU dock workers union in the U.S. shut down every port on the West Coast declaring, "An injury to one is an injury to all, Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!" Other unions including Postal Workers, Farm Workers, SEIU, as well as Seattle, San Francisco and other local labor councils are on record in defense of Mumia. It is urgent to expand this support into powerful labor/black action, appealing to the integrated union movement to join with the black, Latino and immigrant poor to demand that he be liberated. Citywide conferences, marches and job actions to save Mumia and demand his freedom are needed, now!

### **No Justice in the Capitalist Courts: Mobilize Workers Power!**

The tight-knit ruling class in Philadelphia is dead-set on the drive to execute Mumia. Every candidate for Philadelphia district attorney in the recent elections swore that he would



© Lou Jones

### **Mumia Abu-Jamal**

continue to seek the death penalty. From Mumia's trial judge, Albert Sabo, a lifetime member of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) who said within earshot of a court stenographer that he was going to help the prosecution "fry that n----r," on up to the Supreme Court, the courts have done such blatant injustice to his appeals that Mumia's defenders have nicknamed this defiance of logic and legal precedent "the Mumia exception." But this is not an exception, it is the rule: *there is no justice for the oppressed in the capitalist courts!* And that is doubly and triply true for a black man and fighter for justice targeted by the police, whose racist crimes he has widely publicized.

At the national level, Democrats and Republicans alike are fiercely loyal to their cops. They will not go against the will of the FOP on such a high-profile case. The multiracial working class, whose cause Mumia has so movingly championed, is his natural ally and has the power to free him and bring down the whole racist injustice system, death penalty and all. Yet standing in the way of the all-out struggle that it will take to stop the execution is the loyalty of many of Mumia's defenders to the racist capitalist state. His former attorneys Leonard Weinglass and Daniel Williams refused to present the confession of Arnold Beverly that he, not Mumia, shot police officer Faulkner, arguing that it was not "believable" that the police and prosecution would knowingly frame an innocent man – their client! Why not? The cops do it all the time, they even have a name for it: *testilying*. Solicitous of approval from liberals and bourgeois politicians who believe that Mumia is guilty, various reformist groups preferred to call for a "new trial" in the capitalist courts, rather than simply demand that an innocent man be freed.

This was highlighted when Mumia's lawyers argued an appeal before the U.S. Third Circuit court in May 2007, detailing how police suborned perjured testimony and how blacks were systematically excluded from Jamal's jury. Prosecutors

peremptorily challenged 11 of 15 potential black jurors and only 4 of 28 whites, in a city with over 40 percent black population. A district attorney's training video later surfaced instructing Philadelphia prosecutors on how and why to knock blacks off juries. The evidence of racist discrimination in jury selection was so overwhelming that liberals and reformists thought that Mumia's "day in court" had arrived. Jeff Mackler, leader of the San Francisco-based Mobilization to Free Mumia, wrote that "what appeared to be unfolding" in the Philadelphia courtroom was that "the systematic race and class bias" of the U.S. criminal "justice" system was being "set aside" and that "Mumia Abu-Jamal, could win a new trial and freedom" ("New Trial and Freedom for Mumia?" *Socialist Action*, June 2007).

However, on 27 March 2008, a three-judge panel of the circuit court turned down Mumia's appeal and called for a new sentencing hearing with only two possible outcomes: death or life in prison without parole. Still, Mackler's faith in bourgeois justice was not shaken. He told National Public Radio on 1 April 2008: "We're confident that the decision of Judge Ambro, who was the minority out of the three... will be upheld." Yet four months later the full circuit court confirmed the March ruling. Commenting later on the appeal to the Supreme Court by Mumia's lawyers, Mackler wrote: "If the Court denies the petition, Mumia's legal options are finished" (*Socialist Action*, August 2008). And now that the Supreme Court has in fact refused to hear Mumia's appeal, Mackler grasps at straws, praising the "important campaign" for a civil rights investigation by the Justice Department, and opining that Pennsylvania officials might "let the 180-day clock run out" on a new sentencing hearing, leaving Mumia with life without parole (*Socialist Action*, November 2009). Beyond "second guessing the courts," at which he has repeatedly been wrong, he makes only the vaguest reference to "the struggles of the masses."

The string of legal reverses for Mumia continues. On 6 October 2008 the Supreme Court rejected the appeal for a new trial on the basis of affidavits proving that the prosecution and police suborned perjury and intimidated witnesses in Mumia's 1982 trial. Mumia's lawyers also filed an appeal of the Third Circuit's July 2008 decision, asking for a new sentencing phase of the trial because of the exclusion of blacks from the jury. On April 6, the Supreme Court refused to hear that appeal



Internationalist photo

as well, despite all the evidence that prosecutors had violated the standards laid out in the landmark 1986 case of *Batson v. Kentucky*, where the court ruled that systematic exclusion of blacks from juries is grounds for overturning guilty verdicts. The Court's delay on the prosecution appeal is likely because it intends to rule first on another case, *Smith v. Spisak*, of a neo-Nazi from Ohio who ranted to the jury against blacks and Jews and confessed to three hate crime murders. This is bourgeois "justice" in racist America: if the death sentence for the neo-Nazi murderer is reinstated despite misleading jury instructions, then this precedent will be almost certainly used against Mumia, an innocent black man and an opponent of racism.

To be clear: we support Mumia's lawyers using every legal avenue open to them. But for his supporters to raise the political call for a "new trial" is an expression of confidence in the capitalist courts that can only disorient protests. The battle for Mumia's freedom depends on bringing to bear a power greater than racist bourgeois "justice": the power of the working class.

### Illusions in the Democrats are Deadly

What's striking in the face of the unrelenting blows Mumia has taken from the courts is the absence of mass mobilizations recently by his supporters. It's not hard to figure out why: it's the same reason that there have been no major antiwar demonstrations for the last two years, even though the war in Iraq and Afghanistan rages on and is increasingly unpopular. The reformist left joined the liberals in placing their hopes in the Democratic Party and Barack Obama. As a result, they now appeal to Attorney General Eric Holder to save Mumia. It doesn't phase them that they are beseeching the boss of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the same FBI that had Mumia under surveillance since he was 15 years old and whose longtime chief J. Edgar Hoover declared in 1968: "The Negro youth and moderate[s] must be made to understand that if they succumb to revolutionary teaching, they will be dead revolutionaries." This was no idle threat: at least 38 Black Panthers were murdered by Hoover's agents. The FBI rode with the KKK as they gunned down civil rights workers in Mississippi. And now they are supposed to "investigate" violations of Mumia's civil rights? Think again.

Numerous public figures and even some capitalist politicians in the U.S. and around the world have signed their names

to petitions calling to free Mumia. We welcome their support for an innocent class war prisoner like Mumia. But it is quite a different matter for campaigners for Mumia to tell people to look to and place their hopes in the capitalist rulers. Yet this is the standard policy of the groups like the Workers World Party and the International Action Center it leads, which are the loudest pushers of the civil rights petition to Holder. *Workers World* (20 November 2008) declared triumphantly: “The election victory of Barack Obama will go down in history as a triumphant step forward in the struggle against racism and national oppression in the U.S.” History hasn’t exactly turned out that way, as any Marxist could have foretold. *The Internationalist* (March-April 2009) headlined: “Obama Presidency:

U.S. Imperialism Tries a Makeover,” and “What ‘Post-Racial’ America: Barack Obama vs. Black Liberation.” We warned: “Those who looked to the election of a black president to save Mumia could be cruelly awakened from their illusions.”

More than a sign of desperation by legalistic liberals and wretched reformists once their hopes in a “new trial” were dashed, this appeal is also a product of misplaced “hope” in the new commander in chief of U.S. imperialism. Although the election of a black president in this deeply racist country represented a significant social shift, his administration and party are pillars of American capitalism, where 40 percent of death row inmates are black and one in nine young black men is in prison. At the NAACP convention in New York last August, where Eric Holder spoke, supporters of the IAC/WWP, the International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal and the Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition held a banner saying: “Obama & Holder/We Need You Now!/Free Mumia.” “We need” these Democrats?! *The Amsterdam News* (16 July) reported that “hope is based on the premise that having a Black attorney general, a Black president” would mean “Abu-Jamal’s chances for a new trial ought to be better.”

But the premise is wrong. The Democratic Party of Obama also includes the black former mayor of Philadelphia, Wilson Goode, whose police firebombed the house of the MOVE organization on 13 May 1985, killing eleven black men, women and children and destroying over 60 homes in the Osage Avenue neighborhood in the ensuing blaze. The persecution of Mumia Abu-Jamal is due to the *class* interests of the bourgeoisie, including its few black members. “Black faces in high places does not freedom make,” as Mumia wrote in August of last year, analyzing what an Obama victory would mean. He added, “Indeed, in times of Black uprising and mass discontent, Black



AP

**Police firebombed MOVE commune on Mothers Day 1985, let the fire burn for hours, destroying more than 60 homes. Bombing was ordered by black Democratic mayor Wilson Goode.**

mayors seem the perfect instrument of repression, for they dispel charges of racism.” And as long ago as 2004, Obama has said that killing a police officer (which Mumia was falsely found guilty of) should be “death penalty eligible.”

### The Obama Administration and Mumia

Significantly, the first black president was endorsed by Michael Smerconish, a reactionary Philadelphia radio commentator who is the most prominent spokesperson for the anti-Mumia lynch mob (he co-authored a book, *Murdered by Mumia*, with the widow of police officer Faulkner). This right-wing Republican who brags about his close ties to George Bush has made a concerted effort to line up Obama for the execution of Mumia, including in direct conversations. Late in the campaign last year, Smerconish asked the Democratic candidate where he stood on the Mumia case. Obama replied that he wasn’t familiar with the details of the case, but added: “So let me just lay out a very clear principle: In my mind, if somebody killed a police officer, they deserve the death penalty or life in prison” (*Philadelphia Daily News*, 20 August).

When the Fraternal Order of Police interviewed Barack Obama and John McCain, two of its questions were about Mumia Abu-Jamal and Daniel Faulkner. The FOP wanted to be sure that the two senators would have voted for the House resolution it sponsored in 2006 retailing the prosecution slanders of Mumia and condemning the French city of St. Denis for naming a street after him. Obama reassured the cops: “I deplore acts to harm or kill our nation’s police officers, and oppose efforts to glorify those who commit such acts.” While the FOP endorsed the Republican McCain for president, it lobbied for Eric Holder’s confirmation as Attorney General. Holder

*continued on page 17*



Charles Dharapak/AP



**Imperialist commander in chief Barack Obama announces escalation of war on Afghanistan at West Point military academy, December 1.**

doubling the size of the U.S. expeditionary force there. Yet it didn't make a dent in the pace of attacks by the Taliban and other insurgent forces, which tripled from February to August. Even more worrisome to Washington, the areas under effective insurgent control have expanded from 20 percent to 40 percent of Afghanistan over the past two years. Recently, Admiral Mike Mullen, head of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, told an audience of Marines at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina straight-out, "We are not winning, which means we are losing" (*London Telegraph*, 10 December).

So now we have the spectacle of Obama receiving the Nobel "peace" prize (named after the Swedish arms manufacturer and inventor of dynamite!) and delivering his ridiculous "war is peace" speech while escalating the war on Afghanistan, as well as attacks on Pakistan. Though it was not mentioned at West Point, the U.S. president reportedly "signed off on a plan by the Central Intelligence Agency to expand C.I.A. activities in Pakistan" (*New York Times*, 2 December). This includes extending missile strikes against alleged Al Qaeda and Taliban targets launched from Predator and Reaper drone aircraft, resuming attacks by special operations forces across the border from Afghanistan and from secret bases inside Pakistan, and stepping up clandestine activity by "contractors" such as the infamous Blackwater mercenaries (see Jeremy Scahill, "The Secret US War in Pakistan," *The Nation*, 21 December). Now U.S. generals want to strike in the rebellious province of Baluchistan. This covert aggression against a supposed ally has provoked massive opposition. The London *Guardian* (2 December) reported: "Strikes that have killed at least 750 people in the past two years have provoked public hostility. Any move into Balochistan is likely to spark a fierce backlash."

The liberal Democrat in the White House is no less an imperialist warmonger than his Republican predecessor. Un-

der Obama, the notorious torture prison at Bagram air base north of Kabul continues to operate, the mercenary death squads are expanding, and the Air Force is still bombing wedding parties. From the moment his commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, demanded a big increase in U.S. forces, and then leaked his report to the press, there wasn't the slightest chance that Obama would turn down the military. He has to resort to double-talk to sell this policy to the antiwar voters that elected him (in a Gallup poll the week before his talk, 57 percent of Democrats favored reducing the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan and fully half now think the U.S. was wrong to invade the country in 2001).

He also needs to assuage Democratic

Congressmen up for re-election in 2010, many of whom could be defeated simply if antiwar Democrats stay home. The U.S. population as a whole is increasingly fed up with the war. A September 2009 Pew Research Center poll showed 43 percent favored withdrawal from Afghanistan, and 49 percent thought the U.S. should "mind its own business" internationally, higher even than the 41 percent who took that view in the wake of the defeat in Vietnam.

Stuck with an unpopular, losing war, in his West Point speech, Obama tried to soft-soap the escalation with talk of a "transfer" of security to Afghan forces in July 2011. He immediately qualified this, saying the 2011 date is only a "beginning" and it would depend on "conditions on the ground." But this didn't please Republicans and military hardliners, so in the next few days, officials emphasized over and over that there would be no pullout. General McChrystal declared in Kabul that the timeline "is not an absolute." NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated in Brussels, "Transition doesn't mean exit." And on Sunday TV talk shows, there was a chorus from Obama administration officials. General James Jones, Obama's National Security Advisor said, "We're going to be in the region for a long time." War secretary Robert Gates said that with 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan in mid-2011, "some handful, or some small number, or whatever the conditions permit, will begin to withdraw at that time." And Secretary of State Hillary Clinton vowed, "We're not going to be walking away from Afghanistan again."

So much for the illusion of the Democratic administration voluntarily pulling out of Afghanistan. To be sure, Obama said from the outset that he was not opposed to all U.S. wars, just "dumb wars" that the U.S. was bound to lose. During the 2008 election campaign he said he would increase U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and his advisors made it clear they intended

to leave 50,000-plus U.S. forces in Iraq indefinitely. So anyone who thought Obama was an antiwar candidate fell for the hype about “hope” and “change” and didn’t read the fine print. The Democrats just thought that Bush and his dark-side vice-president Dick Cheney royally screwed things up with their stupidity, and the Dems could “do better.” At her Senate confirmation hearings as secretary of state, Clinton said the new administration would use “smart power” in diplomacy. (Like in Honduras, where the U.S. *de facto* supported the coup-makers?) As we wrote earlier this year about the Obama presidency:

“But there’s dumb ... and dumber. Bush’s invasion and occupation of Iraq has drained U.S. military and economic strength in a quest for world domination. Obama’s vow to escalate the war in Afghanistan, spread over a far larger, mountainous territory, and at the same time to attack Pakistan, with eight times the population and the only Islamic country with nuclear weapons to boot, could set off a chain reaction that would send the entire region up in flames.”  
 –“Obama Presidency: U.S. Imperialism Tries a Makeover,”  
*The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009

When Obama was elected – the first black president in the history of the United States, a nation founded on chattel slavery – tremendous hopes were placed in him by wide sectors of the population: African Americans, youth, workers and millions who were fed up with eight years of George W. Bush. If many thought they were voting to put an end to the debilitating wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and withdraw U.S. troops, this illusion was partly fostered by the “antiwar movement” that deliberately called off national peace marches in order not to embarrass the Democratic Party candidate. Also, most Democrats considered Afghanistan the “good war” as opposed to “Bush’s war” in Iraq, where they wanted to cut U.S. losses and head for the exit. Now that the U.S. is losing the war in Afghanistan and is mired in by far the worst economic crisis in three-quarters of a century, Obama responds ... by digging in and escalating. This has left many of his supporters feeling angry and betrayed. But their anger will go nowhere so long as the mass of working people and antiwar activists remain tied to the Democratic Party.

The Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International did not support Democrat Barack Obama against Republican John McCain. We warned that on most fundamental issues – including the war, the bailout of Wall Street banks, education “reform” and other questions – the positions of the two capitalist contenders were barely distinguishable, if not identical. While much of the left made “social-patriotic” appeals to “bring the troops home” (and even more explicitly to “support the troops” by “bringing them home”), ever since September 2001 we called to defeat the imperialist war on Afghanistan, and later Iraq, while defending the Afghan and Iraqi peoples under U.S. attack. Rather than forming “antiwar” coalitions with



U.S. Embassy

**Afghan puppet president Hamid Karzai and U.S. puppet mistress Hillary Clinton in Kabul, November 2009.**

bourgeois politicians, we called to break with the Democrats and for workers strikes against the war. Even at protests following the Obama’s announcement of more troops to Afghanistan, organizers carefully avoided any signs mentioning the president by name. Our Internationalist contingent, in contrast, carried signs including, “Hey Obama, How Many Kids Did You Kill Today? Defeat Imperialist Slaughter in Afghanistan, Iraq.”

Imperialism is not a policy that can be discarded at will but a system that continuously generates poverty, racism and war. Any capitalist politician, pro-war or “antiwar,” will perpetuate it, whatever rhetoric they may spout on the campaign trail. The U.S. will withdraw from the Mideast only if it is forced out, by losses on the battlefield and class struggle “at home.” At bottom, the war is not over Saddam Hussein, or Osama Bin Laden, the Taliban, Al Qaeda or oil pipelines – it is a war for world domination. We can only put an end to the endless U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Colombia, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, Korea and elsewhere if we smash imperialism through international socialist revolution.

### **U.S. Sinking in the Afghan Quagmire**

In all the analysis in the media of Obama’s Afghanistan surge there has been hardly any mention of the terrible toll the U.S. war and occupation is taking on the Afghan population. The killing of civilians in air strikes seldom makes it into the press unless it is a really big massacre, like last May 5, when over 125 villagers were killed in a bombing raid. In such cases U.S. military spokesmen typically deny civilian casualties for a few days, then say their reports were “thinly sourced” (i.e., invented), and eventually own up to a small fraction of the dead, claiming the rest were “militants” and “extremists,” or were supposedly killed by the Taliban. The regular slaughter of smaller numbers, such as the killing of nine civilians (including several children) in Helmand province on November 5, seldom makes it into the press, in that case only because

the villagers took the bodies to the provincial capital to show before burying them. According to official (United Nations) statistics, over 2,000 civilians were killed in Afghanistan from January to October, well ahead of last year's toll. But the U.N. is just an appendage of the U.S./NATO "coalition" military and the actual numbers are undoubtedly far higher.

Afghans overwhelmingly oppose the war and the occupation, although no one asked their permission. In keeping with the modern-day imperialists' voracious appetite for "metrics," all sorts of agencies from the International Red Cross to the U.S. Republican Party are continually conducting "opinion surveys" in Afghanistan. This is absurd to begin with in a country where the bulk of the population lives in isolated rural areas, and in wartime

when respondents will say what they think the people with the guns behind the surveyors want to hear. But in one of the few polls that even asked about the presence of foreign troops, an ABC survey in December 2008, barely a third said opinions toward the "coalition" forces were generally positive in their area, only 18 percent wanted more U.S./NATO troops, and 77 percent wanted an end to the air strikes. There have also been numerous demonstrations against the occupiers, such as in Kabul just this past December 9, when thousands of students blocked the Kabul-Jalalabad highway protesting the killing in nearby Laghman province. Did you read about that in the newspapers or see it on TV? No you didn't, because the "free but responsible" imperialist press censors it.

What the imperialist media and the U.S. government are concerned about is that "the central government of President Hamid Karzai ... is widely seen here as corrupt and incompetent," in the words of a London *Guardian* (2 December) report from Kabul. Democratic Congressman Jim McGovern of Massachusetts questioned sending more troops "defending a government that is corrupt and incompetent." Both Obama and Clinton reportedly lectured Karzai on the need to fight corruption. But who ever heard of a puppet government that wasn't corrupt? The regimes of Ngo Dinh Diem or Nguyen Van Thieu, heads of the Saigon "government" during the U.S. war on Vietnam, were hardly corruption-free. Even Nazi collaborator puppet "governments" in East Europe were rife with corruption. And why not? The politicians in Afghanistan and Iraq who serve as quislings for the colonial occupiers are traitors who would face summary justice at the hands of any self-respecting nationalist government. So naturally, if they act as front men, their first question is "what's in it for



**Fresh graves of villagers killed in May 5 U.S. air strike in Farah province, Afghanistan, where more than 125 were killed, including many women and children.**

me?" Corruption is the grease that makes it possible for such criminal regimes to function at all. The Americans will never get an uncorrupt Afghan puppet.

A competent corrupt regime is another matter. That's the kind of dictator the U.S. typically looks for in "Third World" countries: the Shah of Iran, Pinochet in Chile (who stole millions from the state treasury, while murdering tens of thousands of leftists), the air force officer turned hard-line politician Nguyen Cao Ky in South Vietnam (who ran the opium trade on CIA Air America planes). But Washington has a problem of even getting that in Afghanistan today. To have a military dictatorship, you have to have a military to provide the bureaucratic framework for bonapartist rule. Afghanistan doesn't. The Afghan army dissolved when the former Soviet-backed government fell in 1992. It was replaced by the warlords of the Northern Alliance who had been bankrolled by the U.S. A few years later they, in turn, were toppled by bands of Taliban, a creation of the Pakistani military's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. Unlike in Iraq – where after initially cashiering Saddam Hussein's entire officer corps, the U.S. turned around and rebuilt the Iraqi army – in Afghanistan they are starting from scratch. It will take some years to turn the warlords' private militias into a disciplined national army.

The U.S. has no intention of exiting Afghanistan, zero. It might like to mask its domination with a semi-colonial protectorate like the Hashemite monarchy Britain installed in Iraq in 1920, which stayed in power until 1958 while the British ran things from their air force bases. (This is what Washington has in mind for Iraq today.) But however they try to disguise it, the Obama administration is going to be occupying Afghanistan for years – five or ten minimum – unless it is

driven out first. That time frame is what British and German ministers have admitted to when questioned in Parliament and the Bundestag, and that's more or less what General David Petraeus, commander of the Central Command (covering Iraq and Afghanistan), told the U.S. Congress on December 9. And it will cost, a lot: Petraeus cited the figure of \$10 billion a year to fund an Afghan army; Obama quoted \$30 billion a year as the price tag for his "surge" of 30,000 more troops. The official cost of U.S. operations in Afghanistan this year will be \$100 billion, or a million bucks for each of the 100,000 U.S. troops scheduled to be "in country" by July. And the bill isn't getting any smaller any time soon.

For now, the U.S. and 42 other members of the military "coalition" (formally known as the International Security Assistance Forces [ISAF]) that is occupying Afghanistan are stuck in a war that even they admit they are losing. In his August 30 Initial Assessment report as ISAF commander requesting a massive increase in U.S. forces, General McChrystal said bluntly:

"Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near-term (next 12 months) – while Afghan security capacity matures – risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible.... [T]he overall situation is deteriorating despite considerable effort by ISAF. The threat has grown steadily but subtly, and unchecked by commensurate counter-action, its severity now surpasses the capabilities of the current strategy. We cannot succeed simply by trying harder...."

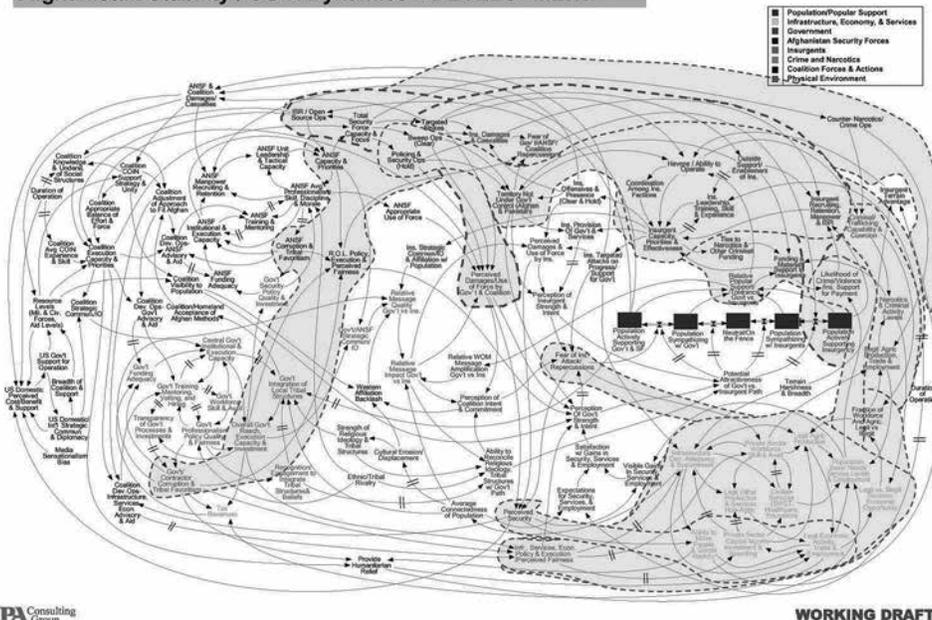
"Failure to provide adequate resources also risks a longer conflict, greater casualties, higher overall costs, and ultimately, a critical loss of political support. Any of these risks, in turn, are likely to result in mission failure...."

"The insurgents control or contest a significant portion of the country, although it is difficult to assess precisely how much due to a lack of ISAF presence. ... REDACTED"

The McChrystal report states that the prisons have been turned into Taliban-recruiting centers, and that the Taliban have displaced the Kabul government in many areas:

"The QST [Taliban operating out of Quetta, Pakistan] has a governing structure in Afghanistan under the rubric of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They appoint shadow governors for most provinces, review their performance, and replace them periodically. They establish a body to receive complaints against the own 'officials' and to act on them. They install 'shari'a' courts to deliver swift and enforced justice in contested and controlled areas. They levy taxes and conscript fighters and laborers. They claim to provide security

**Afghanistan Stability / COIN Dynamics – DEVELOPMENT**



**No wonder they're losing. Slide from PowerPoint presentation for U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff on counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy in Afghanistan.**

against a corrupt government, ISAF forces, criminality, and local power brokers."

No doubt the "redacted" parts of the report are even more explicit. A series of maps and charts published by Andrew Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "The Uncertain Metrics of the Afghan War" (3 December) include a 2008 U.N. "accessibility map" showing almost the entire southern 40 percent of Afghanistan as a "no-go area" of "extreme risk/hostile environment" for aid workers. Other maps show the southern 60 percent of the country as areas "with permanent Taliban presence," and much of the east as "extreme risk" as well. And now the Taliban control areas in the north around Kunduz.

**Obama's "Strategy": Looking for the "Good Taliban"**

So Obama gave McChrystal what he asked for: the 30,000 troops, with a few thousand more from the U.S. "allies" (in several cases paid for by the U.S. as part of the Global War on Terror, or GWOT in Pentagonese), essentially fulfills the general's request for 40,000. In any case, it was all that was available: the U.S. Army and Marines currently have total active duty combat forces of around 500,000, and by mid-2010, fully half of those will be deployed in and around Iraq and Afghanistan. The rest are on duty in other "theaters" (Philippines, Colombia), assigned to the 700+ U.S. military bases in 156 countries worldwide, retraining, and/or getting ready for their next tour of duty in the war zone. The fact is that the U.S. is at the limits of its "force projection" capability without introducing a draft (military conscription).

The "new" Afghanistan strategy is described as "counter-

insurgency” (COIN) aimed at holding off the Taliban, rather than “counterterrorism” (CT) focusing on destroying Al Qaeda. While talking of “protecting the population,” what it seeks to “protect” it from is “a resilient insurgency and a crisis of confidence in the government.” What the COIN strategy argues, in General McChrystal’s words, is that “the population ... must be leveraged” ... to protect the government from the people.

The additional U.S. forces are to be deployed almost entirely in a few provinces in the south (Helmand and Kandahar) and the east (Khost), while pulling back exposed “forward operating bases” and forming a “ring of steel” around the capital. The tiny outposts in hostile territory could only be defended by calling in air strikes, which were becoming a major liability due to mounting civilian casualties. What this shows is that the military planners are seeking to buy time, to halt the insurgents’ advance and prevent Kabul from falling to the Taliban in the next six to 12 months. So McChrystal wasn’t exaggerating, and the imperialist occupiers really are in deep trouble. This, however, raises the question – that has been hotly debated for the last week – of how the U.S. could even begin a “transfer” of security to Afghan forces in a mere 18 months.

No one in Washington thinks the Afghan puppet army will be able to handle the Taliban by then. They will grab their spoils and run. So are the Obama administration and the Pentagon chiefs raving idiots and lily-livered weaklings as Republican right-wingers contend? Not at all. The administration argues that “the Taliban is a deeply rooted political movement in Afghanistan” that cannot be eliminated militarily, according to a top official quoted by the *Washington Post* (10 October). The actual U.S. strategy is not to defeat the Taliban but to weaken it enough so that elements of the Islamists can be brought into a political deal. The McChrystal report is explicit:

“Insurgencies of this nature typically conclude through military operations and political efforts driving some degree of host-nation reconciliation with elements of the insurgency. In the Afghan conflict, reconciliation may involve GIRA-led, high-level political settlements.... ISAF must be in position to support appropriate Afghan reconciliation policies.”

This isn’t about “reintegrating” low-level Taliban fighters. Washington is angling for a “high level political settlement” with the “good Taliban.”

Some months ago the *New York Times* (8 March) reported, “President Obama declared in an interview that the United States was not winning the war in Afghanistan and opened the door to a reconciliation process in which the American military would reach out to moderate elements of the Taliban, much as it did with Sunni militias in Iraq.” Since then the search has been on for the “moderate Taliban.” Could this be the Haqqani



Banaras Khan/AFP

**Corruption in Afghan puppet government? Shocking! But the main agent of corruption in the Kabul regime, Ahmed Wali Karzai (at right), the president’s brother, turns out to be on the CIA payroll.**

network, whose founder, Jalaluddin Haqqani, has been well-known to the Americans (and the Pakistani ISI) since he was a mujahedin commander in the anti-Soviet war? Alas, the Haqqanis are in tight with Al Qaeda. Could the elusive “good Taliban” be Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, “the sociopathic former Afghan Prime Minister who pulverized Kabul during the post-Soviet fall-out amongst mujahedin thieves in the early 1990s” (Tom Burghardt, “America’s Search for the ‘Good Taliban’,” *Global Research*, 15 March)? Hekmatyar, another top recipient of CIA aid in the ’80s, was notorious for throwing acid in the faces of unveiled women students at Kabul University. But Hekmatyar is a leading drug kingpin, and has been for decades, which could prove an embarrassment for Washington.

The U.S. figures the Taliban are not a regular military formation such as the former Baathist military who started the insurgency in Iraq. Also, Obama argued at West Point, it is not a mass-based insurgency such as the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. So maybe the Kabul regime can be propped up for a time with massive force. However, what form a “reconciliation” might take is unclear: a revolt of deputies of Mullah Omar, a break-away of groups more interested in local control than Taliban/Al Qaeda-style Islamism? The *Washington Post* reports, “Some inside the White House have cited Hezbollah, the armed Lebanese political movement, as an example of what the Taliban could become.” The White House insiders consider “although Hezbollah is a source of regional instability, it is not a threat to the United States.” The condition would be that they break from Al Qaeda, and possibly hand over Omar bin Laden, if he’s still around, and Ayman Al-Zawahiri, one-time chief of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, bin Laden’s chief deputy and the real leader of Al Qaeda. But whatever the scenario, whether Washington can stabilize its “corrupt and incompetent” puppet

government sufficiently and pull off such a deal is dubious.

