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Voice

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Bush and Kerry, pro-war servants of big business

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What is Communist Voice?

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

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

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

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

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

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Build the mass movements, target the capitalists!

Bush and Kerry, pro-war servants of big business

Below is the text of a Communist Voice Organization leaflet of August 29:

Bush is hated by workers, activists, and progressive-minded people. They've had enough of the war on Iraq; enough of corporate swindlers like Enron and Halliburton; and enough of police-state measures to stifle dissent and terrorize immigrants. They've had enough of his racist campaign against affirmative action and enough of Bush's Christian right and its holy war on abortion rights and scapegoating of gay marriage.

The fervor against Bush is directed at the hired gun of the capitalist corporations. This anger pushes people into struggle. But how can we get rid, not just of Bush, but of his policies?

Many people are voting for Kerry in desperation. Will this be a real alternative to Bush? Kerry and the Democrats say so. But Kerry would keep troops in Iraq, keep the police-state apparatus of the "war on terror", and give more tax breaks to businesses.

Some are sick of both parties and are voting for Nader. They are willing to defy the abuse from Democratic Party flacks. But it's necessary not just to break from the two big capitalist parties, but from capitalist policies as well. On Iraq, Nader shares with Kerry the idea of replacing a unilateral US occupation with a broader multilateral occupation under the UN. But the UN is dominated by the US and other big imperialist powers. Nader says he hopes to rejuvenate the Democratic Party. Meanwhile, he makes deals with racist Pat Buchanan. He'd regulate business a bit. But he's not for class struggle..

A real alternative must be based on mass struggles, such as the anti-war movement, the struggle at the workplace, the movements in defense of the immigrants and minorities, etc. The Democrats want to divert everything into campaigning for Kerry. Instead, we must continue mass protests. Let all workers and activists, no matter who they intend to vote for, put every candidate on the hot seat over their stand towards the war in Iraq. Let's expose the anti-immigrant and anti-democratic stands of the candidates. Let's build organizations of class struggle which stand against the capitalists and their political mouthpieces and push forward the mass movements.

Today the mass struggles are sporadic and often small. The workers' movement is mostly quiet. Yet the mass activity of the workers in all the struggles is essential to have a real alternative to capitalist politics. The California grocery strike showed the workers' willingness to fight, though they were betrayed by the sellout union leadership. And further struggles will be spurred as hard times continue as the capitalists squeeze us more. We need to encourage strikes and other workplace actions. We need to mobilize workers into anti-war actions like the "million worker march" on Oct. 17. As well, the rank and file need to organize themselves against the treachery of the AFL-CIO leaders who have faith in Kerry, but not the workers.

We must oppose not only Bush and Kerry, but the capitalist class that stands behind them. The closer we look at Bush and Kerry's stands, the more it's clear they are the policies of the capitalist class.

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Iraq

Bush's occupation of Iraq has been a fiasco. His weapons of mass destruction hoax has been exposed, and the torture scandal has obliterated the myth of a benevolent occupation. The Iraqi masses welcomed the downfall of Hussein but now there is resistance all over the country to the arrogant rule of the US military and the discredited Iraqi governments it rigs up. Over a year after declaring victory, US forces have been forced to retreat from many areas of Iraq.

This is not just Bush's mess, however. Kerry also supports continuing the occupation indefinitely. Recently he even admitted that had he known there were no WMDs, he still would have voted for the war. His main difference with Bush is that he insists he'd be able to get European imperialist powers like France and Germany involved in sending troops and thereby share the burden of the occupation. That way, not only would US troops slaughter Iraqis and be killed or injured, so would the sons and daughters of the workers of other capitalist powers. Moreover, in an April 30 speech in Fulton, Missouri, Kerry demanded more US troops in Iraq, too. What an alternative!

And what of the great anti-war heroes of the Democratic Party like Dennis Kucinich? At the Democratic convention, Kerry's forces made it clear no disagreement with their boy would be allowed. And Kucinich agreed to call off any fight on this and back Kerry's platform. Nor did any other of the great liberals utter a peep against Kerry. Meanwhile, liberals like Congressional Black Caucus members Charles Rangel of New York and John Conyers of Michigan are pushing for reviving the draft under the fraud that if rich kids are drafted the capitalists will hesitate to launch wars.

“War on terror” and defending the US imperialist empire

For Bush, the Iraq war is just one battle of an endless “war on terrorism”. The “war on terrorism” isn't really about fighting terrorism though because one US administration after another has sponsored terrorism and still does. It's really about settling scores with upstart tyrants like Hussein who once had friendly relations with the US but then got in the way of US plans. Also it's a pretext for supporting reactionary regimes in Colombia, the Philippines, etc. against the masses fighting oppression in these countries.