A major U.S. liability in Afghanistan is Hamid Karzai, the man it picked as a figurehead president, and the tattered regime he heads. Karzai was installed to give a Pashtun face to a “government” of the Tajik warlords of the Northern Alliance, who control the army and police, such as they are. Taliban influence has grown because the Pashto-speaking clans and tribes of southern Afghanistan regard the Kabul authorities as an alien force. The massive fraud in the August 2009 Afghan elections was because in the South, Karzai’s supposed base, security was so tenuous and popular hostility to the government so great that there was no vote at all in much of the region. So they simply stuffed the ballot boxes. Pashtun rulers dominated Afghanistan from 1747 until the overthrow of the last king in 1973. But whether they yearn for a “Pashtunistan” including the 40 million Pashto speakers of southern Afghanistan and western Pakistan, or for an ultra-fundamentalist Islamic emirate, the common denominator is hatred of the U.S. occupation, and what “holds the disparate Taliban factions together is opposition to Tajik dominance in Kabul,” as liberal imperialist Asia “expert” Selig Harrison wrote (*New York Times*, 17 August).

### For Permanent Revolution Throughout Central and South Asia

Beyond the uncertain prospect of an alliance with sections of the Taliban, the other big sticking point of Obama’s “strategy” is what he barely mentioned at West Point: nuclear-armed Pakistan. More than 80 U.S. missile strikes inside Pakistani territory in the past two years, Pentagon plans for more “special operations” inside Pakistan, the prospect that more American troops will push the Afghan Taliban deeper into Pakistan, and Washington’s heavy-handed pressure on the tottering Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari and army chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani have sparked overwhelming sentiment against the Obama administration in Pakistan. Clearly, Islamist reactionaries and right-wing militarists could capitalize on this sentiment. But Pakistan, unlike Afghanistan, has a sizable working class, and at least elements of a leftist labor movement. Internationalist communists would seek to seize this moment to wage genuine anti-imperialist, proletarian revolutionary struggle – against the U.S., its client Zardari, the Islamist generals who have been the real power in Pakistan since its foundation, and the semi-feudalist landlords who still dominate the political parties – and thereby compete with the



**During the 1980s when the Soviet-backed secular government was in power, the majority of students at Kabul University were women. Maoist and social-democratic reformists hailed the Islamic mujahedin (holy warriors) on the CIA payroll who killed teachers and threw acid on the faces of unveiled women. Trotskyists hailed the Red Army intervention, calling for the gains of the October 1917 Revolution to be extended to the Afghan peoples.**

Taliban’s appeal to the “wretched of the earth.”

While the weight of oppression on the toilers of Afghanistan is enormous, it must be recognized that the social forces inside Afghanistan that could be a base for revolution are weak. This is one of the most impoverished countries in the world, and its economy has been further devastated by decades of war, to the point that there is hardly any industry at all. Nevertheless, Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution holds true here as well: in this era of imperialism, of decaying capitalism, even the democratic gains of the bourgeois revolutions (democracy, agrarian revolution and national liberation) can only be realized through the taking of power by the working class, led by its communist party, which proceeds to carry out socialist tasks. In Afghanistan today, any revolutionary push is likely to come from without, but that is far from impossible. With neighboring Pakistan and Iran in turmoil, the potential for socialist revolution in the region is real, and could join with protests inside Afghanistan against the occupation evolving into a struggle against imperialist domination.

The League for the Fourth International calls for the defeat of the imperialist war on, and colonial occupation of, Afghanistan and Iraq. Following the example of Lenin and Trotsky, we stand on the side of the semi-colonial peoples against imperialism, and with those resisting the occupiers – who are by no means limited to Taliban, Al Qaeda or other Islamists. Many, particularly in the capital, look back favorably to the pro-Soviet government when unveiled women could walk the streets and were the majority of students in Kabul University. While hailing any real blows landed against the occupiers and their Afghan and Iraqi puppets, working-class militants oppose sectarian attacks on Sunni, Shiite, Christian, Buddhist and various minority communities.

And we give no political support to the various bourgeois opposition forces, which are often as reactionary as the Baghdad and Kabul “governments.” Communists fight for education for all, for full equality for women, including freedom from the veil and other restrictions, and defend the rights of nationalities, including the right to self-determination (independence), such as for the Baluchis. Proletarian internationalists are anti-imperialists, not Afghan or Pakistani nationalists.

Revolutionary communists oppose the political manifestations of all forms of religious fundamentalism, whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. In fighting for workers revolution that unites all the toilers, we are for a secular state and against an Islamic republic in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq or anywhere else, just as we oppose a Jewish state in Palestine or a Christian state in Europe in the U.S. We seek to break the stranglehold of religious forces on education, medicine and public life in different countries. As avowed atheists, Marxists seek to overcome through social development and scientific enlightenment the prejudices and obscurantism that characterize all religions. And where religious fanaticism becomes a reactionary military force, we seek to mobilize the working class to fight it, while at the same time opposing the bourgeois militarists who sometimes oppose (and sometimes ally with) the fundamentalists, as for example in Algeria.

Authentic Trotskyists opposed the Islamists when they were used as pawns by Washington against the Soviet-backed reform government in Kabul from 1979 on. At the time, most of the left joined the U.S. government, first under Democrat Jimmy Carter and then under Republican Ronald Reagan, in hailing the mujahedin (Islamic holy warriors) who are now the backbone of the U.S. puppet “government” in Kabul. We hailed the Red Army intervention and stood for defense of the Soviet Union in the Cold War fought by proxy in Afghanistan, calling for the extension of the gains of the October 1917 revolution to the Afghan peoples. When the Kremlin ignominiously withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, we offered to form an international brigade to fight against the U.S.-financed, armed and trained Islamic mercenaries. Thus we opposed the Islamists in the past when they were allied with the U.S., and we will oppose them tomorrow as Washington again seeks “reconciliation” with a section of the Taliban. And when Muslim forces rise up against imperialist domination, we continue to oppose Islamism politically while supporting any real struggles against the invasion and colonial occupation.

### **Not An Antiwar Popular Front But Class Struggle to Defeat War on Working People**

It is striking that in the United States, a majority of the population is turning against the war even though there hasn’t been a major national antiwar march in more than two years – ever



**Cars bring bodies of villagers killed by U.S. airstrike in Helmand province to place in front of governor’s house, November 5.**

Abdul Khaleq/AP

since the start of the last presidential election campaign. A recent CNN poll reports that not even one in five (19 percent) think that Obama deserved a peace prize, and 43 percent think he will never deserve it. So now that his own supporters are feeling jobbed, we are beginning to hear a few peeps from the quiescent “peace movement.” Thirty-four organizations have gotten together to plan a march in Washington ... next March 20. We have insisted that this “movement” is nothing but bourgeois pressure politics, “lobbying in the streets,” a class-collaborationist “popular front” beholden to the Democrats. Here we have another proof: the fact that the protest will not be until months after Obama’s “surge” makes it perfectly obvious that this is a ritual gesture. All those liberals who vowed to “hold Obama’s feet to the fire” while calling for his election, and the reformists who celebrated his victory, figure they have to do something in order not to appear totally hypocritical. In American shorthand it’s called CYA.

Meanwhile, they are still cozing up to the commander of U.S. imperialism. In Afghanistan, angry villagers chant “death to Obama” as they place the bodies of women and children killed by U.S. commandos in front of the provincial governor’s house. In the U.S., the leaders of every major “antiwar” group sent a November 30 letter to Obama pleading with him: “Polls indicate that a majority of those who labored with so much hope to elect you as president now fear that you will make a wrong decision – a tragic decision that will destroy their dreams for America.” This pro-Obama letter was signed by Brian Becker (ANSWER Coalition [Party of Socialism and Liberation]), Medea Benjamin (Code Pink [Green Party, Progressive Democrats of America]), Leslie Cagan (United for Peace and Justice [Committees of Correspondence]), Sara Flounders (International Action Center [Workers World Party]), Jeff Mackler (National Assembly to End Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and Occupations [Socialist Action]) and others. Obama is an imperialist war criminal drenched with the blood of Afghan babies and these fakers are talking about his “tragic” decision that will destroy “dreams for America”! What social-patriotic crap!

The various leftist groups behind the competing antiwar “coalitions” reacted to Obama’s escalation of the war on Afghanistan with their ever-so-slightly different formulas, all aimed at cajoling the dissident Democrats they’re always chasing after. The International Socialist Organization (ISO), focused on “Answering Obama’s Afghanistan deceptions” (Socialist Worker web site, 8 December) with quotes from “liberal establishment” figures like Garry Wills, Rachel Maddow and *The Progressive*. The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) added a pinch of soft-core “anti-imperialism” to spice up its appeal to bourgeois defeatism: “Afghanistan and the logic of empire: Concealing defeat in a war that cannot be won” (PSLweb.org, 6 December). Workers World Party (WWP) made its usual pocketbook pitch: “the increased costs of the war will come directly from funds that could be used to provide jobs and services for unemployed workers at home.” But it objects to the media calling it “Obama’s war” when “the Pentagon is in charge,” and highlights a chant, “Obama, Obama, yes we can, U.S. out of Afghanistan!” (*Workers World*, 17 December). Author William Blum skewered this talk of a “peace candidate” become war president in an article on “Yeswecanistan” (*Counterpunch*, 10 December).

For its part, Bob Avakian’s Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), is currently on a “left” kick after losing the liberal Democrats it courted with its “World Can’t Wait – Drive Out the Bush Regime” front group. An article on “Obama’s War Speech” in the RCP’s *Revolution* (13 December) goes back to the earlier (1980-89) U.S. war on Afghanistan, quoting Democratic president Jimmy Carter’s national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski about how Washington secretly funded Islamist groups in order to “induce a Soviet military intervention.” True. What the article leaves out is that back then, the RCP praised the “resolute struggle of the Afghani people for their freedom” against the Soviet Union (which it branded “a fascist state”) and said nothing about the imperialist aid flowing to the mujahedin (“Superpowers Square Off Over Afghanistan,” *Revolutionary Worker*, 11 January 1980). Along with the Mao-Stalinists of the RCP, the social-democratic ISO also sided with the CIA’s Islamic “holy warriors,” declaring at the time of the Soviet withdrawal: “The Mojahedin victory will encourage the opponents of Russian rule everywhere in the USSR and Eastern Europe” (*Socialist Worker*, 4 February 1989).

In contrast, at a December 2 demonstration in New York City the day after Obama’s West Point speech, a highly visible Internationalist contingent put forward a Trotskyist perspective of class struggle against imperialist war. Our signs included: “Drive U.S. Out of Afghanistan and Iraq! Hands Off Pakistan!” “Defend Iran Against U.S.-Israeli Nuke Threats!” “Israel Out of Gaza and the West Bank – Defend the Palestinian People!” “Break with the Democrats – For Workers Strikes Against the War!” “Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!” and “For Black Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!” In response to the IAC/WWP demonstration organizers’ call for butter instead of guns, we said: “Jobs Not War? Imperialism Is Not a Budget Item – Smash It Through Workers Revolution!” We emphasized “Obama’s U.S.A.: Prison Nation. Mumia Abu-Jamal, Lynne



Internationalist photo

**Another IG sign read: Free Lynne Stewart, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier! No Justice in the Capitalist Courts!”**

Stewart, Leonard Peltier, and Thousands More. Free All Class War Prisoners!” And: “Down with the Democrats and Republicans – Imperialist War Parties, For a Revolutionary Workers Party.”

At present there is a severe worldwide capitalist economic crisis on top of a drawn-out losing imperialist war. This conjunction cries out for intervention by revolutionaries. The liberals, and the reformists who love them, see the connection as a choice of priorities for the government: “butter or guns” in the classic phrase of German social democracy. This reflects deep illusions in the class nature of the state. What the government will spend money on is not up for democratic decision but depends on the needs of capital. If Washington spent less on the Afghanistan war, any extra would go to propping up banks rather than improving schools. The priorities argument also reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of capitalism: even if they did spend more on jobs instead of war, it would not restart the stalled economy. This crisis is not one of “underconsumption” that can be solved by simply pumping more money into the economy, but of overproduction of capital. Capitalists refuse to invest because they can’t get an “adequate” return on their investments (the falling rate of profit). So instead they sink their money into one speculative bubble after another, until it comes crashing down. When it does, the government – their government – bails them out.

The real connection between the war and the economic crisis is the need for sharp class struggle against both, since both are expressions of the bankrupt capitalist-imperialist system. To put a stop to the endless cycle of wars and the boom-bust economy, nothing less than a socialist revolution to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie is required. This is particularly visible when you have 20 million jobless in the United States and the U.S. is

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## Mumia's Life...

*continued from page 7*

shortly thereafter addressed the FOP's May 15 "National Peace Officers' Memorial Service," where he issued a chilling warning to "all those out there who would do harm to police officers": "We are coming to get you. You *will* be arrested, you *will* be prosecuted, and you *will* be sentenced to the full extent of the law." While liberals and reformist appeal to capitalist politicians like Obama and Holder, one has to ask, why would the makers of these blood-thirsty proclamations lift a finger to assure a "fair trial" for a man the police swear is a "cop killer"?

Throughout his campaign, Obama reassured the bourgeoisie that he would *not* do anything to oppose racism. Then in July, when a Cambridge cop arrested Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of the foremost black intellectuals in the nation, for "disorderly conduct" at the door of his own home, Obama at first said the police had "acted stupidly." He was clearly trying to avoid calling the arrest "racist," which it clearly was. But in the face of a firestorm in the conservative *and liberal* media over this mild rebuke, Obama quickly backtracked. More recently there was the case of White House staffer Van Jones, a black former leftist. For months, rightist bigots led by moronic Fox News commentator Glenn Beck had frothed at the mouth over Obama's "green jobs" advisor Jones. The administration ignored their racist rants, until on Thursday, September 3 it was reported that Jones had once supported Mumia. By Saturday, Jones had "resigned." Since then, the right-wing media frenzy against the "communist cop killer" Mumia has continued (see Linn Washington, "Fox Finds a New Black Boogeyman," CounterPunch.org, 9 November).

As for Eric Holder, he didn't get to be the bourgeoisie's top law enforcement officer without a solid résumé. Before becoming the Attorney General, Holder was a leading corporate attorney with the firm of Covington and Burling, where he defended Chiquita Brands International against charges of funding the right-wing mercenary army that massacres union members, peasants and indigenous leaders in Colombia. In 2008, Holder filed a "friend of the court" brief to the Supreme Court supporting Washington, D.C.'s ban on handguns. Washington is the home of a majority black population that the ruling class would keep absolutely disenfranchised and powerless and which, like everyone else, has every right to bear arms. "Weapons possession," incidentally, was one of the pretexts for the 1985 Philly police firebombing of MOVE. Today, Obama's Attorney General defends warrantless wiretapping – arbitrary spying on telephone calls without even the fig-leaf



**"Freedom for Mumia – Down with the Racist Death Penalty!" Banner of the SEPE teachers union in Rio de Janeiro, April 2008.**

of judicial permission – and has called on a federal judge in San Francisco to dismiss a lawsuit against the policy because even hearing the case in court would be "jeopardizing ongoing intelligence activities."

In order to court bourgeois liberals, judges and lawyers who are concerned more with bolstering the pretense of justice in U.S. courts than with Mumia's actual innocence, Jamal's "socialist" defenders first prioritized the call for a "new trial." Now the petition to Holder for a civil rights investigation "cordially" does not say that Mumia is innocent, does not call for him to be freed, does not call for a new trial, does not even demand that the state not kill him! *This can only demoralize and disorient those who would fight to save Mumia.*

### Don't Bow to Capitalist Class "Justice"

The frame-up of Mumia and the fight to free him go to the heart of the nature of black oppression in capitalist America. The racist death penalty goes right back to the system of slave labor on which the American bourgeois republic was founded. It continues today because black oppression can't be overcome by passing a few civil rights laws, which are now being cruelly reversed, or by electing a black millionaire president (Obama's 2007 income: \$4.2 million). Over the past century, the Democratic party of Eric Holder and Barack Obama has been the preferred war party for U.S. imperialism, just as it is the capitalists' party of choice for maintaining their racist rule during times of economic crisis, precisely because of the illusions that blacks and workers have that this is "their" party. Who, after all, would want to "sacrifice" for George W. Bush? Black oppression is inseparable from the *class* question in this country, where the capitalist order rests on the forcible containment of the mass of the black population at the most exploited and impoverished layer of the working class, subject to pervasive discrimination and victimized by a sadistic regime of police brutality and mass imprisonment.

Petitioning the U.S.' top prosecutor to defend the civil rights of Mumia Abu-Jamal shows that his liberal and reformist supporters who previously put their faith in a "new trial" truly believe that Mumia's "options are finished" and are just going through the motions. But the millions who suffer pervasive racist humiliation at the hands of the police, who know by their own experience that the prosecutors and the cops have nothing to do with "justice" or "civil rights" are also those with the power to shut down Philadelphia, New York, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago and every major city in the United States. One group, the Spartacist League and Partisan Defense Committee associated with it have called to free Mumia and have done valuable work on his behalf, including unearthing the Beverly testimony that proves his innocence. In the past, the SL/PDC called to mobilize the power of labor and blacks to free Mumia. But when ILWU dock workers did so, they sneeringly dismissed it, while remaining silent about the work stoppages for Mumia in Brazil. Today they talk in the abstract of a fight for his freedom "based on a class-struggle opposition to the capitalist rulers." But a real effort to build a workers party to lead socialist revolution, in the U.S. and internationally, means fighting to mobilize *workers action* to save Mumia. Otherwise it is empty talk.

Like James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, we place no faith in capitalist "justice," and all faith in the power of the working masses. Brazilian teachers and West Coast dock workers in the U.S. have shown that working-class action to free

Mumia Abu-Jamal is possible. This past July, the ILWU once again called for freedom for Jamal, along with Troy Davis and Kevin Cooper – two other innocent black men on death row – as well as for native American activist Leonard Peltier and the San Francisco 8, former Black Panthers, all of them framed by the government. If in New York City alone the unions that are on record in defense of Mumia were to spark mass labor-black action, it would send shock waves around the country and the world.

The policy of moderation and respectability has led to dwindling numbers at protests to support Mumia at the very hour when militant protest led by the working class is most necessary. What is needed is a loud, clear and urgent call to for the workers to use their power to defend Mumia Abu-Jamal, who is on death row because he forcefully spoke out for working-class and oppressed people, and who has continued to be a powerful voice against capitalist injustice even from his prison cell. The multi-racial working class that makes everything in capitalist society move can and must make the racist judges bow to its power.

For 27 years, Mumia Abu-Jamal has been on death row for being a professed black revolutionary whose courageous indictments of racist American capitalism have earned him the hatred of the ruling class. All defenders of democratic rights, all opponents of racism, all partisans of the working class and the oppressed must now move heaven and earth to *free Mumia and abolish the racist death penalty!* ■

## Defeat U.S. War...

*continued from page 16*

in the ninth year of a war without end that even the Pentagon admits it is losing. The answer is not one more peace crawl to beg Congress or the White House for a few more crumbs, but mobilizing the working class against capitalism. That is why the Internationalist Group calls for workers strikes against the war – as well as for transport workers to "hot cargo" (refuse to handle) war materiel, and for militant labor action such as plant occupations and a fight for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay to combat unemployment. When on May Day 2008 the International Longshore and Warehouse Union shut down every port on the U.S. West Coast to stop the war in Iraq and Afghanistan and to defend immigrants, that was a small taste of the kind of class struggle we need.

The struggle against imperialist war and capitalist economic crisis must also oppose the escalating repression which the ruling class requires in order to keep down its wage slaves "at home." As an IG sign at the December 2 Times Square protest declared: "Imperialist War Abroad = Racist Police State 'At Home' – Defeat U.S. Imperialism!" The Obama administration has not closed down the Guantánamo torture-prison, and it is continuing warrantless wiretaps and other attacks on civil liberties authorized by the U.S.A. PATRIOT Act (and earlier repressive legislation by the Democratic Clinton administration). Now it is gearing up for a new crescendo of "terrorism" scaremongering ... just as the U.S. steps up terror bombing of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Obama justified the Afghan war by linking it to the 9/11 bombing of the World Trade Center and

Pentagon, even though not a single Afghan was among the bombers, and the attack was reputedly planned in Hamburg, Germany not Tora Bora, Afghanistan. Hysteria around the upcoming trial of the alleged "9/11 mastermind," to be held in downtown New York City, will doubtless be used to justify a new crackdown here.

Obama clearly did the electoral math in calculating the fallout from his Afghan escalation. He wrote off big chunks of the Democrats, figuring the Republicans would have to support him. He also is counting on liberal Democrats to support his health care "reform," which is really a giant giveaway to the insurance companies, because they will have "nowhere else to go." Of course, this strategy of trying to "govern from the center" by straddling the party divide (the Clintons called it "triangulation") runs the risk of collapse if anyone decides not to go along. We will see when the war budget comes up for a vote. But at bottom, there is no way out so long as the working class and oppressed black, Latino and Asian are tied to the Democratic Party, the bourgeoisie's party of choice in times of war and economic crisis when the ruling class must call for "sacrifice" from those it exploits and oppresses. In order to put an end to the slaughter on the battlefield and the jobs massacre here, we need to begin organizing a workers party to lead the class struggle for socialist revolution. That, as American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon wrote, is "the only road to a stable and enduring peace for the people of the world."

As a sign of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs at the December 2 NYC protest read: "Capitalism Sux: Wall Street Bailed Out, Workers Thrown Out, Afghanistan Bombed Out. For International Socialist Revolution!" ■

# Build a Revolutionary Workers Party

## Defeat Canadian Imperialism in Afghanistan, and “At Home”!



Journal de Montréal

**Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.**

*The following leaflet was distributed in French and English at a demonstration in Montréal in November 2008.*

For the past seven years the Canadian Army has fully participated in the destruction of Afghanistan. This Central Asian country has been coveted by the imperialist powers due to its geographical location ever since the “Great Game” of the 19th century between Russia and Great Britain. Currently it is a central theater of the “war on terror,” proclaimed by the U.S. government following the 11 September 2001 attacks, whose real purpose is to subjugate the entire world to the dictates of the United States. Canada plays the role of deputy commander of the imperialist expeditionary force at every level: repression and massacres of the civilian population, torture and starvation.

We say straight-out: Canadian troops must be driven out of Afghanistan! It’s not a matter of foreign policy but of the system. Whether the mission of the Canadian contingent is described as “peacekeeping” under the aegis of the United Nations or pursuing the war on the Taliban in the framework of NATO doesn’t change the colonial character of the occupation one bit. We don’t want Canadian forces to leave Afghanistan in order to be deployed in Congo ... or in the Mohawk village of Kahnawake, just a few kilometers from downtown Montréal. Canadian imperialism must be defeated, both here and there, by workers mobilization – like the strike against the war by the longshoremen on the U.S. West Coast on 1 May 2008. The

Ottawa government’s war on the Afghan peoples is the same war being waged by the capitalists against the workers and oppressed in this country.

Presently concentrated in the city and province of Kandahar in southern Afghanistan, the Canadian contingent has suffered at least 90 deaths under the blows of the Taliban. But that is nothing compared to the thousands of deaths caused by the imperialist forces. Eighty civilians were killed just in the month of July 2008, and the Canadian Army played a front-line role in these massacres. In addition to the repeated cases where the Canadian Army has turned over prisoners to Afghan prisons to be tortured, several reports show that Canadian troops have themselves beaten detainees. Two military investigations of this were promptly squelched (*Globe and Mail* [Toronto], 10 June 2008).

All wings of the Canadian bourgeoisie are a major actor in the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan. The number of Canadian soldiers present on the ground has continually increased in recent years, long before the Conservatives led by Stephen Harper took office. It was the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien that launched the invasion in October 2001 as part of the U.S. war drive. He and his successor Paul Martin have been fierce defenders of the so-called “peacekeeping mission” which has devastated Afghanistan.

Moreover, the two main parties of the Canadian ruling class joined hands in March 2008 to vote to extend Canadian

intervention until 2011. This came shortly after the publication of the report of an “independent” consultative group presided over by the former foreign minister of the John Manley government that called for intensifying the Canadian military intervention against the Afghan peoples and for adopting a strategy to make the war more “acceptable” for all Canadians.

Nevertheless, popular opposition to the war in Afghanistan is quite widespread, particularly in Quebec. That has not stopped the Bloc Québécois (BQ) of being a fervent supporter of Canadian imperialism in Afghanistan, while adding its “humanitarian” concerns. As for the New Democratic Party (NDP), it came out for withdrawal of Canadian troops at its 2006 congress, while talking about “consulting with our allies.” Even so, NDP leader Jack Layton foresaw combat operations being turned into “peace-building” activities.

The antiwar movement, both the Québec collective *Échec à la Guerre* and the Canadian Peace Alliance, centers its discourse on immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops. It seeks to pressure the parties in the Canadian bourgeois parliament to change their policies on Afghanistan, as if war were not an integral part of the capitalist system. The petty-bourgeois pacifists peddle the illusion of going back to days when the Canadian government had the reputation of contributing to “peacekeeping” in the world.

Under the administrations of Liberal prime minister Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the 1960s and ’70s, Canada indeed distanced itself somewhat from U.S. foreign policy, which gave rise to this “peace-maker” image. On the other hand, under Trudeau the Canadian Army occupied Québec in October 1970, supposedly to put down an armed insurrection by the FLQ (Quebec Liberation Front), but in reality to bring the working class to heel as it was starting to seriously upset the Canadian imperialist state. Moreover, under the Liberals, Canadian “peace” missions, particularly in Africa, were a profitable business – as the book by Alain Deneault, *Noir Canada*, has well documented.

As for us, the Trotskyists of the League for the Fourth International, we do not call on “our” capitalist ruling class to “bring the troops home” but instead call for the defeat of the Canadian, American and NATO imperialists in Afghanistan. We hail every real blow against the imperialist invader. It should be noted as well that resistance to occupation is far from being limited to the Taliban, contrary to the claims of the bourgeois media. There is in fact increasingly widespread exasperation in the Afghan population against the crimes of the Western imperialists.

On the other hand, we give no political support to the Islamic fundamentalists who are just as reactionary and hostile to women as they were at the time of the anti-Soviet Cold War, when they acted as the spearhead for imperialism. Many left-wing groups who today call on the bourgeoisie to bring Canadian troops “home” – above all the Maoists, pseudo-Trotskyists of all stripes and social democrats, supported the Muslim mujahedin in the 1980s against the Soviet forces defending the weak reform regime of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). These murderers, hailed by the

imperialists and the opportunist left as “freedom fighters,” killed teachers for the “crime” of educating girls, and threw acid on women who dared to go into the streets unveiled.

The PDPA had undertaken a timid program of land reform and emancipation of women, which provoked the fury of the Muslim fundamentalists. The U.S. government under Democrat Jimmy Carter (now viewed in Quebec as a great “progressive”), shaken by its defeat in Vietnam, hired the *ihadis* in order to strike a blow against “communism,” that is, against the remaining gains of the October Revolution which had survived Stalinism. Thus the imperialists provoked the Soviet Union to intervene to prop up the threatened Afghan government and to confront the danger of an imperialist advance on its southern flank.

Soviet intervention was greeted by the Trotskyists, then represented by the international Spartacist tendency, from which the founders of the League for the Fourth International came, while the vast majority of the left howled with the imperialist wolves against so-called Soviet “aggression.” We proclaimed “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan” and “Extend the gains of October to the Afghan peoples.” But the Stalinist bureaucracy, following the line of peaceful coexistence with imperialism, refused to undertake a genuine social transformation.

Finally, in 1989, the Kremlin pulled its troops out of Afghanistan in line with Mikhail Gorbachev’s desire to “make peace” with the United States. This catastrophic decision led to the victory of the Islamists and the destruction of the limited gains brought to women and other oppressed layers of the Afghan population. The ignominious retreat of the Soviet army played a huge role in the destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers state and the bureaucratically deformed workers states of East Europe, constituting a major defeat for the working class internationally.

At the time of the arrival of U.S.-Canadian forces in Afghanistan (in late 2001), this backward country was dominated by the deeply obscurantist and medieval regime of the Taliban. After the fact, the imperialists have sought to justify their intervention by referring to the horrendous condition of Afghan women under this Islamic clerical regime. But the reality is that the Taliban seized power in 1996 after driving out the warlords of the Northern Alliance, the current allies of the Western imperialists, who took power in 1992 and imposed even on urban women the shroud of the *burkha*, the head-to-toe veil that turns them into faceless slaves.

The imperialist talk of “liberating women” after the fall of the Taliban is nothing but a sinister smokescreen. The current puppet “government” of Afghanistan, as well as its imperialist godfathers, are bitter enemies of female emancipation which can only be begun by a revolution that breaks the power of the mullahs and the khans (the religious and tribal leaders). The only way to liberate women in Afghanistan from their condition of backwardness and obscurantism is through international socialist revolution, above all in the imperialist centers, led by a revolutionary, Leninist-Trotskyist workers party as part of a reformed Fourth International. This is the goal for which the League for the Fourth International fights. ■

## Drive Out All the Imperialists!

# Afghan Massacre Blows Apart German Occupiers' Lies

On November 27, former German war minister Franz Jung was forced to resign from his current post as employment minister. The day before, Bundeswehr (German armed forces) General Inspector Wolfgang Schneiderhan and State Secretary Peter Wichert had similarly been sacrificed as scapegoats for the government's creeping cover-up of a massacre in Afghanistan that has been described as Germany's "deadliest military operation since the end of the Second World War" (*Guardian* [London], 9 September).

In the early morning hours of September 4, the German commander in Kunduz, in northern Afghanistan, Colonel Georg Klein, insisted that U.S. fighter jets carry out air strikes on two hijacked jet fuel tankers. The tankers had bogged down in the sand of a river bed – giving the lie to later claims that they could have been used for a Taliban assault on the NATO-led ISAF ("International Security Assistance Force") base. Instead, local villagers had gathered to siphon off precious fuel. At least half of some 140 victims who were burned alive in the fireball created by blowing up the tankers were civilians – including 8-, 10- and 12-year-old children.

Who really knows how many were "insurgents" at all? The quisling governor of Kunduz initially claimed the charred corpses could not be identified at all, but then was able distinguish between armed and unarmed "insurgents" and even Chechen members of Al Qaeda. Colonel Klein had told the fighter pilots, falsely, that his "troops [were] in contact" with the Taliban and that the German base was under "imminent threat" of attack (also false). He later told investigators that he was in telephone contact with an informant who was on the scene (he wasn't). But a December 8 report by the German news radio station DLF however, suggests that Tajik informants denounced the largely Pashtun villagers (their ethnic enemies) to the Germans.

Of course, U.S. killing in Afghanistan and Pakistan with bombs and missiles launched from drones is so routine that unless more than 30 civilians are killed at any one time, it doesn't even rate a news article. (Strangely, an astonishing number of U.S. strikes over the years have allegedly claimed



AP

**Villagers near Kunduz, Afghanistan bury their dead after NATO air strike that killed at least 140.**

exactly 30 victims.) For years, U.S. commanders complained that German forces in Afghanistan were loath to enter in combat. Klein evidently decided to change all that. He had his lead flight officer (codename "Red Baron") issue the order: "weapons release." But then it all blew up in his face, and that of the German government.

While Colonel Jung pretended the dead were all Taliban down to the last charred corpse, the overwhelming majority of the Bundestag, the German parliament, rallied to the cover-up in a special session four days later. Christian Democrat (CDU) Chancellor Angela Merkel snarled in response to international press coverage about civilian casualties that she would "not tolerate" criticism "from anyone, either at home or abroad." Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the Social Democratic (SPD) vice-chancellor and foreign minister, warned against "premature judgments," while speculating about how a German withdrawal could begin. When this war crime was perpetrated, the SPD was still in a coalition government with the CDU and thus co-responsible. The main thing, all agreed, was to keep the lid on until after the elections on September 27.

Despite massive discontent among the population with the German role in the imperialist occupation of Afghanistan, this was practically a non-issue in the elections. Neither of the bourgeois "opposition" parties, the Free Democrat (FDP) free marketeers and the Greens, made any trouble. As part of the

coalition government with the SPD from 1998 to 2005 under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, erstwhile New Leftist Joschka Fischer, the former New Left street fighter turned Green foreign minister, was the most fervent advocate of German participation in the assault on Serbia and occupation of Kosovo as well as for the dispatch of troops to Afghanistan. Die Linke (Left Party), Germany's second-line social-democratic party, called in its election platform for immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan. But as the vote drew near party leaders began qualifying this: "immediate doesn't mean the day after tomorrow," etc.

In the election, the SPD took a drubbing, falling from 34 percent to 23 percent of the vote, while Die Linke's total rose from 9 to 12 percent. The Christian Democrats were also down slightly, but continued in office, this time together with the FDP. The press turned its attention to the economic policies of the new right-wing ("black-yellow") coalition, as new attacks on the working class are expected. As Chancellor Merkel stonewalled about the Kunduz massacre, it took almost two months for the truth to come out.

This set off a firestorm in Berlin: heads had to roll. Within hours, minister Jung was gone. His replacement as war minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, from the arch-conservative Bavarian Christian Social Union, initially defended the Kunduz strike as "militarily appropriate", but later backpedaled. Merkel and Steinmeier's claims to have been "out of the loop" are laughable. But after the parliamentary brouhaha was over, the German government settled back to war business as usual. Despite popular opposition, Berlin has not said no to Washington's request for more Bundeswehr troops to Afghanistan, putting off the decision until late January.

### Behind the German Occupation

For years, the German media has been filled with fulsome coverage of Afghanistan, in which occupation troops of the so-called "stabilization operation" were portrayed as social workers, digging wells and building schoolhouses. This was contrasted with the chaotic and bloody U.S.-led occupation of Iraq (from which Germany stood aside, having been denied a share of the spoils). When Afghanistan was partitioned by the imperialists in 2001, German forces were sent to the north, whose population had always been largely hostile to the Taliban. Neither Social Democrat Schröder nor Christian Democrat Merkel showed any desire to commit German troops to the more dangerous south. It was thus surely gratifying for the U.S. military to watch the Germans get their hands bloody at Kunduz.

In 1979, when the Soviet army intervened on the side of social progress in defense of the petty-bourgeois regime in Kabul in its war against U.S.-backed Islamic reactionaries, there was a hue and cry about the violation "sovereignty" of the "Afghan nation." Not a peep about that today. The imperialist spy agencies which financed, trained and armed the Islamic reactionaries in their massive proxy war against the Soviets and their allies, knew that Afghanistan was a patchwork of tribes and ethnic groups. After the disintegrating Kremlin bureaucracy under Mikhail Gorbachev betrayed Afghanistan by withdrawing Soviet troops, setting the



militaryimages.net

### Bundeswehr KSK commandos. Digging wells? Building school houses?

stage for the disintegration of the USSR, their formerly Soviet allied government in Kabul were swept aside by the Islamic reactionaries three years later. But soon rivalries between Pashtuns and Uzbeks, Tajiks and others laid waste to Kabul.

In the face of the slaughter and corruption unleashed by the feuding warlords, many in Afghanistan actually welcomed the arrival in 1996 of the Pashtun-based Taliban, created by the Pakistani secret services and bankrolled by the Saudis, hoping for a semblance of order. When U.S. imperialism decided to unseat the Taliban in 2001, it relied heavily on the Tajiks and Uzbeks of the "Northern Alliance," who took the occasion to slaughter Taliban prisoners and Pashtun minority communities in the north. French imperialism had particularly close relations to the Northern Alliance warlords. An article on "Afghanistan: The Secret War of the French," in the newsweekly *L'Express* (20 December 2001) bragged of the "longstanding ties between the French secret services and Commander [Ahmed Shah] Massud" of the Panjshiri Tajiks, who was assassinated by the Taliban on the eve of the 9/11 attack.

German imperialism initially had fewer preferences. The Karzai regime was cobbled together at a conference held near Bonn in December 2001. From 1954 on, the West German spy agency (Bundesnachrichtendienst – BND) had been in charge of training the Afghan royal police; this relationship continued even after the monarchy was overthrown in 1973. During the proxy war against the Soviets, the BND reportedly had stations in Islamabad, Peshawar and Karachi (Pakistan). Mujahedin received training from the GSG-9, the special operations unit of the German Federal Police. By the 1990s, the BND could allegedly count a number of Afghani politicians as its "friends," including Abdullah Abdullah (ex-foreign minister under Karzai and his opponent in the 2009 presidential elections), one-time

*continued on page 30*

## From Obama/Duncan to Bloomberg/Klein: What's Behind the School Closing Craze

# UFT, Students and Parents – Act Now to Save our Schools

**No to Education  
Colonialism –  
Stop the Charter  
Invasion**

**For Citywide Union-  
Led Mobilization to  
Stop School  
Closings**

*The Internationalist Group politically supports Class Struggle Education Workers (CSEW), a trade-union tendency active in the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), representing public primary and secondary school teachers and staff in the New York City public schools, and in the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), representing faculty and staff at the City University of New York. The program of the CSEW is published in The Internationalist No. 28 (March-April 2009).*

*We reprint here a recent leaflet issued by CSEW/UFT on the recent wave of school closings, in particular targeting comprehensive high schools in poor and minority areas where the city wants to install semi-private “charter schools.” Following that is an excerpt from a May 2009 leaflet on the issue of mayoral control of the schools and the CSEW’s call for teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools.*

### **By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT**

**December 9, 2009**

The NYC Department of Education has gone berserk. Last week the DOE ordered the closing of W.H. Maxwell Career and Technical High School in East New York, as well as three other schools. The next day they announced the closure of four more schools, including Jamaica High, which has one of the most active union chapters in the city. On Monday they put nine more schools on the chopping block, including Beach Channel HS in Queens, Christopher Columbus HS in the Bronx and Norman Thomas HS in Manhattan. And today they added five



Internationalist photo

**Teachers, students and parents protesting closure of Brandeis HS last February.**

to their hit list. Twenty-two schools in one week, on top of the 90 they have already closed. It’s a massacre.

This is part of a whole program to privatize public education and destroy teachers unions. The day before Thanksgiving, New York’s billionaire mayor Michael Bloomberg went to Washington to declare war on the United Federation of Teachers. Barack Obama’s education secretary Arne Duncan was sitting there to show his support. They want to shut down schools, open private charter schools, and scapegoat teachers. This is a huge provocation. They are doing it all at once because they figure the UFT doesn’t have the guts to respond. We have to prove them wrong. We can’t just fight this school-by-school. We need united action, *now*.

The union cannot walk away from this. UFT leaders may think contract negotiations are going on, but the DOE is creating “facts on the ground.” Students across the city are having their futures ripped up. Parents of African American, Latino and Asian families in particular are seeing their kids sacrificed on the altar of corporate school “reform.” The union bastions of the high school division are the targets, the charters are the spearhead of the attack. Every closed-down school means almost half the

staff thrown into the ATR<sup>1</sup> pool. And now the DOE wants to fire them after a year. The future of the union and of public education in New York City is at stake.

### We've Got to Play Hardball to Win

*The union needs to take the lead and call a city-wide mobilization to demand "Stop School Closings Now."* Teachers, students, parents and all NYC labor—we have the power. Surround City Hall in protest. Hold lunchtime information meetings of staff and students at the schools. Expose the mayor's phony "Panel on Education Policy" as a rubber stamp. Let them know: the schools won't function unless we work. Insist on no school closings unless teachers, parents, students and staff approve. *And gear up to rip up the Taylor Law that tries to stop our right to strike!*

The schools they are closing are not "failing," it is the DOE that has deliberately failed to fix problems, many of which it has created. Maxwell VHS is a perfect example. One of the leading vocational schools in the city, it has a full academic program, including college prep classes. As a result of closing other schools in the area, 2,000 students have been jammed into a school designed for 900. The number of Special Ed students is 22 percent, double that of other high schools. Yet over the last three years Maxwell's weighted diploma rate has gone from 45 percent to 72 percent. It's raw score on the city's school report cards went from 23 to 43. So why did it get a "D"? Because the bureaucrats at DOE headquarters arbitrarily changed their corrupt scoring system.

When the big high schools are closed, they are replaced by several small schools, each with its own bevy of administrators. Experience has shown that small schools do no better, and often worse on test scores than the comprehensive high schools. Many of the replacement schools are privately run "charter schools," whose main attraction for the bosses is that they are overwhelmingly non-union. This means that teachers are subject to every whim of the managers, many of whom know little or nothing about education and are out to make a buck. Charters also do no better, and often worse than traditional public schools on tests. But that hasn't stopped union-busting corporate education "reformers" from pushing them.

In New York City, Bloomberg and Klein treat the schools like prime real estate. They cook up phony statistics to justify closing down public schools and giving the space to charters. Or they push into the public schools, claiming that libraries or computer rooms, for instance, are "underutilized space." Charters are lavishly funded with state and private money while the regular schools are starved. This has set off bitter protests by teachers, parents and students from Harlem to Brooklyn. In fact, the charters are focused on poor, black and Latino areas, because city authorities are wary of the blowback they would get from white middle-class and upper-class neighborhoods. This is *educational colonialism*, and it must be stopped.

<sup>1</sup> Absent Teacher Reserve: teachers who have lost their positions due to closing or "reorganization" of their schools or programs.



Internationalist photo

**CSEW at rally to save Norman Thomas HS, December 17.**

What's fueling the charter school invasion is millions of (tax deductible) dollars from billionaire hedge fund managers. The Success Charter Network run by the ambitious yuppie politician Eva Moskowitz, who sparked outrage at P.S. 123 in Harlem, was created by Gotham Capital. PAVE Academy, which tried to push P.S. 15 out of its building in Red Hook, is the creature of hedge fund billionaire Julian Robertson. His wife runs the Girls Preparatory Charter that tried a hostile takeover of P.S. 188 on the Lower East Side. A recent exposé also revealed that "non-profit" front groups like "Democrats for Education Reform" are "financed by hedge fund heavies.... the kind of guys who a decade ago would have been spending their time angling to get on the junior board of the Met" (*New York Times*, 6 December).

Unbridled speculation by these predators was a major factor in the collapse of the world capitalist financial system last year, touching off an economic crisis that has brought untold hardship and devastation to working people. Wall Street banks got trillions in bailout dollars, while NYC schools are forced to lay off school staff and factories like Stella D'oro are shut down. The U.S. government wages imperialist war and colonial occupation, raining death and destruction on the peoples of Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. It backs a dictatorship in Honduras that murders teachers. And now the rulers are out to destroy the public schools.

George W. Bush pushed the standardized high-stakes testing mania with his "No Child Left Behind" act that condemned millions of children to rote learning as educators are forced to "teach to the test." Now Barack Obama has a "Race to the Top," using billions in stimulus funds to force states to permit charter schools, eliminate teacher tenure and introduce "merit pay." Their model is capitalist competition. For the past quarter century there has been a bi-partisan ruling-class consensus to try to milk profits from the public schools. The teachers unions

are the biggest obstacle to this.

Bottom line: the people in charge are ideological opponents of public education. Their kids go to elite private schools. As we wrote last spring:

“A class battle is going on over the nation’s schools. Big business has joined forces with both the Democratic and Republican parties in a push for corporate-designed education ‘reform.’ They want to bust teachers unions and impose test-driven rote learning on the public schools, particularly in impoverished inner city ghettos and barrios. Meanwhile, they privatize as much as they can through charter schools, many of them run by education-for-profit private companies. The aim of these phony “reformers” is not to improve education but to cut its cost, while turning the schools into lucrative cash cows for education entrepreneurs and corporate vendors. And they have the wholehearted backing of the Obama administration, which many education unions and teacher activists voted for. But they can be stopped. *We* can stop them, if we use our power.”

The response of the UFT tops to the latest attacks from City Hall is to ask the membership for more money to fund COPE. To go to Albany and try to influence some Democratic legislators? Forget it. The fact that the unions are chained to the bosses’ parties

is one of the biggest roadblocks to effective labor action. Many teacher activists want to build a movement against privatization. But since they don’t challenge the capitalist framework, any gains of such movements can be easily reversed if the balance of power shifts (e.g., with the civil rights movement). We need to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucracy and build a leadership that is prepared to use the unions’ power to wage class struggle.

Class Struggle Education Workers was formed by activists in two New York education unions, the UFT and Professional Staff Congress representing faculty and staff at the City University of New York. We are for free, quality public education from kindergarten through graduate school; stop education privatization; oppose resegregation of the schools – separate is never equal; no to mayoral control, for teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools; keep the bosses courts’ out of the unions and fight anti-labor legislation like the no-strike Taylor Law; mobilize the power of labor together with minorities, immigrants and students; and break with the capitalist parties, for a workers party and a workers government. If you want to fight for public education that serves the working people, get in touch with the CSEW.

## Mayoral Control = Corporate Control

# Who Needs the Suits?

## For Teacher-Student-Parent-Worker Control of the Schools!

By Class Struggle Education Workers/UFT

May 14, 2009

The fight over mayoral control of the New York City schools is not just about a power grab by billionaire mayor Mike Bloomberg and his education flunkie, Joel Klein. The exclusion of parents from having any say in the education of their children is not accidental but key to their program. Their “business model” of scripted “education” is designed to produce minimum wage hamburger flippers for McDonald’s and sales “associates” for Wal-Mart, while reserving a decent education for predominantly white (and some black) middle class students in the suburbs. And big companies are lined up behind them, from Coca-Cola with its no-bid contracts to supply soft drinks to fatten up students to textbook giants like Pearson and McGraw-Hill, testing giants like ETS, test prep companies like Kaplan and Princeton and fly-by-night tutoring outfits that make a mint by hiring low-paid tutors as “contractors” (and thus pay no taxes or benefits).

The leadership of our union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), has proposed a slight modification of mayoral control so that Bloomberg wouldn’t appoint a majority of the members of the toothless Panel on Educational Policy (PEP), but instead the city council and borough presidents would have more sway. Dissidents in the Independent Community of Edu-

cators agree with the UFT tops’ goal of “checks and balances,” but want more voice for the community and the union. But even UFT president Weingarten’s<sup>1</sup> timid proposal is likely to get nixed as she declared recently that there is now a “consensus” for continuing mayoral control. So now she is trying to make nice with the mayor by proposing a “collaborative” model to turn around troubled schools, which got her another peck on the cheek from Joel Klein last week.

“Collaborating” with these vultures means selling out the students and teachers. “Checking and balancing” won’t stop Bloomberg & Co., or their big business backers, who want dictatorial control of the schools in order to break union power and carry out their corporate agenda. What the UFT ought to be fighting for is to get the mayor’s claws off the schools totally. Who needs the suits at Tweed, who only manage to royally screw up education?! We in Class Struggle Education Workers call for **teacher-student-parent-worker control of the schools**. Educators and learners, school staffs and families should be democratically discussing and deciding about curriculum, programs, school hours and the rest, as well as appointing administrators, instead of the principals and their bosses unilaterally dictating terms.

<sup>1</sup> In July, Weingarten, now president of the American Federation of Teachers, resigned as head of the UFT, and was replaced by Mike Mulgrew as acting president until her term expires in June 2010.

For further information e-mail: [cs\\_edworkers@hotmail.com](mailto:cs_edworkers@hotmail.com)  
Visit the CSEW web page: <http://edworkersunite.blogspot.com>

## CLC Says: “Police Are the Armed Fist of the Bourgeoisie” Brazilian Teachers Under the Gun

Brazilian teachers in Rio de Janeiro have been under attack in recent months both by the federal government of Luis Ignácio Lula da Silva and the state government of Sérgio Cabral. Lula’s popular-front government in Brasília, in which the Workers Party (PT) is allied with reactionary bourgeois parties, is seeking to impose a “re-form” of Brazil’s trade-union and labor laws, including imposing a 40-hour workweek on all public employees, including teachers. It is also carrying out directives of the International Monetary Fund and other imperialist agencies calling for reducing government expenses by increasingly privatizing public education.

Cabral’s state government is also a “popular front,” tying reformist workers parties including the PT and the PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil – a one-time Maoist party that is now thoroughly social-democratic) to his bourgeois PMDB (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement). In addition to implementing Lula’s cutbacks, Cabral has been cutting back salary increases for length of service from 12 percent to 7.5 percent every five years, subcontracting functions carried out by school staff (such as school lunches) and implementing a “Nova Escola” (New School) plan that greatly increases the teaching load. When the teachers union, SEPE-RJ (Union of Education Professionals of the State of Rio de Janeiro) struck last September against the attack on their salary steps by Cabral’s emergency decree, PL 2.474, Cabral responded with vicious repression.

On September 8, when the SEPE staged a march of thousands of teachers in front of Palácio Guanabara, the seat of the state assembly, as it was voting on the decree, Military Police (PM) from the Shock Brigade suddenly attacked the crowd. Tear gas grenades were thrown, a dozen demonstrators were injured by shell fragments, teachers were thrown to the ground and beaten, with a number having contusions requiring hospital attention. Newspaper photographs documented the police assault, including a dramatic shot of a PM pointing his pistol directly at the unionists. Many teachers responded courageously to this unprovoked attack, militantly confronting the cops. But the union leadership headed by supporters of the PSTU (Unified Socialist Workers Party) and the PSOL (Party of Socialism and Freedom), sharply backtracked.



Agência O Dia

**Military Police threaten striking Rio de Janeiro teachers with pistol (circled) during September 8 march by SEPE in front of Rio governor’s palace when 14 union members and journalists were injured. In march the next day, reformist leaders offered flowers to the cops, saying they were not the enemy! Oh no?**

The next day when the union began its march, the leadership meekly submitted when the police refused to let the union sound truck approach the state assembly. To top it off, the SEPE leaders shamefully *gave flowers* to the Military Police who the day before had brutalized the demonstrators! They were so proud of this shameful capitulation that they later published a wall poster with the above photograph, claiming that giving flowers to the police showed that they “understood that the real enemy of education is the governor.” Although both PSTU and PSOL occasionally make a ritual bow to Leon Trotsky (they are followers of the currents of the late pseudo-Trotskyists Nahuel Moreno and Ernest Mandel) both scandalously support police “unions.” Our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB), in contrast, insist, with Trotsky, that the police are *the armed fist of the bourgeoisie*, the class enemy.

At a union assembly later that day, the SEPE/PSOL leadership majority tried to call off the strike, claiming that they had won, since the state assembly agreed to maintain the 12 percent salary increases, even though the rest of the bill passed. In particular, school staff were not included in the career plan of salary steps, condemning them to years of low pay. Many do not even receive the minimum wage. Significantly, this sector of the union membership includes many black women, who are not considered “professionals” by some in the leadership. The spokeswomen of the Comitê de Luta Classista (Class Struggle

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## Courageous Strikers Could Have Won – Class-Struggle Leadership Key

# Lessons of the Battle for Stella D’oro

After a struggle lasting more than a year, the 136 mainly immigrant workers at the Stella D’oro bakery in the Bronx, New York lost their jobs October 8, when the owners closed the plant. Fearing last-ditch resistance, Brynwood Partners – the “private equity” (read: speculation and pilage) firm that set out to break the workers’ union – shuttered the factory a day before schedule. Vindictive to the end, it turned a cold shoulder to a buyout bid from Citgo, the U.S. oil company owned by Venezuela, which offered to keep the plant going in the Bronx. Instead, Brynwood sold the brand to a North Carolina-based junk food firm, with cookies under the “Stella D’oro” name to be churned out by a non-union plant in Ohio.

The 15-month struggle at this small factory became a *cause célèbre* because it symbolized workers’ endurance and courage in defense of the most basic rights of labor. In a period of mounting attacks on unions across the country, this gained national attention. And as the fight grew ever more bitter, conflicting strategies and political conceptions were brought to the fore.

The closing of the plant was a real defeat for the labor movement as a whole. What makes it all the more bitter is it didn’t have to be this way. The Stella D’oro strike could have ended in victory – and the company’s plan to break the union and then to shut down the plant could have been stopped. To do this would have required a massive mobilization of labor’s *power*. Instead, the labor bureaucrats – from the AFL-CIO and New York Central Labor Council down to the leadership of the Stella workers’ own union – let these courageous workers go it virtually alone. While a few unions (notably teachers and nurses) came out regularly to support rallies and marches, the pattern was labor leaders paying lip service to solidarity while refusing to mobilize against this blatant union-busting.

The reasons for this are fundamentally *political*: the union leaders’ subordination to the bosses’ rules, institutions and parties. They relied on making photo ops for local “friend of labor” Democrats, and were unwilling to challenge the sacrosanct “right” of the bosses to do as they see fit with “their” property. The Stella D’oro story is a fresh and vivid example of why we need to build a *class-struggle leadership*: one worthy of the kind of courage and determination shown by these workers, not one of whom crossed the picket lines during eleven months on strike. To unchain workers’ power, we need a leadership committed to forging a revolutionary workers party and toppling the capitalist system – in which “private property” means mass layoffs, with workers thrown out while the bosses get bailed out.



Internationalist photo

**Internationalist Group, Class Struggle Education Workers and CUNY Internationalist Clubs called for labor action to stop scab production and get scab products off store shelves.**

### Picket Lines Mean Don’t Cross!

The first shot in Brynwood’s war on labor came when the company pushed out the Teamster drivers. “Picket lines mean don’t cross” – but Local 50 of the bakers union (BCTGM) told its members to cross the lines when the Teamsters struck the plant in 2006. The hard-won principles of labor are crucial to unions’ survival – this was shown again, as the company turned its fire on Local 50’s own members at the plant two years later. Brynwood’s demands for drastic cuts in wages and benefits were rightly seen as a threat and challenge to the livelihood and rights of workers throughout the region.

The Stella D’oro workers began their strike in August 2008 – and stayed solid through eleven months of heat, snow, meager strike benefits and police harassment. Unable to cow or lure strikers into crossing the line, the company brought in scabs. Strikes win when they stop production and distribution. Given the relatively small size of the striking workforce, it was especially important that NYC unions pitch in by bringing out their members in mass pickets to stop the scabs. (An *Internationalist* leaflet recalled the building trades’ massive mobilization against the scab Roy Kay firm in 1998; see “Mobilize New York Unions’ Power to Win the Stella D’oro Strike!” in *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009.) A few thousand, or even hundreds, of demonstrators could have jammed the narrow streets of this Bronx neighborhood, galvanizing support among the largely black, Latino and immigrant population in the surrounding area.

jesscarbaez@flickr.com



Union leaders and many in strike support committee pushed losing “strategy” of consumer boycott rather than militant labor action.

But from the beginning, Local 50’s leaders opted for a consumer boycott – asking the public in general to not buy the cookies – *instead of* seeking to mobilize effective support from the rest of labor, or even its own members in other plants. Thus other unions could pretend to be “doing something” just by asking their members to join in...not buying cookies. Such a “strategy” is ineffective at best in a big industry whose workers have strategic power – and totally disastrous for a strike in a small consumer-goods plant. In fact, the real purpose was as a cover for *not* organizing the militant mass actions really necessary for winning, which would have upset the apple cart of those who sought collaboration with area politicians. To make matters worse, the union officials repeatedly stood in the way of initiatives from the most active and militant strikers, while preaching reliance on the capitalist courts and politicians.

Among left activists from a range of tendencies who participated in strike support activities, the pattern was to tail the union misleaders’ losing consumer-boycott “strategy,” throw in the usual popular-frontist rhetoric about how “the people united will never be defeated,” and be seen as “best builders” of generic solidarity. Internationalist Group supporters intervened at strike support meetings and worked intensively among area unionists with the call for using labor’s muscle to get the scab products off the supermarket shelves. We also agitated for labor to block the flow of products into the struck plant – where an entire wall of the factory, along a public sidewalk, had neatly labeled entry points for each of the types of flour, sugar and other ingredients used in the production process. Such elementary concepts of class struggle were received as surprising novelties by most left activists involved with the strike.

On June 30, a judge for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that the company had violated labor law, and one left group after another – notably the Progress-

sive Labor Party (PLP) and Workers World Party – rushed to hail this as “victory.” A cold shower was thrown on all this when Brynwood announced – the very same day the workers returned to the plant – that the factory would be *closed* in October. An Internationalist Group statement warned: “With their steadfastness, the strikers beat back one attack. Now they face a new assault that is just as serious. ... In a difficult struggle, it is crucial to have clarity about who are your friends and who are your enemies. Illusions in the capitalist state are among the key obstacles that must be overcome” (“At Stella D’oro, the Struggle Continues: Mobilize NYC Labor to Stop the Plant Closing – No Concessions!” reproduced in *The Internationalist* No. 29).

Our calls for labor action to stop production and distribution struck a chord not only among Stella strikers but among super-market workers and others – yet the labor tops turned a deaf ear. The indolent functionaries of the Central Labor Council could scarcely bring themselves even to listen to the strikers’ pleas for real support. Insult was added to injury when Stella workers were told they would march at the head of the 2009 Labor Day parade – then found themselves wedged way behind in the *pro forma* procession. (Long a venue for Democratic pols to lay claim to being “friends of labor,” this year’s parade also featured floats for Republican mayor Michael Bloomberg – notorious for breaking the 2005 transit workers strike.)

### Class Struggle – or “Pressure Politicians”?

At this point, a real fight to mobilize effective working-class support for the Stella workers – in workplaces, union halls and the streets – became more urgent than ever. The Internationalist Group, as well as some of the strikers and a number of other leftists, pointed to the example of the factory occupation at Republic Windows & Doors in Chicago. Instead, the union bureaucrats preached a line of wait-and-see, looking to “friendly” politicians to somehow save the day.

The situation cried out for intransigent *class* struggle, driving home the lesson – freshly highlighted by the false “victory” of the NLRB ruling – that workers must rely on their own class power. Instead, left groups clamored ever more loudly about “the importance of pressuring politicians,” in the words of a spokeswoman for the International Socialist Organization (ISO). While the ISO played a desultory role in the strike support, this summed up the approach of a gamut of social democrats and Stalinists who share the reformist conception of a “minimum program” for today’s struggles and a rhetorical “maximum program” for the sweet bye-and-bye.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Spartacist League deserves no more than a footnote here, as it avoided any participation in the struggle other than showing up at a handful of events to sell its paper (with no articles on the strike, let alone how to win it).

In the case of Progressive Labor, there is quite a wide gulf between its speeches about “fighting for communism” and articles in *Challenge* about “communist ideas,” and its actual activity in the trade unions. To their credit, PLP supporters worked hard on building support for the strike, on the picket line and in the unions of teachers in the NYC schools (UFT) and City University (PSC). Yet as crunch time neared, they pushed hard in the strike support committee to “focus on Bloomberg” and for a “rally to call on Bloomberg to keep the plant open.” Calling on the multibillionaire mayor, New York’s No. 1 labor-hater, to save the plant was thoroughly reformist, and absurd. PLers admitted hizzoner would do no such thing, but argued that it was smart tactics to demand it anyway. Such an approach can only delude workers into thinking their class enemies can be turned into friends.

A strikingly similar message was put forward by the League for the Revolutionary Party. While PL never gave up on Stalin, the LRP claims to be Trotskyist, sort of – oddly, since its actual politics are so starkly counterposed to what Trotsky actually stood for (beginning with its claim that the former USSR was “capitalist”). While making routine criticisms of Democratic Party politicians, the LRP’s lengthy September 12 bulletin on Stella D’oro focused on pressuring those who claimed to back the Stella workers (mayoral candidate Bill Thompson, the City Council). Under the heading “How Victory Can Be Snatched From the Jaws of Defeat” it wrote:

“[L]ocal city politicians cannot be allowed to stand by without being challenged to use their power to fight for the city government to take the factory out of the hands of the private capitalists who own it. The politicians, of course, have no intention of taking such action.... But experience proves that massive action can force them to concede workers’ demands.”

Arguing that “coupling mass labor action to demands on the politicians in this way” would “point the way forward for workers around the country who are facing factory closure and layoffs,” the LRP returned to this theme again and again:

“As an urgent measure, workers should demand that these politicians who claim to support our side on imminent plant closure call for a city government takeover of the plant, rather than allowing it to close.

“Under situations of great pressure, if workers use a strategy of mass action such as we have described, capitalist politicians at all levels can be forced to institute measures that at least temporarily benefit workers.”

Going beyond the observation that sharp class struggle can sometimes force concessions and defeat a capitalist attack on the workers, the LRP is here presenting a “strategy” of “mass action” geared to pressuring bourgeois politicians “at all levels.”

Warming to its theme, the LRP bulletin called for workers to “demand that the Obama administration nationalize all union-busting and failing companies.” In discussions, LRP supporters argued that their demands came from Trotsky’s “Transitional Program” (*The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* [1938]). Nonsense. Trotsky argued that in addition to the general slogan of

revolutionary expropriation of the bourgeoisie, under certain circumstances Marxists can “raise the demand for the expropriation of several key branches of industry vital for national existence” (cookies do not generally fall into this category) “or of the most parasitic groups of the bourgeoisie.” But he stressed that “we link up the question of expropriation with that of seizure of power” and, crucially, that “we call on the masses to rely only upon their own revolutionary strength.”

What the LRP is doing here is trying to turn Trotsky’s “*transitional program*, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution,” into a recipe book for bourgeois pressure politics. They’re not alone in this. For a discussion of such opportunist flim flam, see “Exchange on Transitional Demands” in *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009.

The idea that Obama would nationalize a cookie factory in the Bronx is downright ridiculous. But the illusions the LRP is peddling – *counterposed* to the Transitional Program – go far beyond this. As Karl Marx insisted, “The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.” The demand that the government take over “all union-busting and failing companies” means spreading the illusion that it could systematically act on behalf of the working class. Moreover, the LRP bulletin says: “It is high time that the workers’ organizations demand that the government solve the real crisis of production and jobs that is currently devastating workers’ lives.” How can a capitalist government solve the crisis of capitalist production? It can’t.

These concepts are straight-out reformism. Leftists who try to get the workers movement to adopt such demands, admitting all the while that the capitalist government will do no such thing, are creating illusions – and breeding cynicism under the guise of “clever tactics.” Illusions are the last thing workers need in a tough fight. Yet the fool’s gold of Obama’s fading popularity was still too much for them to resist.

The Stella D’oro strike and the subsequent fight to stop the plant closing showed a wrenching contradiction facing working people today. During this severe and drawn-out economic crisis, many want to find ways to fight back in defense of their jobs, their children’s education and their most basic rights. The fact that the Stella D’oro workers showed such tenacity and will to struggle was the reason so many were inspired by their fight. Yet the pro-capitalist labor “leadership” stands *opposed* to even the most basic measures needed to win.

This contradiction can only be resolved if the most thoughtful and serious militants set out to build a new, class-struggle leadership based on a program for defeating the rapacious employers and replacing their entire system of racism, war and exploitation. Again, this is above all a political fight, for a *revolutionary workers party* that tells the truth and draws the hard lessons of past struggles in order to open the way to a *workers government*. We hope to see a good number of veterans of the Stella D’oro struggle as comrades in that effort. ■

## Afghan Massacre...

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defense minister Mohammed Fahim and current foreign minister Dadfar Spanta (Spiegel online, 12 January 2006).

The case of Spanta is particularly interesting. A Maoist in 1979, he was one of the many Afghan refugees taken in by West Germany (in contrast to so many Turks, Kurds and other victims of right-wing repression who have been refused asylum). Whether or not he is actually on the BND payroll, at the time he was taken on by Karzai he was most definitely an actual member of the German Greens (*Financial Times Deutschland*, April 23, 2006) and still has ties to them. One can see here is how the virulent anti-Sovietism of the Maoists and other “leftists” (former Maoists were prominent among the founders of the German Greens) was a decisive element in their transformation into imperialist flunkies.