Kerry does not expose the war on terrorism, but promises to wage it more zealously than Bush. That's why Kerry clamors for more troops for the armed forces, denounces Bush for withdrawing troops from Asia and Europe, and backs universal national service which could serve as a precursor to the military draft.

Bush uses the “war on terrorism” to justify the doctrine of pre-emptive wars, that is, wars against anyone who might potentially interfere in US world domination. But even the liberal *Washington Post*, after listening to a Kerry speech, was forced to conclude that “Kerry appeared to outline his own pre-emptive doctrine.” And Kerry tries to outdo Bush in arguing that the US has the right to reshape the world according to its whim. Thus, he stated “America has taken a rare step in human history in arguing that its interests and the world's are one. I fully accept the challenge of moral as well as military leadership that the

claim demands.” By “America”, of course, Kerry really means those running America, the capitalists and their puppet politicians. Whatever they want, Kerry pledges to forcibly impose it on the world.

Israel and the Palestinians

Massive support for Israel has long been a cornerstone of US imperialist policy. Israel has turned the Palestinian territories into a virtual prison camp, but that's OK with the US because Israel is the main watchdog for US interests in the Middle East. The Sharon regime continues the decades-long terrorist occupation with a vengeance. Sharon's latest provocation was starting to build a 425-mile wall that, in effect, annexed a good chunk of Palestinian land for Israel. Bush complained, but no matter what Sharon does, Bush continues to send billions to this butcher. Kerry is not to be outdone though. Last year, like Bush, Kerry had a bit of criticism of the wall. But this July he issued a position paper reversing himself stating “The security fence is a legitimate act of self-defense.”

The American bourgeoisie backs maintaining Israel as a Jewish theocracy because such an Israel will help it oppress the Arab peoples. We must support the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. There should be a single state encompassing Israel and the occupied territories, to which no religion has any special rights. This would be a democratic secular state in which Jewish and Arab workers could live in peace, and in which the Palestinian refugees could return.

Bush and Kerry support deregulation

Behind imperialism is economic exploitation. Bush's neo-liberal “leave no profit behind” strategy is a program of fevered deregulation of world capitalism. In the US too, it aims to eliminate anything restricting the capitalists' ability to ruin workers and the environment. Bush was an enthusiastic proponent of deregulation of the energy industry, helping fuel the California energy crisis and the Enron scandal.

But energy deregulation was a bipartisan affair. Clinton was for it, and so was the Democratic former governor of California, Gray Davis. In the Aug. 2 *Business Week* interview, Kerry declared “I am going to bring Corporate America to the table — not to lecture but to say: How do we make you more competitive? How do we get out of your way?” So if Kerry gets his way, the workers and poor will continue to get run over by the business tycoons.

“Trickle-down” economics

Bush promised that if only the capitalists were free to do what they wanted, this would be great for the workers. Instead there's been massive job loss, while the remaining jobs pay lower wages. Kerry mocks Bush's jobs record and touts the Clinton administration as the model. But under Clinton the gap between rich and poor grew rapidly. Corporate CEOs were swimming in money, while workers were still treading water. Yes, there was a “boom” that temporarily lowered unemployment. But, as always under capitalism, that boom has been followed by recession.

Kerry attacks Bush for running up massive deficits to finance

huge tax breaks for the rich. Fine. But what would Kerry do to balance the budget? If his model is Clinton, he would slash social programs. It was Clinton who cut deficits by joining forces with Newt Gingrich for “welfare reform” that ravaged the poor. And Kerry isn’t opposed to tax cuts for the rich either. He says “Some may be surprised to hear a Democrat calling for lower corporate tax rates.”

Health care

The health care crisis has been a hot topic for the candidates. There are over 40 million people uninsured. Bush has done nothing to help. He supports tax credits and tax-exempt “health savings accounts”. The tax credits for uninsured people would be minuscule compared to cost of decent health coverage. Nor are the uninsured going to have the ability to pour money into a health savings account. Rich people will have a new tax shelter, however. And the plan will encourage employers to drop their health care plans.

Kerry’s plan would provide some of the uninsured relief by extending Medicaid benefits. Beyond that Kerry recommends federal subsidies to health insurance companies and tax credits for employers which allegedly will entice them to provide their employees with health insurance. Kerry’s plan is a patchwork and many uninsured will continue to fall through the cracks. It’s a far cry from the universal guaranteed coverage of a national health insurance system. But Kerry opposes that because he wants to keep the greedy private health insurance industry thriving.

Build an independent movement of the working class!