But the German occupation forces are now in a symbiotic relationship with the warlords of the ex-Northern Alliance, principally the Tajik general Mohammed Atta Nur. As the December 8 DLF report concludes, the Germans have thus turned a blind eye to massacres of local Pashtuns by his forces. The result is, of course, that areas under German occupation are just as corrupt and impoverished as the rest of Afghanistan, despite all the hot air about Bundeswehr “well-diggers”. Even the Heinrich-Böll Foundation (the Greens’ think tank), now has to admit that “with the warlords of the Northern Alliance, a corrupt and undemocratic new leadership has been installed in the country.” Installed by whom it neglects to say.

### “Exit Strategies” and the Role of Die Linke

With German imperialist troops increasingly besieged, the Kunduz air strike was hardly the first time they had killed innocent civilians. But the Bundeswehr high command was well aware that the situation has been deteriorating. Some CDU and SPD politicians are now talking about withdrawal, and even the new war minister zu Guttenberg has hinted at this. But such talk is only tactical, to appease public war-weariness and regroup for a new intervention. In addition to the 4,500 troops in Afghanistan, Germany has another 2,400 in Kosovo. And while Die Linke, formed in 2007 by a fusion of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, the social-democratic successor to the former East German Stalinist SED) with the WASG (Electoral Alternative Labor and Social Justice, a split-off from the SPD), is against “a course to war,” it just wants a more peace-loving, people-friendly German imperialism ... and a Bundeswehr that is “like the defensive army of old Federal Republic” (Die Linke, *Schwarzbuch zur Sicherheits- und Militärpolitik* [2007]).

In this context, Die Linke is channeling public discontent into the dead-end of a hoped-for future coalition with the



Reuters

**Die Linke leader Oskar Lafontaine. Left Party calls for withdrawal from Afghanistan, but “not the day after tomorrow,” “not pell-mell,” “not unthinking,” and not “like in Vietnam.”**

SPD (which most of the SPD continues to stubbornly resist, despite heavy electoral losses). It is so fixated on parliamentary maneuvering, that it can’t even be bothered to mobilize any serious protests in the streets. Its antiwar demonstration at the Brandenburg Gate four days after the Kunduz massacre drew only 500 persons. Of course, even should Die Linke actually turn out any significant number of protestors, it would be solely as a means of pressuring the imperialists to “see reason.” As former SPD minister and Left Party co-chairman Oskar Lafontaine, put it in a *Spiegel* (14 May 2009) interview: “the SPD and the Greens will probably only come to their senses once U.S. President Barack Obama realizes that the war in Afghanistan cannot be won and withdraws his military.” So much for that fantasy.

Lafontaine speciously declared in the September 8 Bundestag debate “Why don’t we at least have the courage to decide as the Canadians have?” The “left” social democrat Lafontaine was praising Canada’s Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper for allegedly ordering the withdrawal of Canadian troops in 2011. What weasel-worded Harper actually said was that the Canadian mission, “as we’ve known it,” would end then (BBC, 11 September). This has as much reality as Obama’s bogus timetable for “transfer” of security to the Afghan puppet regime. Since the call for withdrawal from Afghanistan will be the first item sacrificed should it ever come to serious negotiations with the SPD, the Die Linke leadership was already scrambling to open a back door even before the September 27 elections.

Afterwards, as a coalition with the SPD was directly posed in the federal state of Thuringia, the Left Party leader there Bodo Ramelow even told *Welt am Sonntag* (3 October): “Our concern is not immediate withdrawal. That would be flight, as it was in Vietnam.” Dagmar Enkelmann, the head of Die Linke’s parliamentary fraction, told the newspaper *Junge Welt* on September 8, “we need a debate about an exit strat-

egy.” Die Linke Bundestag deputy and federal party manager Dietmar Batsch explained to *Tagespiegel* that “immediate withdrawal” didn’t mean “getting out of Afghanistan the day after tomorrow.” And Die Linke’s “defense” spokesman said, “That naturally doesn’t mean pell-mell. A withdrawal could be carried out over a year’s time” (*Spiegel OnLine*, 17 September). Lafontaine himself told the *Sächsische Zeitung* (16 September), “Immediate [withdrawal] naturally doesn’t mean unthinking.”

What this could concretely mean was explained by Batsch in a press conference in party headquarters on September 7 when he called for concentrating more on the training of the Afghan police. So for these “left” social democrats, it’s back to German imperialism’s longstanding focus on training Afghan police, one which it took up again in 2002. In fact, this was already a major element in the Left Party’s 82-page position paper on Afghanistan, which complains at length that the military occupation had usurped police functions, starved it of funds, etc. It even casts a dim eye on the introduction of U.S.-style policing methods in Afghanistan – as if the *German* police don’t routinely attack leftists and immigrants! The reformists’ position paper doesn’t mention that much of this training is in the hands of the super-secret KSK and GSG-9 units, the former in particular being a hotbed of nostalgia for the Third Reich. So for Die Linke, “troops out” (eventually) means “more cops.”

Just as Die Linke wants to go back to the “good old days” of the welfare state, it also wants to turn the clock back to the time when German imperialism was less openly militarized. It has openly declared its support for “national defense” – the basis for the SPD’s historic betrayal of the working class by supporting the imperialist slaughter in World War I. Lafontaine wants the SPD and the Greens to “come to their senses.” But these parties are not deranged: they understand that the interests of German imperialism are served by showing its willingness to militarily intervene, whether in Kosovo or even in the Hindu Kush. And when push comes to shove, Die Linke will fall in line as well. Although it pretends to be against German soldiers in Afghanistan, even wearing United Nations blue helmets, the party’s parliamentary fraction was ready to support sending German warships to the Red Sea with the right U.N. mandate.

### The “Far Left” Tags Along Behind Die Linke

One might think that the greatest single massacre by the German military since the end of World War II would have occasioned more of an outcry. But as in other imperialist countries, Germany is in the grip of a racist anti-Muslim “anti-terrorist” drive which was recently expressed in an openly racist outburst by SPD central banker Thilo Sarrazin and was the impetus behind the murder of an Egyptian woman in a courtroom in Dresden this past July, as well as providing a definite niche for the fascists of the NPD (National Democratic Party). So Christian Democrats, Free Democrats, Social Democrats and National Democrats and Greens could all get together and make the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the opening of

the Berlin Wall into an orgy of anti-Communism, presaging the subsequent *Anschluss* (annexation) of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) by triumphant German imperialism.

The mass peace movement of the 1980s was saturated with German nationalism and ultimately produced the future warmongers of the eco-imperialist Greens. Likewise, at the time of the 1989-90 collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the (DDR), almost the entire West German “extra-parliamentary” left joined in the push for (capitalist) reunification of the German “fatherland.” (At most some of them would have preferred the SPD to lead the *Anschluss*-Express.) The Trotskyists, in contrast, fought to defend the DDR against counterrevolution and for a political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy that was selling it out. Again at the time of the imperialist attack on Iraq in 2003, the large antiwar demonstrations in Germany essentially amounted to cheering the decision by the Schröder government to sit this war out. “Without us,” was the leitmotiv, which is a far cry from a communist program of class struggle to defeat imperialism. While Die Linke calls for withdrawing from NATO, Trotskyists fight to smash the imperialist alliance and for a united socialist states of Europe.

The bulk of the German supposed “far left” is quite content with Die Linke’s paper position on the war. Indeed, this is one of the main selling points for most of them to join Die Linke outright. For the former Linksruck, the German affiliate of the British Socialist Workers Party, the liquidation is quite brazen. It closed up shop in the spring of 2007 and set up a loose “Marxist network” around the review *Marx21*. Not even pretending to be any kind of left opposition, they have been easily absorbed into the party apparatus. All they are asking, as former Linksruck leader Christine Buchholz now on Die Linke’s national committee put it, is to “step up the pressure on the federal government with all our strength and bring the majority demand for withdrawal of the Bundeswehr from Afghanistan onto the streets” (*Marx21* No. 6, June 2008). A little “extra-parliamentary” action in support of Die Linke’s parliamentary maneuvering.

The opportunists of Sozialistische Alternative Voran (SAV), the German branch of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) are a wee bit wilier. The CWI’s English-language publications have focused on the fact that some prominent SAV members have not been allowed into Die Linke. But this is merely the result of an opportunist miscalculation. When the WASG was founded in 2005 by dropouts from the SPD and various homeless “lefts” in western Germany, the SAV latched on to this, particularly in Berlin, where the PDS, the East German social democrats and main future component of Die Linke, was in the ruling coalition together with the SPD. Given that this coalition was slashing social services and attacking municipal workers, the SAV tried to build up a part of the WASG as a slightly more left-wing social-democratic alternative to the PDS.

But when in June 2007 the bulk of the WASG merged with the PDS to form Die Linke, the SAV was left out in the cold. For more than a year the SAV assumed convoluted postures as its members were told to join the Die Linke in the West, but not

in the East, and tried to maintain the rump WASG in Berlin. But it was the same national party, with the same program! In September 2008 the SAV gave up on this charade, although nothing in the character of Die Linke had changed. So they're half-in Die Linke, and half-out. And while SAV now offers some polite criticisms of Die Linke's coalitionist yearnings (its main complaint on Afghanistan are the overtures to the SPD), it's only on the basis that it could thereby improve its electoral scores.

The bulk of the opportunist "far left" is now cranking out economist propaganda about fighting back against the austerity measures planned by the new CDU-FDP. In this propaganda, the FDP (which appealed to a yuppie electorate dissatisfied with the CDU as well as SPD) is singled out as the bogeyman. This sets up Die Linke (or even the SPD) as the lesser evil, when it was in fact the capitalist SPD-Green government which launched the most effective hammer blows against the working class and oppressed in the Harz IV package of massive cutbacks in unemployment insurance and forced employment (requiring recipients to take "jobs" at €1 an hour in order to receive benefits).

In the worldview of the opportunist "far left," struggles against layoffs, against cuts in social services, "anti-racism," "anti-fascism," "anti-war", etc., are carefully compartmentalized in order to mount reformist pressure campaigns around this or that demand rather than the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, which is the integral link between them. In differing degrees these groups lay claim to the heritage of Lenin and Trotsky, or used to, yet none of them are prepared to call for defeat of their own imperialism in a colonial war. (Both the CWI and SWP explicitly reject this call as inappropriate for the masses.) Tellingly, virtually the entire "left" ignored the example given by the May 2008 strike against the war by the dockers of the U.S. West Coast.

When it momentarily escapes the stranglehold of the trade union bureaucracy, the German working class has shown that it is ready to fight. Even the recent building cleaners' strike, conducted for the extremely elementary demand for maintenance of a minimum wage, shows that a whiff of class struggle can cut across national and ethnic divisions. But what this working class needs is a leadership true to the spirit of Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht in the *class* struggle against imperialist war – a revolutionary workers party armed with the program of authentic Trotskyism. ■

## Brazilian Teachers...

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Committee), the trade-union tendency linked to the LQB, argued against calling off the strike, spoke about the role of the police, denounced the "militarized popular front government" of Cabral and called for strike pickets to turn the walkout into a serious strike. The CLC distributed a leaflet headlined "Our Worst Threat Are the Popular Fronts." The vote to call off the strike lost by a 3-to-2 margin, despite the opposition of the majority leadership. But by the next week, the SEPE leaders had worn down the membership and the work stoppage was



Agência Globo

**The police are professional repressors, the armed fist of the class enemy.**

called off, even though it maintained the fiction of being in a "state of strike" readiness.

Those most notably hurt by calling off the strike were the low-paid school staff (*funcionários*). They are still not part of the salary steps career plan, their jobs are still threatened by subcontracting (*terceirização*), and while teachers received their salaries for the days on strike, staff workers were not paid. In a subsequent SEPE assembly in Rio for school staff on November 28, the CLC delegate presented a motion of solidarity with the *funcionários*, calling on the union to make up their lost pay from the SEPE's strike fund. The motion was approved. The delegate from the CLC also showed a series of banners which the SEPE in the steel city of Volta Redonda prepared (at CLC initiative) depicting important moments of labor history, including the 1988 steel workers strike, and going back to the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.

Other banners emphasized key events in black history, including the slave rebellion led by Zumbi dos Palmares in the 17th century, and the struggle today for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, in which the SEPE has played an important role. At the proposal of the LQB/CLC, Rio teachers have on three different occasions called work stoppages demanding that Mumia be freed, the latest in May 2008. The banners also emphasized the struggle against the presence of Brazilian troops in Haiti, where they are serving as mercenaries in U.N. blue helmets to enforce the interests of U.S. imperialism. The SEPE has approved motions from the CLC calling on workers to mobilize to drive Brazilian troops out of Haiti and the military police and army out of the impoverished *favelas* (slum districts) of Rio.

If the PSTU and PSOL trample on the heritage of Trotsky and the Bolsheviks in considering the police workers and allies, this flows from their overall policies of reforming, rather than sweeping away, the bourgeois state. It also reflects the mentality of a labor aristocracy, concerned to preserve a privileged status in the face of the all-sided capitalist attack against the working class. If many in the SEPE consider themselves "professional educators" rather than education workers, this blinds them to the fact that the police are *professional repressors*. What is needed, as the CLC's September 2009 leaflet said, is a fight against all the popular fronts of class collaboration, and to forge a revolutionary workers party that fights for a workers and peasants government and for socialism. ■

## Massacre in Maguindanao

# Warlords, Clan Wars and Capitalist Rule in Philippines

**Down with Martial Law – U.S. Forces Get Out – Defend the Bangsamoro!  
For a Trotskyist Party to Fight for Workers Revolution!**



Rolex Delia Penal/European Pressphoto Agency

**Philippine police amid bodies dug up from massacre in Maguindanao province, November 23.**

MANILA/NEW YORK, December 20 – On November 23, some 57 people including women and journalists were massacred in Barangay Saniag, in the province of Maguindanao on the southern Philippines island of Mindanao. Among those killed were the wife of the deputy mayor of Buluan, Esmael (Toto) Mangudadatu, as well as several other female relatives. Supporters and companions of the Mangudadatus were on their way to the Commission on Elections (Comelec) office to file a Certificate of Candidacy for the deputy mayor to run for provincial governor. Also among the victims were 18 journalists who were accompanying them. At around 10:30 a.m., they were blocked at a checkpoint manned by some 100 Maguindanao police and armed civilians allegedly led by Datu Andal Ampatuan Jr., the mayor of Datu Unsay town and son of Maguindanao's present governor, Ampal Ampatuan Sr. The entire cavalcade was kidnapped, and then executed one by one and buried in shallow graves. Even the victims' vehicles were

burned and buried to hide the evidence.

The horrific massacre and pictures of the killing field sent shock waves through the islands. It was the biggest election-related massacre in the history of the Philippines as well as the largest number of journalists killed in a single event. That the Ampatuans were responsible was quickly established by an eyewitness and journalists who at the last moment didn't go on the caravan. Initially there was resounding silence from Malacañang, the presidential palace. For several days there were no arrests. The reason why was obvious: the Ampatuan clan were not only members of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's party, Ampatuan Sr. was a key ally who had delivered vital block votes that gave Arroyo a spurious majority in the 2004 election she stole. In the infamous "Hello, Garci" phone call recordings during vote counting that were later leaked to the press, Comelec commissioner Virgilio Garcilano assured her excellency that they would have no problems

in Maguindanao.<sup>1</sup> “Garci” was right about that: more than 140,000 of the 1 million vote margin she demanded came from that one province (“The Ampatuans, the Military and Elections in Maguindanao: The Ties That Bind,” *Bulatlat*, 14 December). GMA owed the Ampatuans, big time.

As outrage mounted, eventually Ampatuan Jr. turned himself in, in hopes of quieting the uproar. But as politicians denounced the killers as “monsters,” soon journalists were producing reams of investigative reports on warlordism in Mindanao. What they showed is that *all* the national political dynasties were hooked up to *all* the feuding clans in the South. Ampatuan Sr. had run the province of Maguindanao with an iron hand since 2001, “as father, grandfather, uncle, and in-law to at least 10 mayors, vice mayors, and other local officials in the province” (*Newsbreak*, 26 November). He was first put in office, however, by Arroyo’s reputed liberal predecessor, Corazon Aquino. This monster was Cory’s man. Moreover, while they were bitter enemies of the Ampatuans, the victimized Mangudadatus were also allies of Arroyo, who ran the province of Sultan Kudarat next door. Probably because of that, they figured that if they sent a caravan of women to register Toto Mangudadatu’s candidacy, and if there were plenty of journalists along to record the event, they would be safe. It was a fatal miscalculation.

Since the controversy wouldn’t die down, on December 5 President Arroyo had Governor Ampatuan Sr. taken into military custody for “questioning” and the province placed under martial law. This would allow troops to make arrests without warrants and restore order, according to cabinet secretary Eduardo Ermita, the *eminence grise* who runs Malacañang for GMA. Some 4,000 soldiers of the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) flooded Maguindanao. They discovered an arms cache buried in one of the Ampatuan compounds with enough weapons for a military brigade. Moreover, the arms bore the markings of the Department of National Defense. What a surprise! It was well-known that the AFP armed local clan militias to back up its brutal offensive against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the area. In particular, the AFP used the Ampatuans against the MILF in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). After several years of truce and negotiations, in August 2008 the government suddenly junked a tentative deal recognizing the Muslims “ancestral domain” and relaunched the war (see “Philippine Government Launches New War on Muslim Groups,” beginning on page 37 of this issue).



In classic Vietnam counterinsurgency style, the military cleared out whole swaths of the countryside, forcing three-quarters of a million people into refugee camps. More than a year after the army launched its offensive against the MILF rebels in this historically Muslim region, some 300,000 refugees remain, many of them living in soggy makeshift huts and under buildings, afraid to go home. Up until the November 25 massacre, the Ampatuans were Arroyo’s main political ally in holding the Bangsamoro population at bay. Accompanying the AFP on Mindanao and other southern islands is “an elite, 600-soldier [U.S.] counterinsurgency force that operates in Mindanao alongside Philippine armed forces,” as the *New York Times* (23 November) reported from the area only a couple of days before the Maguindanao massacre. The “visiting forces” agreement for the Joint Special Operations Task Force Philippines was

renewed this year by the new Obama administration in Washington. And as the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (9 August 2008) remarked under a dramatic photo of a U.S. soldier in an armored personnel carrier in Zamboanga City, with “no sign of leaving after 6 years” (now seven), “it sure is becoming a long visit.” We can also be sure that the U.S. special forces are linked to the warlords’ militias, as they also are in Afghanistan.

The League for the Fourth International calls on the workers movement internationally, and particularly in the United States, to demand the *immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces and agents from the Philippines*. Philippine workers should take action to *force the imperialist forces out*, as they did with Clark Air Force Base and Subic Naval Base which were used as staging areas for the Vietnam War. Defenders of democratic rights should vigorously *oppose the martial law imposed in Maguindanao province*. The military will carry out plenty of warrantless arrests, but that will hardly produce justice. The precedent will be used elsewhere in the country to impose “security” controls during the 2010 elections, and possibly even to postpone them and prolong Arroyo’s stay in the presidential palace. There are always plenty of incidents by sinister forces that can be used to justify such draconian measures, and if not they can be arranged. In addition, Filipino workers should act to *force the withdrawal of the AFP from the contested southern areas*, and to *defend the Bangsamoro people and their right to self-determination*.

### Political Warlordism and Clan Wars in the Service of Capital

Political warlords have existed in the Philippines for quite a while, and not just in the South. This is not some

<sup>1</sup> See “Presidential Crisis in the Philippines,” *The Internationalist* No. 22, September-October 2005.

heritage from a distant feudal past, to be ascribed to Spanish viceroys or Muslim sultans. This phenomenon of local political clans and their private armies grew rampant under the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the 1970s. It came in all varieties. Sugar barons in Negros and the Visayas, logging lords and landlords in the Cordillera, the Cojuangcos' domains in Tarlac or the Marcos' political fiefdom in Ilocos Norte. Warlordism was particularly prevalent in Mindanao as the government brought in huge numbers of colonists from elsewhere in the Philippines in order to dominate the indigenous Muslim population. Arroyo has cultivated warlords there, as did Cory Cojuangco Aquino before her. The clan wars of Mindanao are an expression of *decaying* capitalism in this semi-colonial country as whole regions are driven into penury and the bourgeois state needs auxiliary forces to keep "order" – particularly in areas such as the Bangsamoro region that are under military occupation.

Various left-wing groups have responded to the Maguindanao massacre by pointing at the system of *trapo* (traditional politician) politics, which fostered such political bosses' domination over their fiefdoms. Sonny Melencio's new Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM – Power of the Masses Party) issued a statement headlined, "Justice for the Maguindanao Heroes! End Trapo Politics Now!" It notes that "the political impunity of the families and clans that control the political establishment is a permanent feature of politics in this country. It's the mark of trapo politics." True enough, but when it talks of "ending trapo politics," what does that mean? Melencio calls to "end to elite rule and establish a government of the masa." While elsewhere he refers vaguely to "socialism" and "change," this could be the "socialism" of a Hugo Chávez, whom he hails, which has fostered an avaricious "Bolivarian bourgeoisie." Melencio, a Filipino-style social democrat, carefully avoids any reference to *class* struggle, and particularly to *socialist revolution* of the workers leading the peasantry and oppressed peoples. Yet no (bourgeois) democratic program is going to put an end to "elite rule," which is rooted in *capitalism*.

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the National Democratic Front (NDF) issued denunciations of the gruesome massacre and called for opposition to martial law (as did the PLM). They also point to the complicity of U.S. imperialism. Yet while hoping for an "Oust Gloria" movement to arise from the furor over the massacre, for the last few months the Stalinist "national democratic" camp has been trying to join up with any "democratic" *trapo* it can do a deal with. Last spring, NDF co-founder and current leader of the Bayan Muna party list Satur Ocampo, and Gabriela women's party list spokesperson Liza Maza announced the formation of a new Makabayang coalition for the May 2010 elections. "This is the politics of genuine change ... *politikang mula sa masa* [politics of the masses]," Maza said in her speech, adding that the coalition stood for patriotism, democracy, people's rights and welfare. At the same time, Rep. Jose de Venecia called for "a coalition between the centrist forces and Makabayan" ("Left-wing groups unveil new party coalition," *Inquirer.net*, 16 April).

What this coalition with "centrists" meant was spelled out

recently, as Ocampo went shopping for a leading bourgeois presidential candidate to hook up with. Fellow Bayan Muna Rep. Teodoro Casiño bragged that "we have a sure base of more or less three million votes" to offer (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 13 November). Ocampo tried to bargain with Benigno Aquino III, but although they had a common foe in GMA, the issue of Hacienda Luisita was a sticking point. The Aquino family doesn't want to give up their estate despite farmers' demands that it be parceled out under the agrarian reform law. Then Makbayan turned to Sen. Manuel Villar, the presidential candidate of the Nacionalista Party (NP). Things seemed to be going alright until Villar signed an alliance with Ilocos Norte Rep. Ferdinand (Bongbong) Marcos Jr., son of the former dictator (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 November). But in spite of the "delicate position" this presented for Ocampo, he and Maza evidently overcame any qualms and on December 14 the two announced they would be "guest candidates" on the Nacionalistas' Senate slate, and perhaps sharing in the NP's "campaign kitty."

Political warlordism, clan warfare, *trapos* and the rest of the distinguishing features of Philippine politics are not some incidental blemishes or warts that can be smoothed over with a little political Botox or removed with some democratic cosmetic surgery. They are not anachronistic survivals from the past. They are essential characteristics of capitalist rule in semi-colonial countries that *cannot*, in this imperialist epoch, achieve the essential elements of the classical bourgeois revolutions without overthrowing the rule of the bourgeoisie. *Agrarian revolution* threatens even the most liberal of the landlord-capitalists, as the Cojuangco-Aquinos have made clear with the Hacienda Luisita massacre.<sup>2</sup> To talk of *democracy* after the Maguindanao massacre and when even "progressive" politicians join the *trapos* to get some of that vital political cash – is a cruel joke. As for *national liberation*, you certainly won't have that with U.S. special forces traipsing around Mindanao "advising" their Filipino counterparts on how to put down rebels – like in the Jolo massacre of 1906 when U.S. Marines slaughtered 900 Moros fighting for independence.<sup>3</sup> In the Philippines, massacres tell the story.

All these tasks require that the workers seize power, with the support of impoverished farmers and oppressed peoples, and proceed to the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and *international* socialist revolution. This is something the Stalinists and social democrats cannot and will not fight for as they are buried in forming alliances, coalesce with any bourgeois party or politician that they can in opposition to the Arroyo regime. It requires the formation of a revolutionary party of the proletarian vanguard, a Leninist party based on the Trotskyist perspective of *permanent revolution*. Such a party, independent of all bourgeois forces, would fight to defeat the warlords, to drive U.S. troops out of the country and consistently defend the Bangsamoro and their fight for self-determination. This is the program of the League for the Fourth International. ■

<sup>2</sup> See "Massacre of Sugar Plantation Workers in the Philippines," *The Internationalist* No. 21, Summer 2005.

<sup>3</sup> See "The Class War In Southeast Asia," *The Internationalist* No. 17, October-November 2003.

## Speech by Esteban Volkov (Sieva) on the 69th anniversary of the Assassination of Leon Trotsky

# The Triumph of the Fourth International: The Duty and Task That Is Still to be Fulfilled

*We publish below the words of Esteban Volkov (Sieva), the grandson of Leon Trotsky, on the anniversary of the death of the co-leader, together with Vladimir Lenin, of the October Revolution of 1917. His speech was given in front of the funeral monument designed by the Mexican muralist Juan O'Gorman in the garden of the Museo Casa León Trotsky in Coyoacán, Mexico. This was where the great Russian and internationalist revolutionary lived the last years of his exile, before being assassinated by a Stalinist agent in August 1940. Among those who attended the ceremony were a dozen comrades of the League for the Fourth International. A spokeswoman for the Grupo Internacionalista, the Mexican section of the LFI, gave some brief remarks and at the end The Internationale was sung in Spanish, English, French and Russian.*

On August 20th, it will be 69 years since the day when on a hot summer afternoon, returning from school after a long walk to our house at Viena 19, in Coyoacán, I was able to see alive, for the last time, my grandfather, Lev Davidovitch, better known as Leon Trotsky.

It still seems to me as if it was yesterday, when on that afternoon, through a half-opened door of the library, I saw my grandfather, mortally wounded, lying on the kitchen floor with his head bloodied, and at his side his inseparable companion Natalia, who was applying ice to the head wound, attempting to stop the hemorrhaging. Also at his side, if I remember correctly, were the American comrades, Charlie Cornell and Joe Hansen.

Upon hearing my steps in the room next door, motioning in that direction, he said, "Keep Sieva away, he must not see this." Shortly before, he had also admonished the comrades upon hearing the groans and cries of Stalin's agent coming from his office where he was being beaten by one of the comrades: "Don't kill him, he must talk," were his words.

By the time he was in the hospital, in his last conscious moment, before going into surgery, he gave his last message to Joe Hansen: "I am sure of the triumph of the Fourth International. Forward!"

Stalin, the bloody tyrant of the Kremlin, supreme leader of the counterrevolution, had finally managed to assassinate one of the most noteworthy revolutionaries which humanity has produced, who together with Lenin played a decisive role in the preparation, execution and triumph of the first socialist revolution on the planet.

The assassination of Trotsky was the culmination of the extermination of Lenin's comrades in struggle, and of the great majority of the generation which made possible the victory of October. These were the methods that Stalin used to maintain his usurping and illegitimate bureaucratic regime.



El Internacionalista

**Esteban Volkov speaking on the anniversary of the assassination of Leon Trotsky, August 2009.**

Scarcely three months earlier, in the early morning of May 24, we had suffered a first, failed attempt on the life of Leon Trotsky in the big house in Coyoacán. On that occasion the painter Alfaro Siqueiros together with 20 or so Stalinist fanatics had stormed the house at Viena 19, preventing the comrade guards from leaving their quarters, raking it with intense fire while pouring machine-gun fire into the bedroom of my grandparents from three different directions, using Thompson sub-machine guns. Quick thinking by Natalia, who immediately pushed grandfather out of the bed and kept him in a corner of the dark bedroom, was what saved both of their lives. At the time I slept in the neighboring bedroom, and was grazed by a bullet on the big toe of my right foot.

Firebombs thrown into my bedroom, in order to burn the cabinets and destroy archives were the unmistakable calling card of Stalin, since only he could have been interested in their destruction.

It is difficult to describe on this occasion, how filled with joy and euphoria grandfather was at having emerged alive from this first failed attempt at assassination. Only the discovery of the absence of the guard on duty, Sheldon Hart, cast a shadow over the atmosphere.

But Lev Davidovitch knew that the break would be short and that his days were numbered. Every day when he got up he said, "Natasha, they have given us one more day of life."

The question was, where would the next attempt come from? So much so that when he suffered the fatal attack, covered with blood, his glasses broken, standing in the door frame, when Natalia rushed up to him, he only exclaimed: "Jackson!" and

*continued on page 46*

## Mobilize Workers Action to Defend Bangsamoro Peoples' Struggle! Drive Out All U.S. Imperialist Troops and Agencies!

# Philippine Government Launches New War on Muslim Groups

Jay Director/AFP



**Philippine army artillery in North Cotabato province August 12 to drive Moro Islamic Liberation Front out of 22 villages it occupied after government cancelled autonomy agreement.**

MANILA, Philippines, 13 September 2008 – War officially came to southern Philippines again as the government of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo dissolved the government peace panel, unilaterally putting an end to eleven years of negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) September 3. Three days later, as AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) task forces launched sweeps searching for MILF units in Central Mindanao Region, rockets from a helicopter gunship killed fleeing civilians including two children and a pregnant newly wed teenager (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 September 2008). While left-wing groups, opposition legislators and Muslim scholars denounced the government for calling off peace talks, reports came in of U.S. Special Forces soldiers accompanying AFP patrols. From a few hundred American soldiers in 2001, the number of U.S. troops in the Philippines grew to over 5,000 participating in the “Balikatan 2006” maneuvers on the southern island of Jolo. After the maneuvers were over, they never left. Congressional committees are investigating whether this violated the Visiting Forces Agreement.

Fighting already broke out last month when government officials suddenly refused to sign a Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain that had been negotiated with

the MILF. The agreement was to have set up an autonomous regional “entity” in traditionally Bangsamoro areas<sup>1</sup>. The MOA was due to be signed at a ceremony on August 5, but at the last minute Arroyo called it off citing an injunction by her kept Supreme Court. What actually happened was that military hard-liners in the government negotiating team leaked the contents of the agreement to the press, touching off an uproar among Christian local officials in areas that were to be included in the Bangsamoro Judicial Entity (BJE), whereupon the high court issued its injunction. Angry commanders of the MILF’s military forces then proceeded to occupy areas which would have been included in the BJE, while right-wing local officials announced a “Reformed Ilaga Movement” to hunt down rebels. (The dreaded Ilaga vigilantes terrorized Muslims and left-wing activists during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos.)

At least 100 people have been killed so far in the renewed fighting, hundreds more injured and 500,000 displaced from their homes as a result of clashes between AFP and MILF

<sup>1</sup> Land of the Moro (Muslim in Spanish) people (Bangsa in Malay), the southern Philippines areas historically including the Sulu Archipelago, much of the large island of Mindanao, and Palawan (see map, page 38).