Bush and Kerry may squabble, but they’re twins. So no matter which of them is elected, there will be unrelenting imperialist bullying and war. And the workers and poor will continue to be sacrificed on the altar of free-market economics.

Let’s turn the anger against Bush into anger at the exploiters and imperialists who lie behind Bush. Let’s use every occasion to denounce the political stands of Bush and Kerry so as to encourage mass struggle. Whether or not you vote for Kerry or the reformist Nader, we say to you we should all participate in the mass movements. No matter who is elected, the warmongering will continue, the conditions of the masses will be under attack, and the various forms of oppression we are struggling against will continue because the bourgeoisie, the class force behind these things, will still be in charge.

We must continue the demonstrations against the war. No to American occupation, and no to NATO or UN occupation! We must direct the struggle not at the particular form of occupation, but at imperialism itself. We must support, not multilateral imperialists, but Iraqi workers and poor, who are oppressed both by US occupation and its puppet Iraqi government and by religious fundamentalist groups and ex-Baathists. Imperialism is based on the interests of the monopoly capitalists. Lenin showed this in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and US foreign policy confirms this. So to fight war and aggression, we must unite the workers of all countries against the capitalist militarists.

We must organize at the workplace against the wage and benefits cuts and the miserable working conditions. We should popularize and support every sector of workers rising in struggle, from the immigrant workers who are rising up despite every legal obstacle, to the wildcat strike of truckers on both coasts whose blockades this spring shut down major seaports, to Bay Area longshoremen who are demanding an anti-war struggle. We must oppose the pro-capitalist leaders of the AFL-CIO who try to keep our struggle under wraps and sell out our demands. These leaders are almost as afraid of strikes and militancy as the capitalists themselves. Even when they pass resolutions in support of something good, like opposing the Iraq war — as SEIU and AFSCME recently did — they immediately support Democrats like Kerry who want to continue the occupation.

We must pay special attention to the plight of immigrants, including Arab and other communities who are being persecuted under the “war on terrorism.” The working class will never be free if we allow different sections to be picked off one by one. Can we rely on Kerry to defend their rights when he voted for the police-state Patriot Act, opposes states issuing drivers licenses without checking immigration status, and is out to prove what a super-patriot he is? No way. Let’s counter racism and chauvinism by building working class solidarity: unity with workers of all backgrounds and with oppressed communities!

The independent movement of the working class can only be built in the midst of these and other struggles. To be truly independent means not only to oppose Bush and Kerry, but to join with other workers in a powerful movement. The more the mass struggle advances, the more it will clash with the capitalists and their political parties. This process will help clarify why we say:

**To hell with Bush and Kerry and the capitalist parties!
Build the independent movement of the working class!**



2004 election shows need for a working class trend Down with both Bush and Kerry!

by Eric Gordon

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In the presidential election coming up this November, the Republicans are putting forth George “Dubya” Bush, the incumbent and an extreme conservative, widely despised by the masses, but much loved by the energy companies, military manufacturers and other monopoly capitalists. The Democrats’ candidate is John Kerry, a liberal running a moderate conservative campaign. Bush is primarily running on the argument that we are at war (from now until eternity), and we shouldn’t switch horses in midstream. Kerry’s main campaign theme has been to position himself progressively further to the right, and otherwise to sit things out while popular disgust toward Bush does his work for him. He is the kind of candidate of whom the best that many of his supporters can say is “well, at least he’s not Bush”. Therefore, the election is likely to come down to a question of how well Bush can keep everything from blowing up in his face before November. Despite popular discontent with Bush policy at home and abroad, Kerry will not attack Bush on these policies in any real way. Rather than stir the masses, he would prefer to lose to Bush. Meanwhile, Ralph Nader is reviled in the bourgeois press for being a spoiler, for throwing the election to Bush, supposedly all for his own ego gratification. But in reality he (like Dean and Kucinich) is operating as a pressure-relief valve on popular discontent, offering both the illusion of choice for those who are disaffected with the two capitalist parties, and the illusion of hope for the “revitalization” of the Democrats.

The bourgeoisie uses the election process to work out their consensus on how to deal with these crises. Through the elections, the bourgeoisie polls its own ranks and sorts out their course in broad strokes. The bourgeoisie expresses their desires in various ways: through campaign contributions, lobbying the candidates, shaping the image of the candidates in the media. In turn, the candidates and parties work out their positions in response to the direct and indirect feedback from the bourgeoisie. Much of this happens in back rooms, but some also happens in public, via syndicated columnists, talk shows, the recent spate of liberal and conservative books, and debates between the politicians: in part the bourgeoisie uses this public debate to work out policy toward, and shape their relations with, other classes in society.