**Build a Trotskyist Party in Philippines!**

forces, as well as reciprocal burning of Christian and Muslim villages and communal massacres. While the press screams about MILF atrocities, it is the capitalist government of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo that is responsible for setting Filipino Christians and Muslims against each other. The AFP tops calculated on quickly wiping out the MILF forces, supposedly lulled into complacency by eleven years of ceasefire, in order to then concentrate their forces against the guerrillas of the Communist-led New Peoples Army (NPA). Earlier, GMA and her militarist aides such as Eduardo Ermita and Norberto Gonzales had sought to use the Memorandum of Agreement to sneak through a “charter change” (“chacha”) in the Constitution, allowing her to stay in office after her present term (won through rampant election fraud) runs out in 2010. But now that they have run into resistance, all their plans have all gone up in the smoke of battle.

Bourgeois liberals and the petty-bourgeois left lamely call on the government to resume the “peace process,” which in any case was only intended to wear down the insurgents. (Talks with the NPA have been stalled since 2004.) But Arroyo announced that henceforth any negotiations will only be on the basis of “disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation” (DDR) – in other words, abject surrender. As opposed to the reformist/liberal pipedreams of “peace,” revolutionaries would seek to mobilize Philippine workers to drive out all U.S. forces, whatever their legal status; to force the withdrawal of the AFP from the contested southern areas; and to defend the Bangsamoro people and their right to self-determination.

### Colonization, Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

The island of Mindanao and the southern island chains of the Sulu Archipelago have been ethnically and linguistically distinct from Luzon and the northern islands for centuries. They were Islamicized in the 1400s under the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao. The region was never really conquered by the Spanish, who eventually recognized the independence of the sultan of Sulu. When the United States conquered the Philippines in the 1898 Spanish-American War, it carried out bloody massacres in the South, notably the first battle of Bud Dajo (1906) where up to 1,000 Moros were slaughtered by U.S. Marines in the crater of a volcano. (The Moro Massacre was made infamous by the Anti-Imperialist League in the U.S. and in particular by its vice-president, Mark Twain, who fought for Philippine independence.) As American colonial rulers established their authority over the next several decades, major U.S. corporations took over much of Mindanao, including Firestone



Shaded areas in enlarged map are the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) established in 1996 with MNLF.

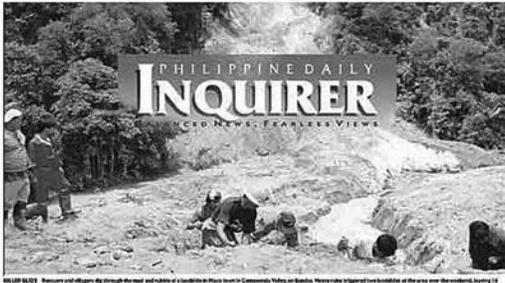
**Bangsamoro (land of the Moro, or Muslim, people) region in the southern Philippines, centered on the island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago has been ethnically and linguistically distinct from the northern Philippines Islands for centuries.**



(rubber); Dole, Del Monte and United Fruit (pineapples); and the timber and paper giants Weyerhaeuser and Boise Cascade. It was only with independence in 1946 that the region was formally integrated into the Philippines.

During the 1920s and '30s, Christian settlers began moving into the region. In the 1950s, as part of its anti-Communist counterinsurgency program against the People's Liberation Army (HMB), the government combined mass assassinations of “guerrilla suspects” with a “land reform” that sent peasants to militarized colonies in Mindanao. But the real surge in migration came later: “The movement speeded up dramatically under the Marcos regime – more than three million Christians are estimated to have settled in Mindanao between 1966 and 1976, Marcos' first decade. The consequences have been devastating” (Ajiz Ahmad, “Class and Colony in Mindanao,” in *Rebels, Warlords and Ulama: A Reader on Muslim Separatism and the War in Southern Philippines* (Institute for Popular Democracy, 2000)). By 1976, the Muslim population of Mindanao had fallen to 40 percent of the total, compared to 98 percent at the start of U.S. colonization, and Moros owned less than 17 percent of the land, mostly in remote infertile mountain areas. With the native population having become a minority due to colonization, the question of ancestral lands became a key issue.

In the early 1970s, an insurgency arose in the Muslim population leading to the founding of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The Front received backing from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the



**Fighting resumes in South**

**AFP air, ground forces attack Moro rebels**

**Mom saved 4 kids before deadly slide hit her house**

**Lim absolves Harper, contractor faces charges for tree-cutting**

**Ultraelectromagnetic hangerover: What really happened, according to the Eraserheads**

**Chavit named deputy nat'l security adviser**

**US troops' stay questioned**

**Inflation hit 12.5%**

**'Visiting forces' set up camps; no sign of leaving after 6 yrs, say officials**

Qaddafi regime in Libya. Initially landing blows against the AFP, the MNLF suffered military reverses as the government resorted to indiscriminate bombing, mass rape, burning of whole villages and massacres. When the OIC put pressure on for negotiations, a Tripoli Agreement was reached in 1976 for a southern autonomous region. But as the government dragged out negotiations and then called for a plebiscite in the 13 provinces affected (nine of which now had a Christian majority), talks collapsed. In 1984 the insurgency split and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) was formed, more religious than ethnic nationalist in orientation, which argued that negotiations for autonomy were a trap and instead there must be armed struggle for independence. After a resurgence of guerrilla struggle in the early 1990s, the MNLF signed a Memorandum of Agreement in 1996 setting up an Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). MNLF chief Nur Misauri was elected governor.

With the MNLF leaders effectively bought off by the perks of office, the mantle of militant opposition passed to the MILF. But by 1997 the Islamic Front, too, was negotiating with Manila. In 2000-01, another splinter group surfaced, the shadowy Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), originating in contacts with *jihadi* (holy war) groups from Indonesia to Afghanistan. Rather than a mass insurgency, the ASG specialized in kidnappings for ransom and indiscriminate terror against mass transportation and Christian communities. As part of their ongoing negotiations, the MILF reportedly coordinated with the government in isolating the ASG and driving it from its

original base (International Crisis Group, "The Philippines: Counter-Insurgency vs. Counter-Terrorism in Mindanao," May 2008). The MILF expected to be rewarded with control of the Bangsamoro Judicial Entity, covering much of the same area as the earlier Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao negotiated with the MNLF. But the generals evidently decided they no longer needed the services of either the MNLF or MILF. Beginning last year there were clashes between the AFP and units of both Moro fronts, and after months of back-and-forth, the negotiations came to an abrupt halt on August 4.

Under the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) that had been initialed and was to be signed at a ceremony in Malaysia, the BJE would supposedly enjoy self government, as well as management of natural resources. In addition to the territory of the now moribund ARMM, the BJE would include other predominantly Muslim baranggays (districts) scattered around the islands. But when the MOA-AD was leaked, local officials launched protests and even liberal media in Manila objected to provisions allowing economic cooperation and trade relations with foreign countries ("Don't Sign – Yet," editorial in *Philippines Daily Inquirer*, 4 August). The Supreme Court issued its injunction against implementation of the agreement and ordered "further review" by the government. When several local MILF commanders decided to implement the MOA on their own, the government dispatched combined AFP units on "punitive actions" against the guerrillas and bombed MILF strongholds. In addition, it placed bounties on the heads of the rebel commanders, and handed out guns to the Ilaga vigilantes who are burning Muslim homes and fanning anti-Moro chauvinism in North Cotabato. The slaughter has begun.

**For Permanent Revolution in Southeast Asia!**

In justifying her policy of "disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation" as henceforth the only basis for talks, the president said that she would not negotiate the MOA-AD "at gunpoint." But that, of course, is exactly what she is proposing: to talk "peace" only *under the guns of the AFP*. The terms dictated by "General" Arroyo have never worked as a basis for a peaceful agreement between opposing armed groups, and how could they? "DDR" can only mean surrender and capitulation, which no insurgent group would do unless it was facing imminent defeat. The government's real policy was summed up in its *Oplan Bantay Laya* (Operational Plan Freedom Watch), announced in January 2002 as part of the U.S. "global war on terror" (GWOT in the Pentagonese dialect). The aim of this "final solution" to rebellion was "to decisively defeat insurgents armed groups," particularly the NPA, and to "degrade the military capability of the SPSPGs" (Southern Philippines Secessionist Groups). For this it has received more than \$4.6 billion in military aid from the U.S. Treasury.

According to a September 3 [2008] statement by Amirah Ali Lidasan, president of Suara Bangsamoro, the scrapping of negotiations with the MILF shows that the Arroyo regime was never serious about forging peace with the insurgents. So, too, does the

fact that the terms of the MOA-AD were kept secret. GMA now seeks to end the decades-old rebellion of the Bangsamoro people by setting Christian settlers and Lumad hill tribes against the Moros. Noting that the Moros were forcibly evicted from their lands in endless military operations, SB points out: “The settlers and the Lumads in Mindanao lost their lands for these same reasons. We were made to fight over what was left of the land, ravaged by multinationals and landed elite.” Yet Suara Bangsamoro seeks to unite the different oppressed sectors on a (bourgeois) *democratic* basis, rather than a program of united *class struggle*. And it calls in vain for Arroyo to “keep the atmosphere of peace in Mindanao”! How likely is that?

Same theme from the MILF leadership, which countered by issuing statements that it has not abandoned peace talks and will continue to ask the Philippine government to comply with the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domains. The MILF added that it will wait for the formal notice from the Malaysian facilitators of the Philippines government’s unilateral decision to end the negotiations! Such impotent legalistic appeals will not stay the hand of a regime that is out for blood. Meanwhile, Representative Satur Ocampo of Bayan Muna (People First) party-list said he had long suspected that the government had no intention of signing the MOA-AD, and noted that DDR is the government’s policy in the stalled “peace talks” with the National Democratic Front. Some left groups have launched protests against the war in Mindanao, calling for the immediate resumption of peace talks. But all the efforts of the MILF and the NPA to negotiate and renegotiate seem doomed to fail: such talks cannot resolve the issues that have led to decades of rebellion throughout the Philippines.

No bourgeois government in Manila will provide land to the impoverished peasantry or genuine autonomy to the myriad oppressed peoples of the archipelago. Such measures would mean the downfall of the government and a body blow to Philippine capitalism, which is based on superexploitation and heavy-handed repression. The policy of the GMA regime is no different than that of all the governments that preceded hers. When they “negotiate” it is only to wear down the rebellious insurgents, or to avoid being toppled by mass revolt. It is no accident that all the Philippine governments since “independence” have essentially been *bonapartist*, military-based regimes. Whoever sits in the president’s chair in Malacañang Palace – whether GMA or General Fidel Ramos, the “democrat” Cory Aquino or the dictator Ferdinand Marcos – it is the AFP that calls the shots on behalf of the Filipino capitalists and their Yankee imperialist overlords. Nor is this a peculiarity of the Philippines: it is a confirmation of Leon Trotsky’s theory and program of *permanent revolution*.

Basing himself on an analysis of the defeated Russian Revolution of 1905, and then the victorious October Revolution



Bullitt Marquez/AP

**Strutting martinet Gloria Macapagal Arroyo reviews honor guard at change of command ceremony, May 12. Arroyo and her militarist clique seek to crush insurgents and prolong her regime.**

of 1917, Trotsky wrote that in the imperialist epoch the weak bourgeoisies in the countries of belated capitalist development (whether semi-feudal, colonial or semi-colonial) are incapable of realizing the tasks of the bourgeois revolution. Only the working class can achieve national liberation, agrarian revolution and democracy by seizing power at the head of the poor peasants and all the oppressed, under the leadership of a communist party, and then proceeding to undertake socialist measures while extending the revolution internationally to the imperialist centers. This program was diametrically opposed to the Stalinist-nationalist delusion of building “socialism in one country.” The illusory character of that anti-Marxist dogma was demonstrated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Stalinist-ruled, bureaucratically deformed workers states of East Europe. And it is tacitly confirmed by the Filipino Mao-Stalinists of the CCP, who today are not even fighting for a nationally limited revolution.

Trotskyists stand on the side of the NPA peasant guerrillas and the Bangsamoro insurgents against the murderous Philippine capitalist regime, but without supporting their reformist and bourgeois-nationalist *politics*. The “armed struggle” of Filipino Stalinists is in fact “armed reformism”: like the MNLF and MILF, the PCP/NPA and NDF want to use their military units as bargaining chips to negotiate their way into office. Their dream is not to replicate Stalin’s Russia or Mao’s China, but to imitate on a smaller scale their Nepalese comrades who are now administering the bourgeois state (and repressing Nepalese workers)<sup>2</sup>. Even if by some twist of fate they were

<sup>2</sup> After eight months as prime minister, Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) resigned as prime minister of Nepal in May 2009 over the Maoists’ inability to dismiss the head of the Nepali army.





**They aren't singing Kumbaya. U.S. ambassador Kristie Kenney and then AFP chief Gen. Hermogenes Esperon at opening of Balikatan 2008 military exercises in February.**

Even partial actions by the workers can show to the Moro peoples and other indigenous peoples of the Philippines that the Filipino working class supports their struggle for self-determination. Many leftists understand instinctively that the GMA regime will never grant genuine autonomy, much less independence to the Bangsamoro peoples. But they believe that somehow this can be won under a “democratic” capitalist regime. Thus the Cordillera People’s Democratic Front stated, in an August 25 declaration: “genuine autonomy can only be achieved within a truly free and democratic state, free from imperialist control, domestic feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism.” But that can only come about under the rule of the working class – there is no non-bureaucratic capitalism or “national” bourgeoisie free of imperialist control. And while the Stalinist and social-democratic reformist left may talk of self-determination, they call only for autonomy within the Philippines, never accepting the possibility of independence for Bangsamoro. Trotskyists recognize the right of independence for the Moro peoples while fighting for a socialist federation of Southeast Asia.

The League for the Fourth International along with comrades in the Philippines has called to “recognize the right of oppressed nationalities to independence (self-determination) from colonial-like rule of the bourgeois states of Indonesia and the Philippines” and for “defense of the insurgents and defeat of the military offensives against the Aceh, Moro, and Papuan peoples” while fighting for “equal rights of national and ethnic minorities under a revolutionary workers state” (see “The Class War in Southeast Asia,” *The Internationalist* No.

17, October-November 2003). Filipino Trotskyists fight for *international* proletarian revolution, and hail the action of U.S. dock workers who shut down West Coast ports on May Day. A struggle for workers action to sweep away George W. Bush’s puppet Arroyo will have an impact far beyond the Philippines.

U.S. forces are certainly participating in the current AFP offensive, while all the while denying it. Despite the ban on foreign military bases in the Philippines constitution, U.S. Special Forces have a HQ at the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines in the AFP’s Western Mindanao Command at Camp Navarro, in Zamboanga City (*Business World*, 12-13 September). But the U.S. also was intimately involved in the previous negotiations – so much so that some Filipino nationalists wondered if they were an American plot to take over Mindanao. The Center for People Empowerment in Governance notes that U.S. military had “direct access to the MILF including its military camps” through the Philippine Facilitation Project of the U.S. Institute of Peace (a CIA front group). And it points out that the Memorandum of Agreement “binds the MILF to honor private landholdings, corporate plantations, foreign investments particularly in energy resources, as well as the presence of foreign forces in Bangsamoro” (*Bulatlat*, 31 August). Even right-wing senator Panfilo Lacson questioned the frequent visits of U.S. ambassador Kristie Kenney, who spends “out of 365 days at least 120 days in Mindanao” (*Philippines Daily Inquirer*, 9 September). Thus in explaining the abrupt shift in the government’s attitude on the peace negotiations with Moro insurgents, one has to consider the U.S. interest.

For one thing, there is ExxonMobil’s recent interest in exploring for oil in the Sulu Sea. Also, the Philippines was the fourth-largest recipient of U.S. military aid – after Israel, Egypt and Colombia – until it was recently surpassed by Georgia. It can hardly be coincidence that in the last six months, the U.S. client regimes in Colombia, Georgia and the Philippines have launched military attacks against local adversaries (Colombian attack on FARC guerrillas in March, a failed Georgian attack on Russian-backed Ossetia in early August, the Philippines military offensive against Moro areas in late August). Word has evidently gone out from the Pentagon and the White House to strike now, whether the aim is to distract attention from the morass in which the U.S. finds itself in Iraq and Afghanistan, to bolster the presidential chances of Republican “warrior” John McCain, or as a last gasp from the Bush-Cheney administration. A U.S./Israeli nuclear attack on Iran could be next. But in any case, action by the Filipino working class to thwart Arroyo’s military plans could throw a wrench into Washington’s war plans.

For the indigenous peoples’ struggle for self-determination and independence to lead them out of the terrible poverty and oppression to which capitalism has condemned them, the key is to build the nucleus of a genuine Filipino Leninist-Trotskyist party to fight for workers revolution in the Philippines and throughout Southeast Asia, in the struggle to reforge the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution. ■

# Popular Front Diverts Workers into Legalistic Dead-End Life and Death Struggle for Independent Unions in Mexico

The Mexican government headed by President Felipe Calderón of the clerical-rightist National Action Party (PAN) launched a war on labor that is likely to be the key battle for the existence of unions independent of government control. Just before midnight on Saturday, October 10, the federal government sent more than 5,000 police and army troops to seize the generating plants and other installations of the state-owned Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LyFC) electrical power company. An hour later, the president issued a decree liquidating the company and firing all 44,000 employees belonging to the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME). The draconian measure also affects another 20,000 retired electrical workers. Earlier in the week, Labor Secretary Javier Lozano officially refused to recognize the elected leader of the SME, Martín Esparza. Rumors spread that the government intended to destroy the SME and prepare the way to privatize electrical energy. Then Calderón called out the *federales* (army and police) and the battle was joined.

This arbitrary act of force set off a firestorm. Thousands of electrical workers rushed to the SME union hall in the center of Mexico City; at 3 a.m. there were 10,000 gathered. As union leaders denounced the government's action over and over, militant unionists cried out, "Enough pep talk. We need a plan of action!" By Sunday morning there were 30,000 workers marching in the streets of the capital, including many members of other independent unions and students, chanting "*Aquí se ve, la fuerza del SME*" (Here you see the power of the SME). By October 15, when the SME called a mass protest, well over 300,000 poured into the streets and crowded into the Zócalo, the capital's main plaza. One of the most popular slogans was, "*Si no hay solución, habrá revolución*" (if we don't get a solution, there will be a revolution). When the union called a "national work stoppage" a month later, on November 11, at least 200,000 joined marches all over the capital. The government arrested 10 unarmed electrical workers, accusing them of trying to murder heavily armed cops.

For the last two months, the struggle over the fate of the SME has been the central issue in Mexico, even eclipsing Calderón's much publicized "war on drug trafficking." The government set up centers to dole out severance pay to LyFC workers, but only a minority of the employees came (many of them office workers). Tens of thousands of electrical workers



**SME electrical workers demonstrate outside headquarters of LyFC during national work stoppage, November 11.**

have held daily marches, often joined by other unions, including the dissident teachers of the CNTE (National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers), university workers, students and peasants. Repeatedly in union assemblies, workers have demanded strike action. Yet the SME leadership has looked to the courts and the national Congress for salvation. A call on Congress to go to court to challenge the constitutionality of the government's action, a request by the union to the Supreme Court for an *amparo* (temporary injunction) holding off the liquidation of LyFC, tens of thousands of individual requests for *amparos*: all have been turned down, as was entirely predictable.

Faced with a solid wall of rejection by the state, the union leaders have sought refuge in the arms of a "popular front" tying the workers organizations organizationally and politically to the bourgeois nationalist opposition. This includes the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the Party of Labor (PT), and the Broad Progressive Front (FAP) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known by his initials, AMLO. López Obrador was the PRD's presidential candidate in the 2006 elections, which the PAN candidate Calderón "won" by massive electoral fraud, a realm in which Mexico's capitalist rulers are world champions. In response, AMLO called huge marches and meetings of over a million people in the capital and organized a giant sit-in that occupied Mexico City's main avenue, Reforma, for six weeks. But these "forceful" actions only served to divert the mass anger into impotent pressure tactics.

Now the cause of the electrical workers has been added to the AMLO popular front. As in the past, union leaders have been quite inventive in coming up with new “coalitions” to siphon off worker militancy. A few days after the October 15 march, at a mass assembly in the SME union hall, a National Front of Popular Resistance was announced, with representatives of the PRD, PT and even Mexico’s long-time state party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), on the stage. Following the “national work stoppage” of November 11, a second popular-front organization was announced, the National Movement for Progressive, Democratic and Left Unity. This “movement” is tasked with calling a new constituent congress that would supposedly put an end to poverty, injustice and marginalization, according to López Obrador. Yet nothing short of a socialist revolution can achieve these goals.

The Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International, has played an active role in the struggle to defend the electrical workers, and all workers, against the government’s brutal anti-labor offensive. The GI has put out a number of leaflets and articles, distributed and sold by the thousands to demonstrators, calling to prepare a general strike in central Mexico, the area serviced by the dissolved electrical power company. It has fought in Mexico’s National University (UNAM) and in college preparatory schools for work stoppages in support of the electrical workers. The Comité de Lucha Proletaria (Proletarian Struggle Committee), a trade-union tendency associated with the GI, has agitated among telephone workers and in Mexico City’s Metropolitan University (UAM) for union action in defense of the SME, including electing strike committees. And the GI has insistently emphasized the need to break with the PRD and the AMLO popular front of class collaboration, and begin the construction of a revolutionary workers party fighting for a workers and peasants government.

### **The Struggle Against Corporatist Control of Labor in Mexico**

The Mexican president wants to imitate Ronald Reagan’s breaking of the air traffic controllers strike in 1981 and Margaret Thatcher victory over the British coal miners union in 1985. He is going after the electrical workers union because it is the most powerful workers union in the country that is independent of direct government control. To grasp the importance of this key struggle, it is necessary to understand the role that corporate state control of labor has played over the last three-quarters of a century. In fact, the Electrical Workers is the oldest trade-union in the country, founded in the middle of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17. In taking on the SME, the capitalist government, with the backing of every major employers’ association in the country, is trying to destroy the workers movement as a whole. To defeat this war on labor will require a corresponding mobilization of the power of the working class.

Most so-called unions in Mexico are part of the CTM and other federations that for decades have been part of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which under different names ruled the country from 1929 to 2000, and is still in power in a number of states. First as the PNR (National Revolutionary Party)

formed by Plutarco Elías Calles (El Jefe), then renamed as the PRM (Party of the Mexican Revolution) by General Lázaro Cárdenas in the late 1930s, and then as the PRI, this “party” was the political apparatus of state power. In the heyday of the priato (PRI rule), Mexico was a one-party state, in which the “PRI-government” expressed the fusion of party and state. PRI operatives moved seamlessly between government ministries, party offices, state-owned industries and the “unions” which were one of the main components of the regime. Rather than workers organizations, these were organs of state control of labor, modeled on Mussolini’s fascist Italy (from which Mexico took its labor law). The corporatist labor bodies were formally a sector of the state party and along with similar organizations of peasants, women, students, youth, military officers, architects, musicians, etc. organized the whole of society.

A key reason for the existence of this elaborate structure is Mexico’s proximity to the United States. The 2,000-mile border is the longest land frontier, by far, between a poverty-stricken semi-colonial country of the so-called “Third World” and a “First World” imperialist power. Thus, after robbing Mexico of half of its territory in the 19th century, U.S. rulers from the early 20th century on have paid close attention to keeping a lid on socially turbulent Mexico, whether by invasion (during the Mexican Revolution) or by closely supervising its government. During the anti-Soviet Cold War, the U.S. intervened to get the Mexican state to take over unions and drive out communists. To give an appearance of “democracy,” it was decided to allow some “opposition” parties, known as *palero* parties, financed and controlled by the PRI-government. By the 1970s, this system was decaying, and the government began setting up alternative labor federations such as the CT, still controlled by the PRI. A decade after the 1968 massacre of a student rebellion, it instituted a political “opening,” even including some “far-left” organizations, all financed by a raft of state subsidies, to ensure that they didn’t get “out of hand.”

But as the imperialists launched a worldwide offensive against labor unions and the Soviet Union in the 1980s in the name of “free markets,” Mexico’s heavily state-owned economy became an anomaly. Again under pressure from the U.S., successive PRI presidents privatized 80 percent of the state enterprises, and along with this ripped up the system of social benefits (housing, health care, retirement, subsidized food, etc.) which it had set up to pacify the powerful working class, and to compensate for low wages (which made Mexican labor “competitive” on the world market). In 1988, the PRI barely squeaked by through blatant fraud, in which the electoral computer system “broke down,” depriving left-nationalist Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the presidency. Cárdenas together with other ex-PRI politicians went on to form the Party of the Democratic Revolution, whose apparatus was staffed with ex-members of leftist groups, particularly the now-defunct Communist Party. And as unions began to escape from the PRI/CTM, they were politically tied to the PRD through multiple popular-front coalitions.

The PRD became a significant electoral force with its appeals for “democracy,” and when the right-wing clericalist National Action Party won the 2000 presidential elections, it

was partly because PRD supporters figured the PAN was better placed to oust the stifling PRI machine. But once in office, the PAN presidents did anything but further democratic rights. On the contrary, both Vicente Fox and his successor Calderón have maintained control of a number of key corporatist “unions,” notably the teachers (SNTE) and oil workers (STPRM), while militarizing the country. Mexico used to have a relatively small army by Latin American standards, since social control was maintained by the PRI’s all-encompassing corporatist apparatus and its elaborate social welfare programs. Now that that system has broken down, state-owned companies are auctioned off, social security programs are eliminated, and in their place there is heightened repression: less carrot and more stick. So today even unions linked to the PRD are seen as an obstacle to the privatization offensive.

### Break with the Popular Front – Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!

Calderón is out to break the SME in order to finish the job of dismantling the “Old Mexico” of corporatist labor control and state bureaucracy and replacing it with a “brave new world” in which businessmen reign supreme. The government is pursuing a broad reactionary program, including a tax on food and medicine, introduction of electronic identity cards, attacks on peasant organizations (not just the Zapatistas) and writing into state constitutions an absolute ban on abortions. And just as the right-wing’s watchword of “democracy” is a mask for unbridled police power, the free-marketeers’ markets are hardly free. Mexico’s economy today is dominated by a few politically powerful conglomerates which obtained their holdings by favors from the PRI and PAN rulers. Thus the struggle to defend the SME could become the spearhead for a broader working-class offensive against the capitalist assault. But by placing it under a popular front, as the SME leaders are doing together with López Obrador and the PRD, they are guaranteeing that the struggle will not challenge the rule of the bourgeoisie. *This is a ticket for defeat.*

The Grupo Internacionalista has been known for its insistence that the corporatist “unions” are not workers organizations but instruments of control of labor by the capitalist state, which actively intervenes to dictate union policies and name (or veto) union leaders. The GI calls for full independence of the unions from the state, not some vague kind of “autonomy” which would include some degree of government control. Although the SME is a formally independent union,



it is still under the thumb of Mexico’s labor law. An important aspect of the current battle is the presence of a corporatist electrical workers “union,” the SUTERM, in the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE), which has supplied workers to scab on the SME by repairing damaged LyFC power lines. The Grupo Espartaquista (GEM), which used to hold the Trotskyist position of fighting for trade-union independence until it expelled the founders of the GI in 1996, today claims that the corporatist labor bodies are workers organizations. A GEM leaflet lamely called on SUTERM members not to scab, while ignoring the fact that the “union” itself was born from effort by the state to squelch independent action by electrical workers in the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

Since their appeals to the courts and Congress failed, the SME leaders are reduced to begging for “dialogue,” which the government keeps postponing, and in any case says it won’t withdraw its decree. So today the SME leadership and the AMLO/PRD popular front are trying to divert the electrical workers’ struggle into political theater in the streets. The first was a symbolic “takeover” of the capital on December 5, the anniversary of the historic entry into Mexico City by

Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution. While occasionally mouthing the words “general strike,” the focus is on “building a new social movement” aiming toward the 2012 presidential election. In these circumstances, the most combative electrical workers are beginning to question the strategy of their leadership. Particularly now it is crucial to underline the need not just for “new” or more “militant” leaders but for a class-struggle leadership that breaks with the politics of bourgeois nationalism and the popular front to fight for a revolutionary workers party built on a program of proletarian internationalism.

After three failed bourgeois revolutions, the “social transformation” of Mexico that will eliminate poverty, exploitation and social oppression will not be a replay of the peasant struggles of the past but a workers revolution, supported by the peasants and the millions of poor who have been thrown off their land and forced to migrate to the cities or the North where they can form a human bridge to the working class in the imperialist heartland. ■

<sup>1</sup> This one leaflet was the extent of the GEM’s intervention in the electrical workers struggle, from which it has been largely absent, as it also was during the 1999-2000 UNAM student strike. In both cases, this appears to be linked to an internal political crisis over just how abstentionist from the class struggle it should be.

## Fourth International...

*continued from page 36*

pointed to the assassin who was pinned down by the guards, as if to say, "That's where what we were expecting came from!"

My reuniting with grandfather was in Mexico, in August 1939, a year before his assassination. I was 13 years old at the time, and arrived from France with the Rosmers, old friends of my grandparents.

My memories of Lev Davidovitch during this last chapter, this last year of his existence, are very sharp and clear. It is difficult for me to describe with words, to impart the image of the living being, of the revolutionary with the magnitude and the brilliance of Leon Trotsky.

He was a human being of exceptional intelligence, and of total, absolute commitment to the struggle for socialism. His whole personality was shaped by the framework of this struggle. He was generous, supportive, patiently explaining and politically educating the comrades, with a great sense of humor, creating a jovial and warm atmosphere around him.

He was a tireless worker, not wasting a minute of his existence, radiating vitality and optimism. He had great admiration for human labor, where he did not permit privileges or distinctions. The word fear did not exist in his vocabulary.

What most impressed me about his person was his absolute certainty, his immovable confidence in the coming of socialism in the future of humanity.

A certainty that he acquired through his experiences of life, of having participated as a key personage and privileged observer in one of the most notable and astounding events in the history of humanity, the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, which in its beginning laid the basis for genuine socialism, and which later due to the adverse historical circumstances of the time degenerated under the blows of a counterrevolution. At least it demonstrated once and for all that socialism is a tangible and achievable reality.

Those of us who do not accept that there is eternal life, do believe that in the immortality of ideas.

Leon Trotsky had such an active and prolific mind in analyzing, elaborating theses and political slogans, that he transcribed and bequeathed to us an immense and inexhaustible arsenal of Marxist ideology and theory, the fruit of more than 40 years of revolutionary struggle, such that I venture to say that Leon Trotsky is still with us. His immense Marxist legacy enables us to analyze and understand all the past and present historical happenings, and to plan the future.

In the face of the increasingly voracious and brutal capitalist regime of today, in speaking of the socialist revolution, the words of Leon Trotsky come to mind: "Never was there a greater task on earth. The Party demands everything of us, totally and completely. In exchange, it gives us the immense satisfaction of participating in building a better future and carrying on our backs a particle of humanity's greatest dream, and that our life will not have been lived in vain."

Leon Trotsky's last message to Joe Hansen was: "I am sure of the triumph of the Fourth International. Forward!"

This has not yet been accomplished. This is the duty and it is also the task to be carried out by the comrades who fight with the example and the ideas of the great revolutionary Leon Trotsky.

Let us remember his words:

"My faith in the socialist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today, than it was in the days of my youth.

"Natasha has just come up to the window from the courtyard and opened it wider so that the air may enter more freely into my room. I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall, and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression and violence, and enjoy it to the full."

Thank you.

Esteban Volkov

21 August 2009

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The Supreme Court and Congress Are Instruments of Capital, And It Will Take More Than a “Civic Work Stoppage” to Defeat Calderón’s Decree

## Mexico: Forward to a General Strike In Defense of the Electrical Workers

“Neither PAN, nor PRI, nor PRD – Workers to Power!”



José Carlos González/La Jornada

Electrical workers demonstrate on October 15 against mass firing decreed by President Felipe Calderón.

**Break with All the Capitalist Parties and Politicians!  
Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

*We print below a translation (slightly abbreviated) of the leaflet, several thousand copies of which were sold by our comrades of the Grupo Interenacionalista/México, at the November 11 national work stoppage in support of the electrical workers and at subsequent mobilizations.*

MEXICO CITY, November 10 – A month after the police seizure of the installations of the Central Light and Power Company<sup>1</sup> (Luz y Fuerza del Centro, or LyFC) and the firing of more than 44,000 active workers, a “national work stoppage”

<sup>1</sup> The Compañía Luz y Fuerza del Centro used to be the Mexican Light and Power Company, owned by U.S. and Canadian investors, before it was nationalized in 1960.

has been called in support of the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) for November 11. The blow against the SME by the government of the usurper Felipe Calderón (who took power in 2006 in an election marked by massive fraud), is the decisive battle for the future of unions independent of the iron control of the state in Mexico. The electrical workers with their symbol of a fist and thunderbolts have been the bastion of working-class opposition to the bosses’ governments in recent decades. It may also be turning point for the privatization offensive by the Mexican capitalist class and its imperialist masters. Conferring the solution of this historic battle on the robbed arbiters of the Supreme Court of Injustice and the politicians

in the national Congress amounts to having confidence in the judicial and legislative branches of *the capitalist state*. This state not only is not neutral, it is a gigantic apparatus for the repression of the working people and the subjugation of the oppressed. What's at stake is the fate of the entire workers movement. Thus, it is of the utmost urgency to mobilize the power of the working class to defeat this capitalist assault.

When workers chant, “¡Aquí se ve, la fuerza del SME!” (Here you see the power of the SME), this is not simply rhetoric. The electrical workers have enormous power, which could be the axis of a counteroffensive by the whole of the proletariat against capital. But if it doesn't use this power, as with electrical current, it will be lost. We in the Grupo Internacionalista

have called since the very first day to *prepare a general strike* in central Mexico (the area supplied with electrical power by LyFC). After several weeks in which various union leaders have talked of a national strike, there will now be a *civic work stoppage*. This is not the same thing as a *workers strike* which shuts down production – and much less a general strike, which places on the agenda the political question of who shall rule the country. In reality, the civic work stoppage will be a big demonstration of some sectors of the working people. With luck, it may be larger than that of October 15, when more than 300,000 people took to the streets in support of the SME. But however imposing this may turn out to be, it will still be no more than a pressure tactic in the framework of a “popular front” which chains the workers movement to the bourgeois “opposition.”

It is the duty of all working people to come out to demonstrate their support for the SME on the 11th. However, in order to use their economic power to make the gears of the capitalist machine grind to a halt, it is necessary to break with the supposed “allies” of the bourgeois parties and politicians, above all the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the Party of Labor (PT), Convergencia and the Progressive Broad Front (FAP) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Following the mega-fraud of the 2006 elections, López Obrador, popularly known by his initials AMLO, called numerous mega-marches and a mega-sit-in which occupied Reforma avenue and the center of the capital for six weeks. And did anything change? Calderón is still ensconced the Los Pinos (the presidential residence, Mexico's White House) attacking the workers, while the mobilizations called by the AMLO popular front only served as a safety valve to let off steam so that the popular anger would not explode the bourgeois state. The same will happen this time around, unless it is decided to use “the power of the SME” *and of the rest of*



**Electrical workers at October 15 march accuse Calderón of lying in calling them privileged. While SME has one of the best contracts in Mexico, the average electrical worker wage is only US\$500 per month.**

*the working class* to bring to a grinding halt the machinery of production and undertake a struggle against the capitalist system. This requires preparing to all out wage class struggle. There is already a class war, we're experiencing it. Yet it is one-sided: the attacks are only coming from the side of the bosses.

The government of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) which usurped power has carried out an increasing militarization of the country, supposedly to combat drug trafficking but in reality to crush the workers movement. In the midst of the worst capitalist economic crisis in 75 years, and with the backing in Congress of the former state party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the regime wants to further impoverish the working class by imposing a value-added tax on food and medicine. And to top it off, it wants to make a huge step toward privatization of energy production, along the way destroying the most powerful “independent” labor union in Mexico. Calderón's labor secretary, Javier Lozano, a lawyer for the business mafia in the state of Puebla, is a thug who follows the logic of strong-arming opponents, pummeling them in order to intimidate. His response to the electrical workers was: “first sign your severance papers [i.e., agree to be fired] and then we'll see.” He says that the “extinction” of the Light and Power company is “an accomplished fact,” one of his favorite ways of influencing the timid. Under a ferocious propaganda campaign in the media against the union, some 15,000 LyFC employees asked for severance pay, which is clearly a weakness; however, the more than 22,000 who have refused to surrender are more than enough to defeat the bully boy of the Secretariat of Labor and the president who compensates for his weakness by parading around in military garb – if, that is, the electrical workers *really are not alone* (as their supporters chant in demonstrations) and if they can count on solidarity



**400 SME workers participated in worker-student guards of UNAM campus in 1999-2000 student strike, called for by the GI. Now students are supporting them.**

action by the working class.

In an assembly held in the headquarters of the SME on November 5, dozens of unions announced their participation in the upcoming work stoppage. Shortly after, the Union of Telephone Workers of the Mexican Republic (STRM) voted to join the work stoppage with a one-day “collective stayaway.” However, before going to the Zócalo (Mexico City’s huge central plaza, in front of the presidential palace) to support the SME, STRM leader Francisco Hernández Juárez is going to take the telephone workers contingent to the Secretariat of Communications to support Carlos Slim (the third richest capitalist in the world). There he is going to ask that the concession of LyFC’s network of fiber-optic cable (one of the “jewels” that the government is counting on auctioning off in the course of its privatization) be given to Teléfonos de México (the privatized telephone monopoly now owned by Slim) and not to a Spanish company whose executives include several front men who are friends of Calderón. What an example of the class collaboration that characterizes the “independent” union bureaucracy!

After the spokesman for the STUNAM (Union of Workers of the National University) was met with a chorus of “¡Huelga! ¡Huelga!” (Strike, strike) in the November 5 assembly because of his vacillation over joining the work stoppage, STUNAM is now saying that it too will put up red-and-black flags (symbolizing a struck facility in Mexico) in university installations as part of a 12-hour work stoppage. Students in various faculties of the UNAM have voted in favor of participating, as have various Colleges of Sciences and Humanities and other college-preparatory schools. It is also reported that various campuses of the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), of the Metropolitan University (UAM) and the Mexico City University (UACM) will also take part in the stoppage. In addition to shutting down offices and classes, there will be street closures and demonstrations everywhere, which in the afternoon will converge on the Zócalo. But it certainly *won't* be a strike that paralyzes the capital, and not by accident. Even though Martín Esparza, the general secretary of the SME, is calling on the population

to “lower the switch” and turn off the lights for two hours, what’s really needed is a powerful action by the unions, including a strike in Mexico City’s subway and the telephone system – which would lead to a confrontation not only with the PAN president and the PRIAN coalition in Congress, but also with the government of the Federal District headed by PRDer Marcelo Ebrard.

Felipe Calderón’s *sabadazo* (Saturday night coup) was carried out with military planning down to the last detail: first, there was the diversion maneuver of refusing to sign the “*toma de nota*” (taking note) confirming Martín Esparza

as the leader of the SME; then some 5,000 federal police and soldiers were mobilized to seize the installations a little before midnight when people were celebrating Mexico’s victory over El Salvador in a preliminary match for the World Cup of soccer.

What they didn’t plan with as much precision was how to make the antiquated equipment of the LyFC run. Almost from the moment the Mexican Light and Power Company was nationalized in 1960, successive Mexican governments have sought to reprivatize it. In order to justify such a step, they refused to invest in updated equipment, especially generating plants. As a result, the state-owned company had to buy power from the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE), which it sold at a very high price, even as LyFC was required to resell it to industries and businesses at rates well below the purchase price. Thus it’s no surprise that the company was running a constant and increasing deficit. They figured that any CFE technician could repair the inevitable equipment failures, but it hasn’t turned out that way. In the days after Calderón’s decree, patrol cars of the federal police went prowling, looking for SME workers to kidnap them and require them to make repairs.

As a result there have been numerous blackouts in the capital and adjoining urban areas, as well as in other parts of Mexico state (which surrounds the Federal District) and Puebla. Hundreds of industries have had to shut down production for many hours. Tens of thousands of residents have been left for days without lights, and also without water for lack of electricity to make pumps work. This has led to many blockades of streets and highways. The fury of the residents has been directed at the federal government, but because of the SME’s legalistic mindset it has done virtually nothing to join the turbulent popular protests. Another aspect is scabbing: the corporatist “union” of the CFE, the SUTERM (Union of Electrical Workers of the Mexican Republic) is a corporatist body *par excellence*. The SUTERM is a state organization, not a workers union, and it would be more than ready to scab on the SME. However, the PAN government’s determination to privatize the industry is such that it is using workers from private companies to make

the repairs, many of them with little professional training, which has prolonged the blackouts (and led to deaths). So it should be clear to the SUTERM workers that the government employer is preparing to throw them out of work as well which is another reason to break out of the straitjacket of state labor control.

*Today more than ever, the key to victory lies in a struggle for full class independence of the proletariat, which in turn shows the urgency of fighting to forge a workers party armed with the revolutionary program to successfully lead these struggles.* It is absolutely indispensable to *break with the class-collaborationist popular front which keeps working people chained to a sector of their class enemies.* The SME

leadership says that the work stoppage on November 11 will be the prelude to a national strike. But what kind of strike would that be? The *general strike* we need, **one which stops production throughout central Mexico**, cannot be decreed by a pro-capitalist union bureaucracy. It is necessary *elect strike committees in the workplaces that are recallable at any time.*

In the face of the turbulence caused by the blackouts, intensified by the rains and now the cold, the SME should form *joint committees of electrical workers and the working population in the neighborhoods around the plants and electrical stations.* This could lay the basis for *mass mobilizations to retake the installations*, even with the presence of the Federal Police. The SME could take the initiative in proposing *united actions together with the electrical workers of the SUTERM against the scabbing by private companies*, calling on them to *break the chains binding them to the bosses' government and to fight for trade-union independence against the fascist-style corporatist labor laws.* All this requires above all *forging a class-struggle leadership completely independent of all the bourgeois parties.*

The SME leadership has been the target of all manner of smears in the media's dirty war, which labels them corrupt, dangerous and violent. No doubt the federal government has a "contingency plan" to arrest the main leaders. Meanwhile, the *Trojan pony*, Alejandro Muñoz, head of the opposition slate in the last SME union elections, offered his services to Calderón and Lozano, and now is organizing together with other shameless traitors a company to replace the functions of the LyFC ... only this time as a subcontractor of the Federal Electricity Commission. Even so, the policy put forward by Esparza has been to call on the courts to issue thousands of injunctions, to ask for the intervention of the Supreme Court, to promote a court suit by Congress challenging the constitutionality of the measure, along with other measures within the



SME union leader Martín Esparza (third from left) speaking in Ho Chi Minh Hall at National University of Mexico (UNAM), October 15.

framework of the corporatist labor laws. Following this logic, he has interpreted the restraining order issued by a federal judge against the closing of LyFC as if it meant that "legally speaking" Calderón and his buddies "are lost." This is a dangerous illusion, because it hides the class nature of the capitalist state. Ultimately, this is the same Court that approved the theft of workers pension funds turning them into *afores* (Mexico's equivalent of Individual Retirement Accounts, or IRAs), that recently set free the murderers who slaughtered the women in Acteal [Chiapas in 2004], and that while it reprimanded Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz of Oaxaca, it was far from being hard enough in repressing the teachers and the APPO (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca). When the SME leader went to the Senate, the latter's president, Carlos Navarrete of the PRD, refused to see him because the PRI and PAN factions "aren't interested in taking up the question of whether the federal executive has violated the Constitution."

The main obstacle blocking the struggle is the class collaboration that has grown up around the PRD and the populist *caudillo* (leader) Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Ever since 1988, this popular front has managed to bind a number of the unions that are "independent" of the corporatist apparatus as well as left organizations to a group of politicians coming out of the PRI. They have blocked workers mobilizations against the destruction of independent union organizations, as in the case of SUTAUR (the once-powerful union that represented the Ruta 100 buses in Mexico City) in 1995. They allowed the Mexican bourgeoisie to rip from the workers the pension and retirement systems in the case of employees of the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) and of the workers affiliated with the ISSSTE, a parallel institute for government employees. ***It is necessary to break with the popular front around the PRD! We must stop playing by the bosses' rules!***



**Meeting at SME union hall, October 24. Workers chanted “Strike, strike!” but popular front of union leaders and bourgeois politicians blocked militant struggle, arguing it was necessary to “heed legalities.”**

### **If We Don’t Get a Solution, There Will Be a Revolution**

From October 11 on, the day after the Federal Police militarily took over the installations of Luz y Fuerza, there have been practically daily mobilizations of the Mexican Electrical Workers Union, often accompanied by other unions. In the largest one, on October 15, Mexico City’s Zócalo was already full when the head of the march left the Angel of Independence (several kilometers away). Large contingents of electrical workers mingled with contingents of telephone workers, university workers, firemen, etc. There was also an important presence of students from the UNAM, the IPN, the UAM, the UACM, the agricultural school at Chapingo, the Colegio de Bachilleres (another college preparatory school). When students left University City heading to the march on the subway, two entire trains were dispatched to carry them.

One of the most frequently chanted slogans on October 15 and in subsequent marches was “If we don’t get a solution, there will be a revolution!” The attack on the electrical workers is seen by workers in central Mexico as a threat to the working class itself: the obvious intent is to get rid of any unions that are seen as an obstacle to the privatization plans of the Mexican bourgeoisie and its government.

To the students supporting the SME it has also been clear that the assault on the electrical workers presages new attacks against public higher education. In 1999, the PRI government of President Ernesto Zedillo and its representatives in the UNAM simultaneously announced a combined attempt at privatization of LyFC and imposing student fees in the largest public university in Latin America. At that time, both attacks by the bosses were defeated. Today the bourgeoisie is back on the warpath. Public universities will be subjected to budget cuts of

at least US\$120 million in 2010. On top of this, “journalists” who act as unofficial spokesmen for the Calderón government have launched a campaign for the “reform” of higher education, in order to make expenditures in the universities “more efficient.” Without a doubt, this is a prelude to new attempts to introduce fees in the public universities, thereby further restricting the possibilities for the sons and daughters of the workers and the urban and rural poor to get an education.

In recent days there have been increasing numbers of incidents around LyFC installations, such as those that took place in various municipalities of Hidalgo (Pachuca, Tula and Tetepango), Puebla (in the substations of El Salto and Nuevo Necaxa), Mexico state (Toluca and Tenango) and Morelos (Cuernavaca). In addition, in several substations in Mexico City, the electrical workers have successfully mobilized to prevent equipment from being removed, such as in the early morning hours of November 5 at the Tacuba substation. In various places, the workers have placed red-and-black strike flags, and they have even welded the doors shut to prevent the government’s looting. In a number of installations there are groups of electrical workers camped out day and night, often with the support of neighbors, such as at the substation in Colonia Doctores in the center of the capital.

How can one explain, then, that the workers’ will to struggle has been successfully contained within the confines of bourgeois politics. At an October 24 assembly at the SME union hall, where the formation of a National Assembly of Popular Resistance (ANRP) was announced, many electrical workers, frantic at the passivity of the SME’s Central Committee, repeatedly interrupted long-winded speeches with cries of “¡Huelga, huelga!” The leaders preached to the militants that “the unions have to consult their ranks and heed all the juridical aspects.” To underline their attachment to bourgeois legality, Martín Esparza

was accompanied on stage by a group of bourgeois politicians, including Gerardo Fernández Noroña of the PT, Agustín Guerrero of the PRD and even Alberto Jiménez of the PRI, along with Bertha Luján representing López Obrador. You could see the popular front at work holding back the workers' will to struggle.

What's going on here is that the leaderships of the SME and the other "independent" unions won't mobilize the power of the workers as a class, but instead always try to use it in dribs and drabs, just like AMLO and the PRD, as a pressure tactic in the give and take of the bourgeois political game. For AMLO, the significance of the "conflict" of the LyFC is that it provides him with a tremendous opportunity to defeat the PRIAN in the 2010 legislative elections. But what will become of the electrical workers who have lost their sustenance, with their lives ruined and their technical capacities thrown on the scrapheap? For the popular-frontists, this just represents "collateral damage." That is why it is urgent to form a class-struggle, proletarian tendency, which breaks from the popular front to build a revolutionary workers party that fights for a workers and peasants government.

### Permanent Revolution vs. the Popular Front

In the epoch of imperialism, the dilemma presented before the workers is not that of supporting one or another sector of the bourgeoisie in order to carry out democratic tasks. On the contrary, as is shown by the whole history of the 20th century, the issue is that in countries of belated capitalist development like Mexico, democratic tasks *cannot be resolved within the framework of capitalism*. Just to achieve elementary democratic rights, it is necessary for the working class to establish its own class rule over the bourgeoisie, which will inevitably seek to organize a counterrevolution. In Mexico, a workers and peasants government must be established to carry out an agrarian revolution (not reform) against the enormous capitalist agribusiness companies in the North, as well as expropriating industry, commerce and bourgeois finance. It will also make real such democratic rights as genuine access to free public education freed of ties imposed as a result of serving the bourgeoisie. This, in turn, requires the extension of the socialist revolution to the rest of Latin America, but also to the north, toward the North American imperialist center.

This is the perspective of *permanent revolution*, put forward by the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky in summing up the experience of the three Russian revolutions: in 1905, and in February and October 1917.

The central issue today is to fight for the independence of the working class from the bosses, their politicians, their parties and their governments. The various organizations that present themselves as socialist and which have participated in the mobilizations in support of the SME avoid taking a clear position on the need to break with the entire bourgeoisie, and hence they do not wish to admit the existence of a popular front.

A particularly revolting case is that of Militante, an organization which claims to be "Marxist" even as it is part of the bourgeois PRD. Its newspaper *Militante* (No. 189, October 2009) proclaims in big letters on its front page, "PRD, SME and Unions on Battle Footing." According to these bourgeois "so-

cialists," in order to stop the privatization of electrical energy and a tax increase, what's needed is a "general strike" jointly called by the bourgeois PRD and the SME. In an inside article, they urge López Obrador to "make a clear call to mobilize." But as Trotsky insisted on several occasions:

"The fundamental importance of the general strike, independent of the partial successes which it may and then again may not provide, lies in the fact that it poses the question of power in a revolutionary manner. By shutting down the factories, transport, generally all the means of communication, power stations, etc., the proletariat by this very act paralyzes not only production but also the government. The state power remains suspended in mid-air. It must either subjugate the proletariat by famine and force and constrain it, to set the apparatus of the bourgeois state once again in motion, or retreat before the proletariat.

"Whatever may be the slogans and the motive for which the general strike is initiated, if it includes the genuine masses, and if these masses are quite resolved to struggle, the general strike inevitably poses before all the classes in the nation the question: *Who will be the master of the house?*"

—Leon Trotsky, "Once Again, Whither France?" (March 1935)

The idea that López Obrador should call a general strike is a dangerous illusion. The truth is that the policies of almost the entire rest of the self-proclaimed socialist left is qualitatively identical to that of Militante. Thus, for example, the Partido Obrero Socialista (POS – Socialist Workers Party) has adopted the slogan of a "civic work stoppage" (see *El Socialista* No. 352, November 2009). In its previous issue, an article expressed some skepticism about the likelihood of AMLO and the PRD supporting the electrical workers, but concedes that "if they really want to do so, they should call a national strike." As one can see, this is the same as the disgusting political line of Militante.

In practice, the POS has precisely lined up with the *lopezobradoristas* to sabotage the possibility of mobilizations in support of the SME at the National University. At a November 3 assembly at CCH-Sur (a preparatory school of the UNAM), its spokesmen voted *against* the proposal for a shutdown put forward by our comrades of the Comité Internacionalista as well as by other collectives. They followed this up by joining together with supporters of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT – Revolutionary Workers Party), the rotting remains of the pseudo-Trotskyist organization that for many years financed itself with government subsidies to parties and parliamentary deputies, to make a common front together with the school authorities – who provided them with sound equipment and produced a scab leaflet for them – to **prevent a shutdown** of that campus on November 4. Our comrades, in contrast, fought against this perspective of betrayal and explained to the hundreds of students who flocked to the assemblies exactly what the role of the popular front is: to drown the workers' struggles.

For its part, the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (LTS – Socialist Workers League) has in recent months formed a propaganda bloc with the Liga de Unidad Socialista (LUS – Socialist Unity League), the Grupo de Acción Revolucionaria (GAR – Revolutionary Action Group) and a split-off from

Photos: El Internacionalista



**Left: Poster of Comité Internacionalista at CCH-Sur, calling for assembly to vote for shutting down school November 11. Right: Internationalist contingent forming up for the march. After reformists blocked shutdown on November 4, a week later our comrades were successful and 200 students joined electrical workers' march.**

Militante called El Comienzo (The Beginning), with the aim of forming in Mexico a knock-off of the French “New Anticapitalist Party,” an ultra-reformist political formation resulting from the dissolution of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, which thereby managed to (finally) get rid of any reference to communism or revolution.

In a leaflet put out by this brand-new opportunist bloc on October 14 we read: “The social and trade-union organizations that look to the leadership of AMLO and which have been part of the movement to defend the oil and the CND<sup>2</sup>, as well as the thousands who came out against the sellout of PEMEX<sup>3</sup>, have the task of demanding of their leadership that it immediately issue the call for work stoppages and blockades of streets and highways throughout the country.” So in their opinion, the exploited and oppressed who are still tied to the López Obrador popular front should ask their leaders to call for work stoppages and other actions. Far from being a criticism of the policy of class collaboration, this perspective *reinforces* the ties binding the working people to a sector of the bourgeoisie.

In a leaflet published by this bloc on October 24, now without El Comienzo as a signer, the LTS and its *compañeros* of the LUS and the GAR continue the policy of coexistence with the popular front around the National Assembly of Popular Resistance, without raising the slightest criticism of the PRD or AMLO. The leaflet goes after the PRI and the PAN (just as the “independent” union bureaucracies do) and in the purest AMLO style they say that the objective of the struggle is a na-

tional strike “to twist the arm of this illegitimate government.”

Since October 24, the LTS has taken a different tack. In a supplement to its paper *Estrategia Obrera* (2 November), it criticizes the SME leadership and openly labels the PRD a bourgeois party, even criticizing the line adopted by the ANRP of looking to “legal, peaceful mobilizations” and going through the courts. Even though the article is titled “The Assembly of October 24: A Necessary Balance Sheet,” nothing that is written there is mentioned in the leaflet that its opportunist bloc distributed at the assembly. Yet once again, the LTS avoids calling explicitly to break with the PRD and the López Obrador movement, which is key to unleashing the power of the working class to defeat Calderón’s decree.

In contrast to the pseudo-socialist outfits which act as a collective caboose to the popular front, the Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International, has played an active role with a class line in defense of the SME. Not only has it organized mobilizations in support of the electrical workers at the UNAM and CCH-Sur, but in the Telephone Workers union the fraction of the Comité de Lucha Proletaria (CLP) has called to prepare a general strike, underlining that it is necessary to break with all the parties of the bourgeoisie.

In the heat of the class struggle, we seek to bring to workers and students who want to fight against capitalism – a system that can only bring voracious attacks against the workers, wars, racism and all-sided oppression – the program of the October 1917 Revolution, which enabled workers to take control of their destiny on one-sixth of the planet. Today the perspective of the Grupo Internacionalista is to inscribe in the current struggles – including defensive struggles such as that currently being waged by the workers of the SME – the perspective of socialist revolution in Mexico and its international extension. The task is far from being easy, but it is the only way to get to the root of the problems that beset humanity, derived from this horrific system based on wage slavery.

Join our struggle!

<sup>2</sup> The National Democratic Convention was a popular-front formation including unions, peasant groups, leftists and the bourgeois PRD called by López Obrador in the wake of the fraud that denied him the presidency in the 2006 elections, in order to divert protests into impotent street marches, sit-ins and giant demonstrations in the Zócalo (see “Mexico: Bourgeois Elections and Workers Blood,” *The Internationalist* No. 24, Summer 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See “Mexico: The Plundering of Pemex,” *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009.

## Drive Out the MINUSTAH! Workers to Power!

François Louis/Le Nouvelliste

# Haiti: Battle Over Starvation Wages and Neocolonial Occupation



Workers march on parliament from factories August 4 demanding 200 gourde (\$5) daily minimum wage.

### Support of U.S. Workers Key to Fight Against “U.N.” Occupation, Sweatshop Exploitation

Haiti, home of the first successful slave revolution in history, has for most of its independent history been condemned by the workings of the capitalist system to a threadbare existence of grinding poverty. Decades of economic blockade of the black Caribbean republic by the United States and the European colonial powers in the 19th century were followed by repeated occupations by U.S. troops and rule by U.S. puppet dictators in the 20th. Throughout, the impoverished country has been prevented from developing indigenous industry. Today Haitian agriculture has been ruined by the importation of subsidized rice from Louisiana in the name of “free trade.” As the island nation reels under the “natural” disaster of annual hurricanes, any protest is put down by “United Nations” occupation forces acting as mercenaries for U.S. imperialism, which has its hands full in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For years, the only images of Haiti in the media have been of sheer desperation: garbage-strewn slums and rickety boats of fleeing refugees. But Haiti does have a working class, notably in garment factories in several “free trade zones,” and in August



François Louis/Le Nouvelliste

### Workers demand “200 gourdes right now,” August 11.

2009 these workers fought an important battle against starvation wages. In May, both houses of the Haitian parliament voted to raise the legal minimum wage to 200 gourdes (roughly \$5) a day, from the previous 70 gourdes (\$1.75). Even 200 gourdes is barely one-third of the daily minimum costs for food, shelter, clothing, transportation and education for a family of three, and below the U.N. definition of poverty (\$2 per person per day). But leading businessmen declared that paying that miserable sum would drive them into bankruptcy and threatened to shut down half the factories in the country.

Haitian president René Prével took up the bosses' lament, demanding that legislators repeal their earlier action. As the vote drew near, workers streamed out of plants in the industrial parks of the capital, Port-au-Prince, to march on parliament. In a peaceful demonstration of hundreds on August 4, protesters complained: "70 gourdes won't allow us to live decently. We can't afford to eat on our wages. If we are sick, we can't go to the hospital. We work from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m." (*AlterPresse*, 4 August). After a parliamentary committee voted to slash the 200 gourde minimum to 150, thousands of angry workers took to the streets August 5. On August 10, protests turned violent as workers and students responded to police tear gas by stoning official vehicles and the car of the U.S. chargé d'affaires, who sought refuge in a police station besieged by demonstrators. On August 11, after four walkouts in one week, the bosses decreed a lockout at the SONAPI industrial park, whose plants employ 14,000 workers.

Finally, on August 18, the pliant deputies and senators saluted their capitalist masters and slashed the legal minimum to 125 gourdes (a little over \$3) a day. It was a bitter defeat for the workers in the first organized class mobilization under the U.N. occupation. In 2008, as the cost of rice and other staples rose by 50 percent, hunger riots that began in the provinces and spread to the capital were put down by the MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) military and police forces with a toll of several dead. But those were largely spontaneous acts of despair by impoverished slum dwellers. In the recent marches workers used their collective strength to shut down production. Though the outcome was a setback, it was a battle that could lead to more powerful and conscious working-class struggle in the future. The key is revolutionary leadership.

Many workers drew lessons about the country's rulers. One remarked: "It's sad to see that the president of the republic chooses to defend the interests of the bourgeoisie rather than ours." Some showed an awareness of their own power, dismissing the bosses' threats: "They need us.... If they say their factories will close their doors it's false." Demonstrators trampled on the flags of the different countries whose troops make up the MINUSTAH, saying "These are the flags of occupation." This was also the first time under the occupation that workers have been joined by students, who since the beginning of 2009 have occupied the National Teachers College and different faculties (ethnology, law and medicine) of Haiti's State University (UEH). This shows the potential for a broader class struggle against the imperialist occupation and sweatshop exploitation.

Militants seeking to cohere a revolutionary nucleus to lead the struggle for a workers party in Haiti would intervene to deepen the alliance of students and workers, together with poor peasants and slum dwellers who have traditionally provided the bulk of anti-government protests in the poorest country in the hemisphere. Although employed industrial workers are a distinct minority, their leadership is vital because of their economic power and class position. In forging a revolutionary



consciousness, it is vital to combat illusions in petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalist forces. Prével was elected with the votes of poor people who saw him as a stand-in for former president and populist priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide and his Lavalas ("avalanche") political movement. Yet both Aristide and his former protégé have been loyal enforcers for the Haitian bourgeoisie and the imperialist overlords.

Today, U.S. rulers continue to dominate the politics of Haiti and the neighboring Dominican Republic. Many Haitians and Haitian émigrés in the U.S. and Canada saw the election of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States, as a promise of a brighter future. In May 2009, United Nations secretary general Ban Ki Moon appointed former U.S. president Bill Clinton as special U.N. envoy to Haiti. Clinton, as the new colonial *gouverneur*, would oversee efforts to make Haiti safe for foreign investors. To this end he "gave his stamp of approval" to a World Bank conference in Port-au-Prince that attracted several hundred investors who "showed up to network and discuss possible projects" (*New York Times*, 5 October), although so far without results. Simultaneously, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter was in Santo Domingo, trying to coax Dominican leaders into easing up on Haitian immigrants. Meanwhile, Washington continues to lord it over both countries, economically and militarily.

The struggle for the liberation of the first black republic, whose working masses today toil in conditions of near slavery, must be international in scope. The fight against the U.N. occupation must also be waged in countries such as Brazil, Canada and Chile that supply mercenary troops and cops to do the dirty work for Yankee imperialism. Dominican workers should come to the defense of their Haitian class sisters and brothers, some of whom work for the same bosses, in common class struggle. This includes defending the rights of the roughly one million residents of Haitian origin in the Dominican Republic who are denied citizenship and persecuted by the racist rulers who create the climate for lynch mob terror. Above all, workers in the U.S. must undertake solidarity action, for the free trade zone factories are owned by or produce for major U.S. companies, and it is Washington that ordered the U.N. occupation.

Ariana Cubillos / AP



**MINUSTAH troops defend Haiti's presidential palace against protesters demanding resignation of president René Prével over high food prices, April 2008.**

### Neocolonial Occupation Troops Enforce Starvation Wages

The battle over Haiti's minimum wage has been brewing for a long time. In reality, even if it were raised to 200 gourdes, it would be less in real terms than it was 20 years ago (adjusted for inflation). Everyone agrees that it is impossible to live on such a wage, including President Prével, who asked in a June 17 letter to legislators: "Would 200 gourdes let you live as one should? I say no, if you take into account the price of transportation, housing, school, and so on." The issue became heated with the passage of the HOPE (Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement) Act by the U.S. Congress in December 2006 and the HOPE II Act two years later. This trade preference provides for duty-free import to the United States of apparel assembled in Haiti from cheap Asian yarns, fabrics and components. But there is a price advantage only if wages in Haiti's factories stay below Asia's lowest-wage country, Bangladesh.