This election will take place amid crises on several fronts.

One of the most acute of these is the Iraq occupation. This includes the continuing resistance among the Iraqis, the publicity around the torture of Iraqi and other prisoners, the possibility that instability in Iraq will spill into other regional crises, and the resistance to the occupation both domestically and among US troops stationed there. There is also a debate over how best to pursue the imperial conquest of broad sections of the planet, under the banner of the “war on terror”. The US armed forces, already stretched thin across the globe, will require a substantial influx of young blood to cope with this decades-long projected war. On top of all this, there are several domestic crises, including how to lay the burden of colossal budget deficits onto the back of the workers, and how best to pursue the privatization of essential services such as health care and utilities. While the workers may benefit (or more likely, be harmed less) by one approach or another, for the bourgeois politicians this is incidental to the debate.

War on Iraq

Egged on especially by the energy corporations and weapons manufacturers, and those companies which could expect exclusive no bid contracts to rebuild Iraq, Bush’s guns-a-blazing approach to Iraq has strengthened resistance to US presence there and the Middle East in general. These crises are not simply a result of Bush’s unilateralist approach. They were bound to arise in any invasion and occupation of Iraq, no matter how it was conducted. However, in his rush to pry open the Iraqi market for US capitalists, the Bush administration downplayed the level of resistance which would arise. Then, the grossly unprepared occupation forces resorted to especially brutal tactics, including house-to-house searches and torture of Iraqi prisoners. These tactics in turn have strengthened the Iraqi resistance.

Yet, the Democrats did not dissent. Both Kerry and his running mate Edwards voted to authorize the war; Kerry even says he would still vote for it, even now, after so many Bush lies have been exposed. They approved the installation of the puppet Iraqi government to provide cover for US corporations’ grab of oil and other resources there. At various points, Kerry has promised to send more troops to Iraq (as many as 100,000, other times 35-40,000, added to the roughly 140,000 already there: in any case not a small increase). Recently, he has reversed this call, and promised to bring some troops home in 2005. Regardless, he has been constant that he believes that some number of US occupying forces would remain in Iraq for the duration of his administration if he is elected. He declared on *Meet the Press* that, “I am united, along with everybody else, in knowing that we have to have a success in not having a failed Iraq. That we are united in.” A “failed Iraq” is code for an Iraq which has spun out of US control, into the hands of the Islamic fundamentalists, or into warlordism, or any other anti-US regime. Kerry went on to say that in the short term “a stable Iraq” is more critical than a democratic Iraq. In saying this, he is brushing aside the Bush administration’s (illusory) image of Iraq as a shining example of

democracy, and signaling to the capitalists that he knows that a good investment climate for US corporations is what matters.

Democrats denounce Bush's unilateralism and call for a multilateral approach to Iraq. This is not out of opposition to the project of US domination of Middle East resources. Instead, it is to urge more cautious tactics in pursuing that goal. Recently, the bourgeois consensus seems to be shifting in the direction of multilateralism, with the Bush administration starting to recognize that it is in over its head. However, this is no fundamental shift: multilateralism and unilateralism are two sides of the same imperialist coin. As Clinton administration Secretary of State Madeline Albright put it, "the US acts multilaterally when it can, and unilaterally when it must". Note that this is not said as a criticism of US policy (which Albright was in large part responsible for formulating at the time), but as a slap at those nations which seek to use the UN and other international institutions to blunt US imperialism, in favor of their own imperialist aims. With similar intent, Bush declared that the UN made itself irrelevant by not rubber-stamping the US goal of replacing Saddam with a dictator more to the liking of US corporations.

Kucinich's supposedly anti-war line, "US out, UN in", boils down to the same philosophy. Unstated in that slogan is that any UN force would be under US direction, and would still be about divvying up Iraq for imperialist plunder, not Iraqi sovereignty. Even the cry of "let the sanctions work" heard before the war was a call for a continuation of the brutal sanctions regime, a "humane" approach to imperialist conquest. The sanctions were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis through starvation and easily-preventable diseases. Estimates put the number of infant deaths due to the sanctions at 5000 per month over the 12 years the sanctions were in place. This is the "humane" alternative offered by the left-most Democrats and reformists who raised this cry. Incidentally, what was Albright's attitude toward these deaths? "We think the price is worth it".