Last December, Steven Benoit, a parliamentary deputy from the middle-class suburb Pétion-Ville and former member of President Prével's Lespwa (Hope) party, took up the issue of the 200 gourde minimum wage. After much travail he managed to push the law through the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, with unanimous or near-unanimous votes in both houses of the legislature. When business leaders loudly objected that they would go bankrupt, Benoit asked to see their tax returns. Lo and behold, the companies had filed phony reports claiming to be losing money five years in a row even as they were investing to expand production. How many jobs had been created with the present low minimum wage, he asked, to no avail. TV spots opposing the higher wage suddenly appeared from unknown and well-financed "associations of the unemployed." A "Dominican industrialist" declared on television he couldn't afford to pay Haitian workers \$5 a day even as the Dominican government passed a law for a \$9 daily minimum wage.

With the hypocrisy of the capitalists and the Prével gov-

ernment exposed, the issue of the minimum wage galvanized opposition in all sectors of Haitian society. Since early 2009, students in several faculties of Haiti's State University have been mobilized to protest the neglect of public higher education under the "neo-liberal" policies implemented by the government and the policies of university authorities, as well as supporting the demand for a minimum wage of 200 gourdes. After the occupation of the offices of the school of education in late February/early March, students at the faculties of ethnology, law and human sciences joined the struggle. Most recently, students in the school of medicine and pharmacology have repeatedly occupied their faculty, and been expelled by mobilizations of various elite police units – CIMO, SWAT and BIM – with dozens of arrests. A coalition of peasant groups, 4 G Kontre, and peasants in the Artibonite region also supported the demand for 200 gourdes.

On May 1, workers in Batay Ouvriye (Workers Struggle), public sector workers (CTSP), peasants in the Tèt Kole Ti Peyizan (small peasants association), and women's groups demonstrating for the minimal demand of a 200 gourde minimum wage were repressed by the CIMO riot police. As protests heated up, the "blue helmet" U.N. "peacekeepers" have come to the rescue of the Prével government as it enforces starvation wages. On June 18, during a funeral march for Father Gérard Jean Juste, a popular priest of the Tit Legliz ("little church") liberation theology movement, Brazilian MINUSTAH troops opened fire on the crowd of Lavalas supporters, killing a young man from the Delmas slum, Kenel Pascal. The spokeswoman for the U.N. mission in Haiti justified repression against the march by denouncing UEH student protesters as casseurs (window smashers) who must not be allowed to "attack private property" (*AlterPresse*, 18 June). In mid-July, U.N. troops used tear gas against a student demonstration.

Then on August 5, MINUSTAH troops killed another young man, Ricardo Morette, and wounded a dozen as the "blue helmets" took down barricades of demonstrators protesting the lack of electricity in the town of Lascahobas. Until recently these mercenary troops for U.S. imperialism had concentrated on "pacifying" the 400,000 residents of the slums of the capital, Port-au-Prince. This led to a series of massacres in Cité Soleil, Bel Air and other impoverished areas in 2005 and 2006. As our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB) have pointed out, Brazilian troops are using the same "counter-insurgency" tactics in Haiti that are employed by military police against residents of the *favelas* (slums) of Rio de Janeiro. This is confirmed by Brazilian journalist Pedro Dantas who reported, "Army sources confirmed that techniques employed in the occupation of the Morro da Providência *favela* are the ones Brazilian soldiers use in the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Haiti" (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, 15 December 2007).

Some Brazilian leftist groups have politely urged the Brazilian government to withdraw from Haiti, while expressing



**Mass arrests by Brazilian MINUSTAH troops, Village de Dieu, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, February 2008. Military police use same “counterinsurgency” tactics in poor areas of Rio de Janeiro. Brazilian Trotskyists demand: drive Brazilian troops out of Haiti and out of the favelas!**

“full understanding” for the troops faced with the “difficulties” of their mission and dismissing Haitians resisting the MINUSTAH as “organized gangs linked to drug trafficking” (*Causa Operária*, 22 October 2004). In contrast, the LQB and its trade-union supporters in the Comité de Luta Classista denounced Brazilian president Lula as Washington’s “sheriff” in Latin America and called on Brazilian workers to “aid the Haitian working people in expelling the invading Brazilian troops.” A motion introduced by the CLC with this call was passed by the Rio teachers union, SEPE, and by the national teachers union, CNTE (see “Drive Brazilian Troops Out of Haiti!” *The Internationalist* No. 20, January-February 2005). Five years after the U.N. forces began patrolling Haiti, now that Haitian workers and students as well as slum dwellers have confronted the MINUSTAH forces over the minimum wage, it is high time for a *class mobilization to throw out these mercenary enforcers of starvation wages*.

### **Lynching and Persecution of Haitians in the Dominican Republic**

While Haitians are rounded up and shot down by imperialist henchmen “at home,” next door in the Dominican Republic right-wing forces have been whipping up racist hysteria the roughly one million residents of Haitian origin, the bulk of whom have been living and working there for most or all of their lives. In 2005, there was a wave of pogroms (ethnic massacres) and the mass expulsion of tens of thousands of Haitians and dark-skinned Dominicans (see “Stop Persecution of Haitian Workers in the Dominican Republic!” *The Internationalist* No. 23, April-May 2006). Since that time, the Internationalist Group has regularly participated in monthly pickets of the Dominican consulate in New York City called by Grassroots Haiti. The IG also helped initiate an emergency demonstration in August 2008 by Dominican, Haitian and U.S. activists demanding an end to the deportations and racist violence against Haitians and opposition to the Dominican nationality law which denies citizenship to children of Haitian origin born in the D.R. (see *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009).

Now the anti-Haitian hysteria and racial/ethnic attacks are escalating again. The GARR (Groupe d’Appui aux Rapatriés et Réfugiés – Refugee Support Group) has reported a series of murders and expulsions since the start of the year: in January, three Haitians killed by Dominican police and several Haitians killed by machetes near the border; in February, 3,000 Haitian immigrants forced out of their homes in Santiago province and more than a hundred forced to flee for their lives in Higüey, as well as three more Haitians killed by the Dominican police; in March, a Haitian pastor and a Haitian professor at the UASD (Autonomous University of Santo Domingo) murdered; in April, 40 Haitians brutalized by police on a bus as they were being deported. And on May 2, Carlos Nérilus, was decapitated with an axe in broad daylight on a street in Santo Domingo while a crowd applauded. Local leaders then announced they were going to drive all Haitians out of the neighborhood. This horrendous execution led to demonstrations in Haiti, and even the prime minister, Michelle Pierre-Louis issued a mild plea, but Haitian president Préval refused to protest, saying it was up to the Dominican authorities.

The spectre of a repetition of the 1937 massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians in the Dominican Republic is ever-present. That slaughter by the dictator Rafael Trujillo was carried out with the complicity of the Haitian government, which profited from supplying thousands of workers for back-breaking labor during the *zafra* (harvest) on Dominican sugar plantations, and of the United States, which set up this system of virtual slave labor during the 1920s when it militarily occupied both countries on the Caribbean island of Quisqueya (Hispaniola). Today, as well, Dominican sugar production depends on Haitian laborers, some imported with the aid of officials and governments on both sides of the border, and many who have lived year-round in the miserable *bateyes* (slums) on the edge of the plantations. Construction projects in Santo Domingo also depend heavily on Haitian labor. Yet the rulers assiduously stoke racial/ethnic hatreds even as Haitian elites spend their vacations in the Dominican Republic, send their children to university in Santo Domingo and invest their profits in the D.R.

And despite the international publicity to the grisly decapitation of Carlos Nérilus, the lynchings continue. The most recent case was the murder of three Haitians who were shot to death, dismembered and their bodies burned in ovens used to



**Former U.S. president Bill Clinton, now U.N. special envoy to Haiti, glad-handing with imperialist investors at World Bank conference in Port-au-Prince, October 2009.**

produce charcoal near the Dominican border town of Jimaní. The victims were part of a logging operation supplying wood to this illegal trade. While environmentalists blame deforestation on desperately poor Haitian peasants, in fact it is the result of an industry run by Dominican-Haitian cartels as extensive as the drug trafficking mafia in this region, according to an investigative report in the Santo Domingo daily *Listín Diario* (25 October). And whether the crime was committed by Dominican park rangers who profit from the trade, by the murderous military border patrol CESFRONT, or by farmers who have organized manhunts to track down Haitians, the ruling classes of both countries reap the superprofits from this deadly enterprise.

While many of the killings have been carried out by lynch mobs of poor and often dark-skinned Dominicans, the racist capitalists exploit Dominican workers as well. Grupo M runs several garment factories with low-wage Haitian workers in the CODEVI free trade zone at Ouanaminthe just across the river from the Dominican town of Dajabón. The border there is now guarded by the MINUSTAH, which built a metal gate to regulate traffic. The same factory owner has plants in the Dominican Republic which supply the textiles and do finishing work on clothing produced in Haiti for chains including Old Navy, Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, VF Corporation, Banana Republic, American Eagle and Wal-Mart. Other major corporations are the American jeans maker Levi-Strauss, with 1,600 workers in two plants in the CODEVI industrial park, and Hanes underwear, which produces its entire line of T-shirts there. Meanwhile, the products of these plants are exported to the U.S. under the CAFTA (Central American-Dominican Free Trade Agreement), while other Haitian plants using textiles imported from Asia are covered by the HOPE Act.

But even though Dominican and Haitian workers are exploited by some of the same bosses, and despite the fact that

they are both oppressed by Yankee imperialism (which sends U.S. soldiers to train the CESFRONT border troops and hires MINUSTAH mercenaries to patrol the Haitian side of the border), and although Dominican labor and left groups stage nationwide strikes and work stoppages annually if not more often, united action by Dominican and Haitian workers against their common exploiters and oppressors is almost non-existent. Why?

One reason is the dominance of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist politics, as opposed to proletarian internationalism, among leftists on both sides of the border. This is a legacy of Stalinism, which replaced the Leninist program of international socialist revolution with nationalist “popular fronts” seeking (capitalist) “democracy.” Another key factor is the huge difference in living standards. According to a Congressional Research Service report on “The Haitian Economy and the HOPE Act” (October 2008), wage levels in Haitian factories “average as little as one-third of those in the Dominican Republic,” while the gross domestic product per capita of the D.R. is ten times that of Haiti – roughly the difference between the United States and Mexico. Income and wage differences of that magnitude are difficult to overcome on the basis of simple trade-unionism, focusing on the struggle over the price of labor power.

Unity of Haitian and Dominican workers will not be brought about through reformist labor struggles within the framework of capitalism, but only on the basis of a broader *class* struggle against the imperialist system. The whole history of Haiti over the last century underscores Leon Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution: in the imperialist epoch, even the *democratic* tasks of the bourgeois revolutions cannot be achieved short of the taking of power by the working class, supported by the peasantry, which proceeds to expropriate the capitalists and extend the revolution internationally. In a country with a numerically weak proletariat such as Haiti, throwing off the imperialist yoke can only come about as part of a struggle spanning borders from the island of Quisqueya to Brazil to the United States. And that requires above all building *revolutionary workers parties* as part of struggle to reforge the Trotskyist Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution.

With a million Dominican and Haitian immigrants concentrated in New York City, this center of world finance capital will be the crucible for cohering the nucleus of such parties based on proletarian internationalism. Just as youth from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have founded common organizations here in the face of the deadly nationalism that has wracked their homelands, working people from the divided Caribbean island can make common cause in the face of the imperialist would-be masters of the universe who would enslave them all. As a start, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International seek to unite Haitian and Dominican immigrants in fighting to *expel the MINUSTAH occupation troops and police from Haiti and kick U.S. military “advisors” out of the Dominican Republic, and to demand full citizenship rights for Haitians in the D.R. and for all immigrants in the U.S.* ■

## Now It's Official: U.S. Backs Coup Regime – A Threat to All Latin America Honduras After the Phony “Election”: More Repression and Resistance

On November 29, the authors of the civilian-military coup d'état who seized power in Honduras five months earlier held a pseudo-election designed to legitimize the dictatorship. The exercise was staged as plebiscite, typical of bonapartist, military/police regimes, and was accompanied by massive repression. The workers, peasants, teachers and other defenders of democratic rights who since June 28 have courageously resisted the coup called on the Honduran population to boycott the electoral farce. In the days leading up to the event and on the day of the voting, the streets were flooded with soldiers, police and thousands of army reservists. Nevertheless, in the commercial and industrial center of the country, San Pedro Sula, hundreds of opponents of the coup braved the batons, pepper gas and rifles of elite police units to denounce the gunpoint “elections.” Scores were arrested and many badly beaten.

In the poor barrios of the capital Tegucigalpa and major towns and in the countryside, the call “don't vote” was widely followed and people massively stayed home. Only in well-to-do neighborhoods were there lines of voters. Resistance groups calculated the overall rate of abstention at over 65 percent. The official electoral tribunal quickly claimed that exactly 61.3 percent of eligible voters cast ballots ... but it could not report any results due to “technical failures” of the vote counting system. Even the election observers authorized by the regime, Hagamos Democracia (Let's Make Democracy), a “non-governmental organization” funded by the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy (NED), reported an abstention rate of more than 52 percent. Whatever the actual numbers, it is clear that at least 2 million people stayed away from the polls, a significant number in a country where voting is obligatory and boycotters have every reason to fear that they could suffer serious consequences for their act of defiance.

This was immediately made clear with a wave of disappearances and murders of resistance activists within a week of the vote, particularly in the plebeian *colonias* (neighborhoods) of the capital. In the early morning hours of December 4, Walter Tróchez, a noted human rights activist and defender of gay and lesbian rights, was kidnapped, but managed to escape. That same day, five resistance activists were seized in Colonia Nueva Capital by men in the uniform of the National Criminal Investigation Department (DNIC). One of the victims, Santos Corrales García, was found dead several days later, his body decapitated. On December 5, gunmen stormed into the offices of *El Libertador*, the only newspaper that opposed the coup, threatening the personnel and seizing computers and cameras. On December 6, five youths, all of them active in the resistance, were shot to death in Colonia Villanueva. On December 13, Tróchez was gunned down from a car without license plates in

the center of Tegucigalpa. *The death squads are back.*

Despite the bloody repression, the groups leading the resistance to the coup regime vowed to continue the struggle. The day after the vote, a “caravan of victory” of hundreds of cars drove through the capital declaring the failure of the mockery of an election. On December 4, the National Front of Resistance to the Coup held an assembly in the STIBYS (bottling workers) union hall that declared that the fight to restore Zelaya had now passed. The Front emphasized, “We are a real power, which has been constituted throughout the country in grassroots organizations” and called to struggle for a “national constituent assembly” and “participatory democracy.” By all accounts, a movement of mass resistance to the arrogant and greedy rulers has taken root in this impoverished Central American country which previously had the smallest organized left in the region. That it was able to hold out for months despite vicious police and military attacks was something the coup plotters had not counted on, and which continues to worry them.

However, even though it was based in the trade unions, peasant organizations, women's and gay rights groups and organizations of indigenous peoples and the black Garifuna population, politically this movement was tied to Zelaya and other bourgeois politicians and parties. This “*popular front*” stood in the way of mobilizing the workers and urban and rural poor on a *class* basis, thus preventing them from attacking the root cause of the endless coups and military dictatorships that have beset the region for the last century: *capitalism*. Zelaya's acceptance of the U.S.-imposed “accord” for “dialogue” with the coup regime ruled out any effort to overthrow it, and some of minor bourgeois parties (such as the leadership of Unificación Democrática) in the end participated in the coup regime's electoral circus. Although the Resistance Front declared this “chapter” of the struggle closed, it is wedded to popular-front *bourgeois* politics, such as its call for “participatory democracy” through a constituent assembly.

Most Latin American governments announced beforehand that they would not recognize the results of the phony elections and called for President Manuel Zelaya Rosales to be restored to his position. The U.S. administration of Barack Obama, however, used the vote to put an end to its charade of supposedly supporting a “dialogue” between the coup regime and Zelaya while giving de facto support to the dictatorship. The State Department called on all governments to recognize the results of the Honduran “elections” and the victor, Porfirio Lobo of the right-wing National Party. Costa Rican president Oscar Arias, Washington's long-time asset in the region, was already on board. He was joined by Salvadoran Mario Funes, who ever since being elected president as the candidate of the

Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front has sought unity with the ultra-right. Soon the continental bourgeois support for Zelaya began to buckle.

We warned from the beginning against any appeals to Obama to oppose the coup, which was “made in U.S.A.” The fact that the coup plotters were able to keep their grip on state power with the now open backing of Yankee imperialism is a defeat for the exploited and oppressed of Honduras, and a threat to democratic rights throughout the continent. While escalating the U.S. war on Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Democratic Party administration in Washington has given a green light to ultra-rightist coup plotters and militarists in Latin America. Bourgeois nationalist governments such as Venezuela and Bolivia, and even the most “moderate” liberal governments could soon find themselves facing reactionary military threats from within and without.

The League for the Fourth International called throughout

for independent labor mobilization to defeat the *gorila* (reactionary militarist) coup, and for a revolutionary workers party. While fighting alongside those seeking to restore the ousted Liberal president, we warned against any political support to the bourgeoisie and instead proclaimed as our goal a workers and peasants government. Supporters of the LFI sections in the United States and Brazil actively sought with some success in education unions to provide material support to the Honduran teachers unions, who in conditions of extreme danger and deprivation played a leading role in resisting the coup. Underscoring our call for workers action, the Internationalist Group/U.S., the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil and the Comitê de Luta Classista (union tendency associated with the LQB) also made significant donations to the Honduran unions in their own right.

*The struggle for international socialist revolution continues.*

## “Dialogue” with the Coup Regime and Its Yankee Godfathers Is a Trap

# The San José-Tegucigalpa Accord: No to the Imperialist Edict!

### Fight for a Workers and Peasants Government!

1. The San José-Tegucigalpa Accord, supposedly the result of the Guaymuras Dialogue (after the original Spanish name for Honduras) between representatives of Honduran president Manuel Zelaya and the puppet “president” of the coup regime, Roberto Micheletti, is actually an imperialist *diktat*. It came about as a result of the arrival in the Central American country of U.S. Assistant Secretary for State for Latin American Affairs Thomas Shannon, and was signed under the watchful gaze of Shannon and the U.S. ambassador, Cuban *gusano* (reactionary exile) Hugo Llorens. *This agreement does not mean the restoration of “constitutional order,” and even less does it represent a victory for “democracy”; rather, it is a victory for the blood-soaked coup plotters.*

2. Shannon is the same sinister official who met with Micheletti, General Romeo Vásquez y Valásquez and the rest of the conspirators during the week before June 28 when they were preparing their coup d’état. At that time, speaking for Hillary Clinton, the godmother of the putsch, he counseled the plotters on how to get rid of the democratically elected president by “legal” means. Now he is advising them to accept an empty “restoration” of Zelaya, leaving the decision in the hands of the legislature controlled by the National Party and Liberal Party (the twin parties who run the country in tandem), in exchange for stripping all his powers and for a guarantee that the “international community” would recognize the phony elections which the de facto government plans to hold on November 29.

3. The mafia which seized the helm of the Honduran

state, while they are flunkies of Yankee imperialism (many of them hold permanent residency in the United States), have their own interests as a semi-colonial bourgeoisie. As they have done over and over during the last four months, they are angling to buy time to prolong their dictatorship. Currently the pro-coup Congress is refusing to “restore the head of the Executive Branch” until it has an opinion from the equally pro-coup Supreme Court. They did the same thing in July over the “dialogue” agreed upon in San José. In response to their latest refusal, Shannon said that restoring Zelaya is only “a possibility,” and that Washington would give its backing to the fictitious elections even if the constitutional president is not reinstated. Zelaya pathetically asked for a “clarification.”

4. Zelaya’s supporters hailed the signing of the Accord as a victory. There was cheering in the streets of Tegucigalpa in anticipation of the return of Zelaya, currently confined to the Brazilian embassy. This is a major error, although quite consistent with their policy of centering the struggle on the reinstatement of Zelaya. One of the spokesmen for the resistance to the coup, union leader Juan Barahona, resigned from the president’s team of advisors the week before the Accord was signed, saying he was not prepared to drop the demand for a constituent assembly. However, the National Front Against the Coup d’État (FNCGE) in its Communiqué No. 32, dated October 30, celebrates the accord, terming it “a popular victory over the tawdry interests of the coup-mongering oligarchy.”

5. Signing the San José-Tegucigalpa Accord not only



Indymedia Honduras

**The Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) called the San José-Tegucigalpa Accord a trap.**

meant dropping the demand for a constituent assembly, one of the issues that set off the coup on the part of the bourgeoisie, which saw this as a threat to its tight control of the state apparatus, which it feeds off, and of the armed forces, which guarantee its rule over the impoverished working masses that it mercilessly exploits. The text also states that the signers will abstain “from calling for the institution of a constituent assembly, either directly or indirectly, as well as refraining from promoting or supporting any popular poll” aimed at “modifying the form of government or contravening any of the unreformable articles of our Basic Charter.”

6. The signers thereby commit themselves to accepting the coup-makers’ myth that there are articles of the Constitution that are “carved in stone,” which cannot be modified, an inherently anti-democratic stipulation. Moreover, the Accord mandates the formation of a government “of unity and national reconciliation” which would include ministers from the criminal *de facto* regime; it adopts the budget imposed by the coup-makers; and it requires signers to denounce “any sort of demonstrations opposed to the elections or their result, or which promote insurrection,... civil disobedience or other acts which could produce violent confrontations or breaking the law.” Thus Zelaya is committed to condemning anyone who calls for boycotting the elections that serve to prettify the coup regime, as well as those who base themselves on Article 3 of the Honduran constitution, which states:

“No one owes fealty to a usurping government or to those who assume functions or public positions by the force of arms.... The people have the right to resort to insurrection in defense of the constitutional order.”

7. While the bulk of the resistance forces have given their support to the San José-Tegucigalpa Accord as a bitter necessity, some left groups reject this ignominious pact and speak of the “betrayal” of Zelaya. However, Zelaya, as a bourgeois politician, always proclaimed his desire for a “dialogue” with the murderers who until recently were his party colleagues. Already in his appearance before the United Nations in early July he agreed to return with reduced powers and gave up the demand for a constituent assembly. The fact is that the leaders of the popular front resistance fed illusions in Zelaya, with slogans such as “Mel, our friend, the people are with you.” To claim to fight for a constituent assembly and at the same time declare that the ill-fated Accord is a victory, rather than opposing this straitjacket, is spreading confusion among the masses and thereby assuming joint responsibility for a terrible defeat.

8. The League for the Fourth International, which from the very first day has called to *defeat* the civilian-military coup, fighting alongside the Zelaya supporters who resisted it, has insisted that the workers must be mobilized on an independent, class-struggle basis. We did not join in the deceptive popular-front chant, “the people united, will never be defeated,” when

the experience of the Chilean Unidad Popular which coined this slogan shows exactly the opposite. Nor did we proclaim reinstatement of the bourgeois president as the goal. We emphasized that a revolutionary constituent assembly could only be the result of a successful insurrection that establishes a regime based on workers and peasants councils. At the same time, we fight for such a *workers and peasants government* to expropriate the capitalist ruling class and extend the revolution to a *Central American federation of workers republics*. In accordance with this Bolshevik policy, we denounce this Accord which would codify a victory of the coup-makers.

9. It would also formalize Honduras' status as a semi-colony of the United States, with the Accord and the elections to be supervised by a Verification Commission headed by the Obama administration's Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis, and by Chile's former president, Ricardo Lagos, an unconditional supporter of the U.S. From the outset, we warned against any appeals for U.S. intervention, demanding "Yankee Imperialism, Hands Off!" However, the bourgeois and reformist supporters of Zelaya, and the ousted president himself, insistently solicited Washington's support. Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez begged, "Obama, do something." In the U.S., the International Action Center issued a petition on September 23 calling on the Obama administration to "insist that the military regime ... restore President Zelaya to office," and urged calls to the White House and State Department to "demand an end to ... the Micheletti fraud government." Such dangerous calls on the imperialists – the godfathers of the coup! – requesting their intervention in the name of democracy, led to the fatal October 30 Accord.

10. Whether or not to participate in elections is often a tactical question for revolutionaries. We have always stressed that the ritual of going to the polls every so many years to cast a ballot with the illusion that one is choosing which of the competing bourgeois politicians will head the capitalist state – whose soldiers and police, courts, prisons and congresses constitute a whole apparatus to repress the exploited and oppressed – does not constitute the rule of "the people" (*demos*). If we run candidates or give critical support to others, we do so to expose the fraud of bourgeois elections and in full awareness that we are fighting on enemy territory, which is hardly neutral. If there is no candidate that represents a class opposition to capitalism, we may call for abstention. But in the present case, the rigged elections of November 29 are nothing but a farce which cannot express the massive resistance of the Honduran masses and will only serve to put a pretty face on what at bottom is a bonapartist (police/military) dictatorship.

11. The popular-front resistance to the coup ties the working masses to minority sectors of the bourgeoisie, in particular the Liberals in Resistance (whose red-white-red banners are quite visible in the demonstrations), the Democratic Unification Party (UD), sectors of the Innovation and Unity Party (PINU), and above all President Manuel Zelaya himself. UD is the product of a fusion of several groups with roots in the armed struggles of the 1980s, and in this respect is similar (although on a far smaller scale) to the Salvadoran FMLN

and the Nicaraguan FSLN, former guerrilla groups that have transformed themselves into bourgeois electoral parties. In addition, there is a slate headed by Carlos H. Reyes, president of the bottling plant workers union STIBYS, which although formally independent has been politically allied with the Zelaya supporters. The alliance with these parties and candidacies serves to limit the actions of the working masses in the resistance to the framework of bourgeois politics. Trotskyists, in contrast, fight to break with the bourgeois popular front and to form a *revolutionary workers party*.

12. Concretely at this time it is necessary to unmask the electoral farce of the coup regime. The parties and electoral slates linked to the FNCGE have adopted an equivocal position as to their possible participation in the elections, limiting themselves to declarations that they will not run if the constitutional president is not reinstated. Given the foot-dragging policies of Micheletti & Co., it is possible that they will be forced to withdraw, even under the dictatorship's threat of four to six years in jail for any candidates who pull out. In any case, even if they continue to run, revolutionaries and all class-conscious workers should oppose this dictatorial plebiscite. To the extent possible, it would be appropriate to call for an *active boycott to prevent the electoral farce*; or if conditions prevent this, to cast a blank or spoiled ballot.

13. Whatever is the outcome of the current frantic maneuvers over the San José-Tegucigalpa Accord, it is urgently necessary to intensify the struggle to mobilize the working class. A *general strike* in this country with a combative labor movement would be the most powerful weapon against a coup regime based on the employer class. But this would have to go hand in hand with preparations for *worker and peasant defense guards*. Internationally, the struggle for active union support continues to be a priority, including calls for labor boycotts of Honduran cargos by transport workers unions.

14. A paramount task, particularly outside Honduras, is defense of the resistance fighters against the deadly repression. Honduras today is under a state of siege, as it has been since June 29. The death squads have been reactivated. They have even used sports stadiums as jails, recalling the Pinochet coup in Chile on that fateful 11 September 1973. At least a dozen Honduran trade-unionists have been murdered, particularly teachers; resistance leaders like Carlos Reyes have been injured while others have received death threats. Even before the coup there were assassination attempts against leaders of unions and mass organizations. In April 2008, Rosa Altagracia Fuentes, general secretary of the Honduran workers Federation (CTH), one of the three union federations in the country, was murdered. It is necessary to organize a class-struggle defense of the thousands of detainees and to provide material support to the workers organizations in struggle.

*For workers mobilization to defeat the first coup of the Obama administration, and to head off the others which are already being plotted!*

League for the Fourth International  
5 November 2009

## Central America Coups...

*continued from page 72*

president of the republic, Manuel Zelaya Rosales – arresting him at gunpoint in his home, kidnapping and exiling him to Costa Rica in his pajamas, and then installing as puppet president the head of the Honduran Congress, Roberto Micheletti Baín – he surely thought that the problem had been resolved. It didn't turn out that way. Clearly, this act of force was in response to the desire of the reactionary ruling classes of Central America, spurred on by imperialist ultra-rightists, to get rid of the “moderate center-left” presidents who have been elected throughout the region. Everything indicates that they chose Honduras because it had the weakest political left in the isthmus. Zelaya, the head of the traditional Liberal Party, did not have the mass apparatus of the FMLN in El Salvador or the FSLN in Nicaragua. But they miscalculated. They didn't take into account that Honduras has the strongest trade-union movement in the area, and it is the unions that have been the backbone of the resistance.

The civilian-military coup d'état unleashed a nightmare for the Honduran masses, and not just for them. In fact, it threatens all of Latin America with a return to the times of the military dictatorships, of the dirty wars and the death squads of the 1970s and '80s. Everyone understands that if the *gorilas* (reactionary military officers) manage to consolidate their domination in Honduras, the same thing could take place tomorrow in Ecuador or Bolivia. The question that is posed is how to eradicate this plague that has beset Latin America for decades, and in order to answer that it is necessary to analyze its context, its roots and its scope. To suppose that the solution is to be found in merely reestablishing “constitutional order” by restoring President Zelaya, or even that it can be resolved in a bourgeois-democratic framework, is to ignore the class forces which produced the coup, as well as the web of complicity extending from Tegucigalpa to Washington, D.C. In reality, only through international socialist revolution is it possible to eradicate the threat of constant coups, which are inherent in Latin American capitalism under imperialist domination.

### A Coup “Made in U.S.A.”

In the final analysis, despite the denials by U.S. spokesmen, this coup was “made in U.S.A.” And this fact has enormous importance in devising a strategy to fight it.

It must be stressed, as we have done, that the Honduran military uprising is “the first coup of the Obama administration.” In Latin America, there have been many illusions in the election of the U.S. president, reputed to be a liberal and a critic of the war in Iraq. He was seen as the “anti-Bush.” Fewer illusions, perhaps, than in the United States, where the election of the first black president represented a significant social shift, but not the heralded political “change.” Great hopes were erroneously placed in Barack Obama, and while the Internationalist Group warned from the outset that he was a warmonger and defender of the bankers, practically the entire U.S. left, either directly or indirectly, aided his election. Due to their inveterate opportunism, they fed the



Reuters

**The visible heads of the coup d'état: the puppet “president” Roberto Micheletti (in suit and tie) and General Romeo Vásques (saluting).**

illusions rather than fighting them.

Nevertheless, seven months after taking office, the Obama administration has turned out to be, in terms of its political content, the third term of George Bush II. Its leading personnel comes largely from the team of Bill Clinton, with the addition of the chiefs of the War Department and Treasury, who carried out the same functions under Bush. This continuity in personnel constitutes a loyalty oath to Wall Street and the Pentagon, demonstrating that it is the same old Yankee imperialism. In his “national security” policies, in the imperialist war and colonial occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama is following in the footsteps of the Bush administration, and has even intensified military strikes inside Pakistan. The torture and massacres of the civilian population of Afghanistan continue, as well as the police-state measures against democratic rights in the United States.

In Latin America, the U.S. Navy's Fourth Fleet has been reactivated, after having been dissolved in the 1940s. Now a new agreement is about to be signed with Colombia giving U.S. forces access to seven Colombian military bases, in addition to the six where they already have hundreds of American military “advisors” and intelligence agents. And despite the announcement by the Ecuadorian government of Rafael Correa that he would not renew the contract for the use of the air base at Manta (which returned to Ecuadorian control in mid-September), the United States is encircling Hugo Chávez' Venezuela with a military cordon. As the Venezuelan president rightly remarked, the winds of war are blowing in the region.

It was in this framework that the military coup in Hondu-

ras was plotted that overthrew President Zelaya, accused of being the beachhead for the expansion of *chavismo* in Central America. For the U.S. government, Chávez – this bourgeois populist-nationalist who hasn't expropriated anything, and whose few nationalizations are actually commercial transactions which have turned out to be quite lucrative for the companies involved – has apparently replaced “Castro communism” as the fearsome spectre stalking Latin America.

We have published the details showing that the U.S. was up to its neck in the plotting of the putsch, even discussing with the future authors of the coup about how to go about arresting the president who was elected by popular vote<sup>2</sup>. Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Shannon traveled to Tegucigalpa for this purpose a week before the overthrow of Zelaya. We noted how the coup regime has hired prominent lobbyists linked to the Clintons to be its representatives in Washington. It's also noteworthy that prominent liberal groups like the Washington Office on Latin America went after Zelaya during the days before the coup over his plans to hold a non-binding poll on whether a constituent assembly should be called. But if this sent shivers down the backs of the Honduran ruling class, together with the 60 percent increase in the minimum wage ordered by Zelaya last year, what got Washington in a tizzy were the increasingly close ties between the Honduran president and the Venezuelan president in the framework of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA).

Another element placing the civilian-military coup in a regional framework was the coordinated replacement of American ambassadors to the governments of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador in August 2008: Hugo Llorens<sup>3</sup> was dispatched to Tegucigalpa, Robert Blau was sent as chargé d'affaires to San Salvador, Stephen McFarland to Guatemala and Robert Callahan to Managua. All of them studied at the United States War College in Washington, all worked at the U.S. embassy in Iraq, and all of them were officials of the National Intelligence Directorate under John Negroponte, who was known as The Proconsul during his years as U.S. ambassador to Honduras in the 1980s. From that position he ran the death squads in El Salvador, the murderous “contras” in Nicaragua, and Battalion 316 in Honduras, which assassinated and “disappeared” hundreds of left-wing activists and imposed a reign of terror on the country.

Today the ghosts of yesteryear have returned to Honduras. Hours after the coup, Billy Joya Améndola, notorious as one of the bloodiest butchers of Battalion 316, appeared on Honduran television screens as the “minister counselor” of Micheletti in his failed bid to become the candidate of the Liberal Party in this year's elections. Replying to accusations that he was responsible for the death or disappearance of 16 people in the 1980s, Billy Joya told a reporter for the *New York Times* (8 August): “The policy at that time was, ‘The only good Communist is a dead Communist.’ ... I supported

<sup>2</sup> See “Honduras: The First Coup of the Obama Administration,” *The Internationalist*, No. 29, Summer 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Llorens is a Cuban *gusano* (counterrevolutionary exile) who was brought to Miami by the CIA's Operation Peter Pan in the 1960s.



Reuters

**The devil's embrace: Honduran president Zelaya with the Yankee/gusano ambassador Hugo Llorens, in Managua, July 30**

the policy.” Interestingly, Joya, like much of the Honduran “elite,” has permanent residency in the United States, the famous “green card,” and in recent weeks moved his family to Miami. It has also been reported that many of the businessmen behind the coup have sent their families to the U.S., in case things go awry.

It should not be forgotten that the military coups in Honduras in 1956, in 1963 (the bloodiest, which brought to power the father of Zelaya's foreign minister, Patricia Rodas), in 1972, in 1975 and in 1978 all sought the support of U.S. imperialism and attacked the workers movement. Even when there were supposedly civilian regimes, these were only a disguise to mask military domination. So in order to eliminate military coups and military regimes in civilian disguise, which have been a constant in Honduran history, it is necessary to break with the system that generates them: imperialism. In the first days (after June 28), many of those who opposed the Honduran coup called on the U.S. to disavow the coup plotters. Hugo Chávez appealed, “Obama, do something.” We in the League for the Fourth International, in contrast, insisted, “Yankee Imperialism, Hands Off!” We did not beg Obama to restore Zelaya to the presidential seat. We demanded that the U.S. pull its troops out of the military base of Soto Cano (Palmerola) along with its agents throughout the country, and we called on the Honduran workers to expel the imperialists.

We also did not call on the Organization of American States (OAS), that body which Ernesto “Ché” Guevara rightly called the Yankee ministry of colonies, nor did we ask for the intervention of Latin American bourgeois governments like Brazil, Chile and Argentina. If they came out against the Honduran coup, so much the better; but as subjects, allies and junior partners of U.S. imperialism, their posture has been to negotiate a deal, like the ill-starred “Agreement of San José,”

CIPRODEH



**The death squads are back. José Murillo Sánchez, when he attempted to protest the assassination of his son Isis Obed by an army sharpshooter, was arrested by police officers in ski masks.**

which calls for the return of Zelaya without presidential powers and for coexistence with Micheletti & Co. Working people should reject any “dialogue” with the *golpistas*, who only “dialogue” with guns and truncheons. “Amnesty” for these criminals amounts to impunity. Neither forgiving nor forgetting for the coup plotters! We do not call on bourgeois forces to negotiate a deal with the *gorilas*. On the contrary, we fight for workers mobilization to smash the coup.

### Bring Down the Coup with Class Struggle!

Meanwhile, a wave of repression has been unleashed over Honduras without precedent in the history of the country. Thousands have been arrested so far (17,000 by the end of September, according to the estimates of human rights groups; as many as 30,000 by other counts). The “forces of law and order” have been dealing out brutal beatings in the streets in order to “teach a lesson” to the protesters, while in the shadows they shoot and knife teachers in particular. Nothing is known of the whereabouts of hundreds of peasants arrested on any pretext after marching hundreds of kilometers to express their opposition to the coup. When a crowd of up to 100,000 opponents of the military takeover flocked to the Airport of Toncatín on July 4 to salute President Zelaya on his attempted return, a sniper in uniform murdered a 16-year-old youth, Isis Obed Murillo, with a shot to the heart. When his father, a Protestant minister, sought to protest this atrocity, he was arrested. Later, two teachers – Roger Vallejo and Martín Riviera – were vilely murdered, reflecting the leading role of the teachers unions in the resistance to the government of usurpers.

Perhaps the most sinister aspect of the repression is not so much the death toll, but the fact that the military forces go out of their way to brutally and systematically attack demonstrators with riot clubs and steel bars instead of bullets. Here you can see the hidden hand of their U.S. military “advisers”

who advise them to avoid creating martyrs. In the same way, when torture is accompanied by doctors and psychiatrists who advise the torturers when they should take a break in order to avoid killing the “subject,” it is a telltale sign that “scientific” repression is being carried out with the trademark of the CIA. The Honduran high command is a bunch of bloody psychopaths who wouldn’t hesitate for a second to give the order to massacre thousands of their “compatriots.” If, for now, they are concentrating on dealing out kicks and blows, you know with absolute certainty that they are being instructed by Joint Task Force Bravo of the U.S. Army, stationed at the military base of Soto Cano in Palmerola, no matter what Pentagon spokesmen say about their supposed non-participation in the coup.

(Now they are experimenting with new “crowd control” weapons, such as the Long-Range Acoustical Device, or LRAD, which is being used against the Brazilian embassy in Tegucigalpa where President Zelaya is ensconced, and which has previously been used in Afghanistan, Iraq and, most recently, against anti-globalization demonstrators in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.)

The Honduran military takeover – supported and even instigated by the overwhelming majority of the capitalist class; approved by the National and Liberal parties in the National Congress; “legalized” by order of the slavish Supreme Court, totally controlled by the same parties; and sanctified with the benediction of both the Catholic archbishop and of the top Protestant prelates – represents a blood-curdling threat to democratic rights and the fundamental interests of the Honduran masses in one of the poorest countries of Latin America. It was also motivated by capitalist class interests. It was carried out, among other reasons, in order to intensify the exploitation in the *maquiladoras*, the free trade zone factories, which produce for the capitalist world market. As we have pointed out, despite being a small country, Honduras has the third-largest number of maquiladora workers in the world.

What this means is that the country which in the past was the archetype of the “banana republic” is today a “maquiladora republic.” This has a contradictory aspect: on the one hand, Honduras is directly under the iron heel of imperialism, subject to the commandments of American capitalists. But on the other hand, its integration into the world economy, particularly through the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) means that the fate of the Honduran workers is bound up with that of the workers movement around the world. This underscores the importance of international labor action to resist the coup. The International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) has called to boycott Honduran-flag vessels when they enter unionized ports. If in fact the cargos of bananas or of clothing and shoes manufactured in the Honduran factories of Gap, Nike and Adidas were prevented from unloading, this could push the imperialist godfathers of the Honduran coup plotters to dump their puppets.

But so far, the call of the ITF for labor action has remained a dead letter, due to the labor bureaucracy's "respect" for capitalist legality.

Inside Honduras, it has been above all the unions, along with agricultural cooperatives, who have organized the resistance. The teachers unions, in particular, have played a leading role, with a general strike of the schools that lasted three weeks beginning on June 29, followed by a rotating strike (three days of classroom instruction followed by two days on strike). The union hall of the bottling plant workers union, STIBYS, has served as the organizing center for the demonstrations, and the president of that union, Carlos Reyes, is one of the main leaders of the protests. There were national 48-hour work stoppages in the last two weeks of July. However, they have been largely limited to the public sector, and they have a multi-class character: "civic work stoppages" rather than workers strikes. This reflects the

popular-front character of the opposition to the coup, headed by a coalition that "unites" the workers with a sector of the capitalists. The National Front Against the Coup d'État (FNCGE) includes a small bourgeois party, Democratic Unity, and dissident sectors of the Liberal Party. More generally, the struggle to bring back "Mel" Zelaya seeks to pull together all those opposed to the coup around a lowest-common-denominator program, thereby ensuring that resistance is limited to the capitalist framework.

In a previous article on the coup in Tegucigalpa<sup>4</sup> we dealt with the theme of the "oligarchy," which many leftists bandy about. They denounce the "*rancia oligarquía hondureña*" (archaic Honduran oligarchy) in order to justify their popular-front politics. The implication is that while the tops of the ruling class support the coup, there are supposedly other bourgeois sectors that don't. We explained that, in contrast to more economically advanced capitalist countries where the reference to an oligarchy is a pure invention, in Honduras the domination of a tiny number of families and clans persists, *but that this "oligarchy" is nothing other than the bourgeois ruling class*. The few capitalist opponents of the coup are no more than "the shadow of the bourgeoisie," as Trotsky described the bourgeois component of the Spanish Popular Front during the 1930s Civil War. The reformist left wants to ally with them not because it would make the opposition stronger, but to make it more acceptable to the powers that be, and to put a lock on the action of their own ranks, so that they don't go "too far."

In accordance with the Trotskyist program, the League for the Fourth International calls to mobilize the Honduran working people against the coup not for the aim of reinstating the presidency of Zelaya, a bourgeois conservative, but for the purpose of



**The military officers carried out their coup in order to defend the interests of a few property owners. However, these were not an "oligarchy" but the core of the capitalist ruling class. To defeat them and put an end to coups, a workers revolution is needed.**

fighting for a workers and peasants government to sweep away the coup plotters and bring down the capitalist system that breeds them. That is why we call to mobilize the workers in a general strike, to form workers self-defense groups against repression. We fight alongside Zelaya supporters against the coup mongers, at the same time as we warn that the deposed president is also a capitalist politician who responds to the demands of imperialism. This will be a difficult struggle at the present time when demonstrators are shouting, "*Mel, amigo, el pueblo está contigo!*" (Mel, our friend, the people are with you). But it will prepare those who oppose the coup for the revolutionary struggle that is the only positive outcome for the exploited masses.

Zelaya has already accepted the constraints that the U.S. imperialists want to impose on him in the so-called "San José Agreements," which so far are unilateral, because the Micheletti, Vásquez Velásquez, Facussé and the rest don't accept them. In particular, in the face of the insistence by the Department of State, the Honduran president gave up the demand for a constituent assembly. This slogan has recently become the rallying point for the centrist and reformist left in Latin America: having lost confidence in socialist revolution and the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat, they fly the banner of one or another variant of a (bourgeois) "democratic revolution." They call for constituent assemblies everywhere, even in countries that for quite some time have had all the forms of truncated bourgeois "democracy." For revolutionary Marxists, on the other hand, the call for a constituent assembly is applicable in feudal or semi-feudal countries, or where there is an essentially anti-democratic "bonapartist," military/police regime<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> In "Honduras: The First Coup of the Obama Administration."

<sup>5</sup> See our article, "Trotskyism vs. 'Constituent Assembly' Mania," *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008.

El Heraldo



**Around 1,000 women workers at the Index maquiladora in Comayagüela demonstrated on February 17 to demand payment of the minimum wage decreed by the administration of Manuel Ze-laya in December of last year.**

In Honduras today, there is such a military dictatorship, slightly veiled by the approval of the institutions of a pseudo-democracy under military supervision, the guard dogs of the narrow, semi-colonial capitalist class. Even before the coup, the “democratic” attire of the Honduran state was threadbare. The current constitution was issued in 1982, under the tutelage of U.S. Proconsul Negroponte, in order to provide the trappings of a “state of law” to the regime of the death squads, which served as a launching pad for the Nicaraguan contras and as a “ground-based aircraft carrier” for the Pentagon in Central America. As a result of a series of coups, the head of the armed forces was named not by the president of the republic, or by any other civilian authority, but by the all-powerful High Council of the Armed Forces (COSUFA). For a quarter century, from 1954 to 1981, not a single head of the armed forces left his post without becoming president of the country. For its part, the supposedly independent judicial branch is nothing of the sort: the Supreme Court is a condominium of the two traditional parties and the presidency.

However, behind this “democratic deficit” there are important

*class* interests. The tiny Honduran bourgeoisie has repeatedly resorted to military government because of its scant social weight in comparison to the large mass of working people that it, and its imperialist patrons, mercilessly exploit. While fighting alongside those calling for a constituent assembly, we stress that such a body cannot solve fundamental social issues, and to think that this can be achieved with a new constitution reflects dangerous democratic illusions. One only has to look at the recent experience of Ecuador, where a constituent assembly called by President Rafael Correa issued a new constitution in mid-2008. Despite all the fanfare about “refounding the country,” the new Carta Magna ended up protecting private property, providing guarantees for “multinational” corporations, and authorizing mixed companies in strategic sectors of the economy, such as oil.

Any constituent assembly called by a capitalist government, whether headed by a Manuel Zelaya, an Evo Morales or even a Salvador

Allende, will end up being a swindle – and not just because of the opposition of a Stone Age right wing or “betrayals” by “center-left” governments, but because one cannot alter the

fundamentals of the system of exploitation and oppression under capitalism. To put an end to the infernal cycle of military coups, to escape from the clutches of imperialism, to break the power of the large landowners or solve the age-old oppression of the indigenous peoples – not to mention freeing the banana workers and women maquiladora workers from wage slavery in imperialist-owned companies – will take international socialist revolution.

This perspective reflects the theory of permanent revolution developed by Leon Trotsky, which summed up the experience of the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917. Citing the phenomenon of combined and uneven development, in which modern factories exist side-by-side with antiquated economic forms, he concluded that in the imperialist epoch, the weak bourgeoisies in semi-feudal or semi-colonial countries are incapable of carrying out the tasks of the great bourgeois revolutions of the past. Agrarian revolution, democracy and national liberation can only be



Indymedia/Honduras

**Despite the demands of his supporters, Manuel Zelaya has already dropped the demand for a constituent assembly, which was one of the issues that set off the coup d'état, due to the insistence of the bourgeoisie on preventing at any cost all changes to its tight system of domination.**

achieved by the taking of power by the working people. Consequently, Trotskyists call for a revolutionary workers party, to fight for a workers and peasants government to bring down the present-day capitalist state. Then, following a victorious insurrection, a revolutionary constituent assembly could ratify the new state based on workers and peasants councils that would carry out these democratic tasks by expropriating the bourgeoisie and extending the revolution.

### For a Central American Federation of Workers Republics!

To achieve such gains, and simply in order to definitively defeat the coup mongers, one must go beyond the national boundaries of Honduras. As we have pointed out, the origins of the coup are to be found in the Central American framework and domination by U.S. imperialism. We have quoted how the spokesman for ARENA, the party of the death squads in El Salvador, threatened Salvadoran president Mario Funes with the same fate as Zelaya. Looking over a list of “Who Is Who” among the businessmen behind the coup, one sees that many of them – like José Lamas, Jorge Faraj or Miguel Facussé – have companies and economic interests in other Central American countries. However, despite all the sympathy for the courageous Honduran fighters, and even with all the declarations of solidarity, there have not been big mobilizations in the rest of the region to undertake a joint struggle. And for a very concrete reason: the Central American left is dominated by petty-bourgeois – and now bourgeois – nationalism, rather than proletarian internationalism.

It should be noted that at the moment of winning independence from Spain there was a single state on the isthmus, the Federal Republic of Central America. The formation of five mini-republics was the result of conservative reaction linked to the church and the large landowners who opposed the liberal reforms. More generally, this was due to insufficient development of the productive forces that could sustain a consolidated country. This phenomenon was seen all over Latin America, such as in Argentina where a national state was only cohered in the middle of the 19th century under the *caudillo* (strong man) Juan Manuel de Rosas. It was also the case in Mexico, where this consolidation did not take place until the victory of Benito Juárez over the conservatives and the French army of Emperor Maximilian in 1867. In Mexico and Argentina, extensive railroad networks unified national markets; in Central America this did not occur. In Central America, due to greater economic backwardness and being more directly subjected to North American expansionism, the nation-building effort failed with the defeat

and execution of General Francisco Morazán in 1840. Then came the filibusters like William Walker, who was invited by Nicaraguan reactionaries but then took over the republic and sought to conquer the whole of the isthmus seeking to join the United States as a slave state.

Ever since, Central American unity has been a dream of progressive forces, while the “archaic oligarchies” dug in to their piece of the isthmus. In our times, revolutionary figures have referred ironically to the tiny size of their states, as for example the poet and guerrilla leader Roque Dalton did with his references to El Salvador as the “Tom Thumb of America.” The Honduran reactionary Micheletti, on the other hand, says that there is no point to talk with El Salvador, because it is a field too small to play soccer on, that when you kick the ball it lands in another country. Maybe he was trying to avenge himself for the so-called “Soccer War” of 1961, when Honduras lost to the Salvadoran army. In reality, these sorts of national conflicts were whipped up by reactionary forces in order to distract the attention of the working people from the class war. Genuine revolutionaries didn’t take sides in the 1961 war, any more than they did in the war between Bolivia and Paraguay in the 1930s.

Still, historically left-wing forces in Central America have been dominated by a nationalist vision and politics. In the 1980s, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) governed Nicaragua, while the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) waged a civil war in El Salvador. The imperialists always accused the Sandinistas of financing and running the Salvadoran guerrillas, but the FSLN actually did precious little to aid its comrades of the FMLN, and even less for the tiny groups of guerrillas in Honduras. Before that, in the 1960s, there were a host of guerrilla groups in Guatemala, including the MR-13, FAR, EGP, ORPA and the local Communist party, the Guatemalan Party of Labor (PGT).

Even the politically most advanced of these, the Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre, which said it was fighting for socialist revolution (while the others only called for a bourgeois “democratic” revolution), restricted its struggle to Guatemala, although a number of Latin American militants (including several who saw themselves as Trotskyists) supplied them with money and military supplies, for which some like the Mexicans David Aguilar Mora and Eunice Campirán were vilely assassinated by the Guatemalan army, and others, like the Argentine Adolfo Gilly were jailed for years in Mexico.

They had a nationalist outlook for several reasons. First, because of the influence Stalinism, which abandoned the program of the October Revolution – for international socialist revolution – in favor of a conservative, nationalist



Roque Dalton

program reflecting the mentality of the parasitic bureaucracy that seized power in the workers state following Lenin's death in 1924. This program was summed up in the slogan of building socialism "in a single country," which is an impossibility given the worldwide character of socialism. Moreover, what was built in the USSR was not socialism, a classless society, but rather a bonapartist regime, a bureaucratically degenerated workers state, that required a political revolution to open the way to socialism. The counterpart of this dogma, the popular front, was intended to pave the way for the desired "peaceful coexistence" between the USSR and imperialism by blocking proletarian revolutions in other countries, using Marxist-sounding language as it politically chained the workers movement to sections of the bourgeoisie.

A second reason that nationalism continues to predominate is that all these movements had their social base in the peasantry, a contradictory petty-bourgeois social layer which lacks the solid class interests necessary to reconstruct the nation, as is the case with the fundamental classes, the bourgeoisie (which seeks to build a capitalist society) and the proletariat (whose interests will be expressed in socialism). The peasantry is historically the cradle of nationalist movements. Its lower layers, landless peasants, are natural allies of the proletariat, while middle peasants – small producers who do not exploit the labor of others – can join with workers revolution to get rid of the yoke of the landed estate owners, as occurred in the Russian Revolution of 1917. But in "normal" times, the property-owning peasantry is easy prey for the bourgeoisie, on which it depends for seeds and to market its products. However, the victory in Cuba of the peasant-based rebel army led by Fidel Castro, Ernesto "Ché" Guevara and Camilo Cienfuegos, who overthrew the tyrant Fulgencio Batista on 1 January 1959, inspired a whole series of guerrilla movements in Latin America who took to the hills seeking to reproduce what was an exceptional case.

The Trotskyists of the League for the Fourth International and its Mexican section, the Grupo Internacionalista, defend Cuba deformed workers state against imperialism and counter-revolution, whether internal or external. At the same time, we fight for a proletarian political revolution to establish genuine soviet democracy in place of the present bureaucratic regime, in which basic decisions are made by a small petty-bourgeois layer, whether the current leadership of the Cuban Communist



**Lenin and Trotsky with Red Army troops in 1921. Stalin renounced the Bolshevik program of the October 1917 Revolution for international socialist revolution, and later blocked proletarian revolutions by means of the popular front.**

Party under Raúl Castro or whoever was in Fidel Castro's jeep during the early years.

In Central America in the 1970s, the FSLN led by Carlos Fonseca Amador, and later by Daniel Ortega, Tomás Borge and Jaime Wheelock, took its inspiration from the example of Castro's Cuba and the struggle of insurgent general Agusuto Sandino against imperialism and its puppets in the 1920s. But upon coming to power, following Castro's advice the FSLN did not seek to build a "second Cuba," but rather to form a government with bourgeois sectors led by Violeta Chamorro, whose husband was assassinated by the dictator Somoza. The coalition with Chamorro didn't last long. What followed in Sandinista Nicaragua for almost a decade was a petty-bourgeois regime. It was far from being a workers state – the economy remained in the hands of the local bourgeoisie – but neither was it a capitalist state, since the capitalist army of Somoza had been shattered and the Sandinista Army wasn't committed to the defense either of capitalist property or the collectivized property of a workers state.

After a decade in power, under the pressure of U.S. imperialism with its economic blockade and military siege by the mercenary army of the *contras*, in 1987 Daniel Ortega signed the Esquipulas Agreement, orchestrated by the same Oscar Arias, president of Costa Rica, who today is acting as "mediator" in Honduras. In 1989, the FSLN suffered an electoral defeat at the hands of a bourgeois opposition coalition led by Chamorro and lost political power. There followed 16 years of domination by right-wing governments in which corruption reached unheard-of heights and the poverty of the Nicaraguan masses continually deepened. Then in 2006, Daniel Ortega was reelected as president and the FSLN now has a majority in Congress, only this time as a thoroughly bourgeois politician and political party. Formally the regime presided over by Ortega calls itself the Government of Reconciliation and National Unity, making clear its commitment to ally with other bourgeois sectors, despite the fact that it faces a furiously anti-Sandinista opposition, no matter how rightist the government's policies may be.

The capitalist character of the current Sandinista government is reflected in its stance toward the growing working-class discontent. Shortly after beginning its new term in office, the Sandinista Workers Center (CST) split, forming another federation, the National Labor Front (FNT). Both are part of the



**Religion and capitalism: the reborn Christian Daniel Ortega serves the owners of the maquiladoras while Nicaraguan workers are still mired in poverty.**

Sandinista movement; in this sense they resemble the corporatist labor bodies in Mexico. (In Mexico during the 1970s, in the face of dissatisfaction with the corporatist CTM (Mexican Workers Federation), the core of the “workers sector” of the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the PRI-government formed the Congress of Labor (CT), which was also integrated into the state party.) So in Nicaragua last year, when there were negotiations over a national labor contract, the FNT asked for a 25 percent raise. The CST said that, since it was aware of the economic difficulties, it would only ask for 10 percent. And the Sandinista government? The labor minister supported the position of the capitalists, rejecting any wage increase at all. Then at the official May Day celebration, Daniel Ortega told his minister to sit down with the unions and the employers and figure out a way to give the workers a few córdobas more. Another aspect is that those who are trying to unionize maquila workers complain of the hostility of the government, which is seeking to attract maquiladoras.

Then there is the religious aspect. Daniel Ortega, after years of proclaiming himself a Marxist, after his electoral defeat and a sexual scandal, reinvented himself politically and had himself baptized as a reborn Christian. Today all over Managua you can see huge billboards with a picture of the president and the motto, “To Serve the People is to Serve GOD.” And it’s not just exploiting religion for electoral propaganda like any other bourgeois politico. In October 2006, at the height of the election campaign, the new Christian Ortega joined with the right wing to prohibit abortion under any and all conditions, including when the life of the mother is in danger. So all over Latin America there is a struggle for decriminalizing abortion, while in Nicaragua therapeutic abortion was banned! Then in November 2007 (after some 80 women had died),

the Sandinista government added criminal penalties to the ban. In October 2008, the Nicaraguan Police broke into the offices of the Autonomous Women’s Movement (MAM), seizing computers and files to investigate the accusation that MAM was promoting illegal abortions. And in November of that same year, the police prevented hundreds of women from marching in Managua on the International Day for Eliminating Violence Against Women.

The Trotskyists of the League for the Fourth International fight for the unrestricted right to free abortion on demand, under high-quality medical care (see “Mexico: For Free Abortion on Demand,” in *The Internationalist* No. 26, July 2007).

Today hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans are enduring terrible poverty, far worse than in the plebeian neighborhoods

of the poorest regions of Mexico. Virtually any tendency to the left of the FLSN has disappeared, and those who identify themselves as the “revolutionary, Sandinista, socialist left” yearn for a (bourgeois) “21st century socialism” on the Chávez model (see *Correo de Nicaragua* No. 4, May-June 2009). But introducing a few social programs for health care, education and subsidies and encouraging cooperatives is a long ways from sweeping away capitalism, whose system of exploitation is constantly reproducing poverty. The “new Nicaragua” of the second coming of the FSLN urgently needs a genuine socialist revolution, resulting a class struggle by the working people against the capitalist government.



**Mario Funes, TV reporter and talk show host, elected president of El Salvador as the candidate of the FMLN, says he will consolidate the “neo-liberal” policies of the previous rightist governments.**



**The Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International at a protest in New York City against the Honduran military coup, September 29.**

In El Salvador, presidential elections this past March led to the victory of Mauricio Funes Cartagena, a popular television journalist and talk show host, as the candidate of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front. His only connection with the guerrilla past of the FMLN is that as a reporter he once interviewed some *comandantes*. On taking office on June 1, Funes announced that he would not be subject to the decisions of the FMLN and that his would be a government of national unity (although, like the FSLN, he is hounded by the right). Since ARENA still controls the Supreme Court and the Legislative Assembly in alliance with other rightist parties, the new “moderate” president will have very circumscribed powers of decision-making. Even then, he says he is not opposed to consolidating the “neo-liberal” policies of the previous governments, and in particular the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the “Pathways to Prosperity in the Americas” initiative inaugurated by the Bush administration which subjugates the Salvadoran economy to U.S. oversight.

Like Honduras, the narrow Salvadoran ruling class has modernized without expanding. In fact, a recent investigation by the Jesuit magazine *Envío* (July 2009) concludes that the traditional coffee-growing oligarchy based on exporting agricultural products, the famous “14 families” who dominated the country for a century, has been replaced by eight commercial and financial groups. Some of these capitalists are part of the influential “Friends of Mauricio Funes” group, preferring the meritocracy he has promised to the rampant influence-trafficking of ARENA. Seeking “stability,” the allegedly “leftist” president would consolidate one of the most

socially stratified countries on earth. And the response by Funes to the coup regime in Honduras has been quite weak, merely closing the border for 24 hours. But what else would one expect from this “center-left” capitalist government? More significantly, there has also been no action by the Salvadoran left and workers movement. Where are the labor boycotts of Honduran exports, the calls for solidarity strikes? In practice, there has been a thundering silence from San Salvador to the Honduran coup.

Also in Mexico, the regional powerhouse, workers solidarity with the Honduran working people today confronting ferocious repression has been almost non-existent. Here as well, and particularly in the United States, we must call on independent teachers unions and networks to support with deeds their Honduran compañeras and compañeros who are fighting under the gun. It’s not just a matter of solidarity actions: it is necessary to land blows against the allies of the coup plotters throughout the region. A rise of class struggle against the capitalists in El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Costa Rica would raise the pressure on the bosses of the mutineers in Honduras. Above all, it is necessary to begin building the nuclei of revolutionary workers parties, Leninist and Trotskyist in character, to lead the struggle for socialist revolution throughout the region. Given the regional and international genesis of the Honduran putsch, it will be difficult to crush it in the national framework. Thus it is necessary to begin establishing the links for a Central American federation of workers republics, as part of a Socialist United States of Latin America. ■

### League for the Fourth International

LFI, Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A. E-mail: [internationalistgroup@msn.com](mailto:internationalistgroup@msn.com)

#### Internationalist Group/U.S.

**Internationalist Group**, Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A.  
Tel. (212) 460-0983 Fax: (212) 614-8711  
E-mail: [internationalistgroup@msn.com](mailto:internationalistgroup@msn.com)

#### Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil

**Brazil:** write to Caixa Postal 084027, CEP 27251-740, Volta Redonda, RJ, Brazil

**Rio de Janeiro:** write to Caixa Postal 3982, CEP 20001-974, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil  
E-mail: [lqb1996@yahoo.com.br](mailto:lqb1996@yahoo.com.br)

#### LIVI/Deutschland

**Germany:** write to Postfach 74 06 41, 22096 Hamburg, Germany

#### Grupo Internacionalista/México

**Mexico:** write to Apdo. Postal 70-379, Admón. de Correos No. 70, CP 04511, México, D.F., Mexico  
E-mail: [grupointernacionalista@yahoo.com.mx](mailto:grupointernacionalista@yahoo.com.mx)

## Honduras: Sweep Away the Coup Plotters, Generals and Capitalists – Fight for a Workers and Peasants Government!

# For Revolutionary Workers Struggle Against Coups in Central America



Honduras Labor

Mass march against the coup and the repression unleashed by the dictatorship, Tegucigalpa, August 11.

## Yankee Imperialism, Hands Off!

*The following article, translated from El Internacionalista, is based on a presentation at an August 21 forum of the Grupo Internacionalista, section of the League for the Fourth International, at the National University of Mexico (UNAM).*

The June 28 coup d'état in Honduras set off a regional and continent-wide crisis which is still continuing. Its intensity not only has not diminished, it has sharpened, mainly due to the resistance of the working people who have not given up an inch in the face of the brutal repression by the dictatorship that has taken over the Central American country. Despite the efforts of the coup plotters to stay in power through delaying tactics, sustained by the de facto recognition of the de facto regime by its imperialist master, the United States, they have not been able to restore order. Despite all the beatings, the torture and

murders, the Honduran workers and peasants, the teachers and students, the indigenous peoples, the black Garífuna population and women in particular remain on battle footing. Their heroic example is an inspiration to all.

When General Romeo Vásquez Velásquez<sup>1</sup> ousted the  
*continued on page 63*

<sup>1</sup> Like many top officers of the Honduran army, General Vásquez attended the U.S. Army's School of the Americas, known as the "school of assassins" and "school of coup plotters" – twice, in fact, in 1976 and 1984 – although he did not graduate. His main claim to fame prior to his starring role in the 2009 coup was to have gone to prison in 1993 for participation in a car theft ring that specialized in stealing luxury autos (see Al Giordano, "Honduras Coup General Was Charged in 1993 Auto Theft Ring," *Narcosphere*, 4 July).