Use of torture

The Bush administration has made no secret of its hostility to international torture conventions: it has declared that US soldiers can't be tried for anything in international tribunals (rescinded in the wake of the Abu Ghraib scandal); that its prisoners of war are not prisoners of war; that, because prisoners are held in Iraq or Afghanistan or Guantanamo Bay instead of on US soil, they have no rights; and so on. Behind the scenes, they have had lawyers drawing up briefs redefining torture to include only those acts which have no other purpose than to inflict pain (it follows that if the purpose is to get information, then it is supposedly a-okay). Going further, these lawyers have declared that Bush and those under him aren't bound by any laws (US or international) limiting the use of torture, as long as Bush declares that it is necessary in the pursuit of the "war on terror".

The Bush administration appears to revel in its depravity somewhat, yet a gung-ho attitude toward torture is not peculiar to them. For example, over the past several decades the "School of the Americas" became so widely known as a torture school for South and Central American dictators and their death squads that it had to be shut down and reopened under a new name. Of that school, former Democratic presidential candidate Wesley Clark says that it is "the best means available to ensure that the armed

forces in Latin America . . . understand US values and adopt those values as their own [values such as repression of democratic rights for the masses and a 'stable business climate' for US businesses *uber alles*]". In the 1980's, a CIA-written instruction manual on the use of torture came to light in Central America. Beatings, rape, sexual abuse and humiliation, not to mention barbaric extralegal (and legal) executions are commonplace in US prisons. Some of the soldiers involved in the current Iraq torture scandal were themselves implicated in the torture of prisoners in their care when they were prison guards in a former life. The only difference with the Abu Ghraib prison scandal is the photographic evidence. Thus, the torture itself is of no concern to the bourgeoisie, but it being common knowledge? The indisputable photographic evidence? That's embarrassing.

Kerry reaffirms this by remaining almost completely silent on Abu Ghraib. Along with every other politician, he made a show of viewing the photos when the scandal first broke, and made some pronouncements laying the responsibility at Bush's feet, but only on the basis of a "laxity in command". He also signed on to the "few bad apples" line. That is, he endorsed the Bush administration line that this was an aberration and helped to hide that it was directed from the top. He did make a call for Rumsfeld's head over it, but he has since dropped the matter, and his whole response looks like an election-year maneuver. The vast majority of people of all political stripes are shocked and horrified by the photographs from Abu Ghraib, yet Kerry does not press this as a campaign theme. Torture is just too useful to the capitalists.

Imperialist expansion and troop levels

This supposedly righteous "war on terror" is really a cover for an all-out push to expand US military and economic control over ever-larger parts of the world. As the US expands its sphere of influence, it doesn't bring "democracy", as is touted for public consumption, but rather, it establishes military bases, imposes economic privation, and claims control of resources: in short, it sets up conditions conducive to the profits of US corporations. This is the real aim behind the "war on terror".

The Bush administration describes Iraq as one front in the war on terror, and insists that Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were working together, even in the face of their own intelligence organs to the contrary. In doing so, they try to mask the imperialist reality of the invasion. As predicted, the ouster of Saddam has actually created an opening for al Qaeda in Iraq. Meanwhile, more quietly, the Bush administration has been waging this war on several other fronts (Afghanistan, the Philippines, and so on).

On the other hand, the Democrats complain that Bush has supposedly "lost sight of the war on terror", due to the war and occupation in Iraq. Notice, though, that they are not denouncing the occupation, just saying that they would better manage both it and the other "fronts" in the war: suggesting more invasions, more occupations, more counter-insurgencies. They even hint that they would pursue the "war on terror" *more* aggressively than Bush has. Kerry calls his diplomatic philosophy "muscular internationalism", i.e., multilateralism with the US firmly in charge. In his book *A Call to Service*, Kerry argues that multilateralism "amplifies America's voice and extends its reach"

and “invests our aims with greater legitimacy, brings vital support, and dampens the resentment that great power inevitably inspires”. In case it isn’t obvious what he is saying, this may need a little translation from bourgeois political weasel-speak. “Amplifies America’s voice”: augments US imperialist power. “Invests our aims with greater legitimacy”: provides a cloak behind which to hide US imperialist actions. “Dampens the resentment that great power inevitably inspires”: diffuses and redirects the hatred subjected people feel toward their imperialist occupiers. In sum, Kerry sees multilateralism as a more effective way to achieve US imperialist aims.

The Democratic Party isn’t a latecomer to imperialism, as those left Democrats and reformers who talk of “getting back to the roots” of the party like to imply. To take just a few examples from the last several decades, Johnson escalated the Vietnam War dramatically. Carter reinstated registration for the draft, and developed the Carter Doctrine, in which he asserted the US’s intention to repel “by any means necessary, including military force” any “attempt by an outside source [except of course the US itself] to gain control of the Persian Gulf region”. A large number of the Democrats in congress also supported Reagan’s Contra war in Nicaragua, his Star Wars program, his escalation of the nuclear arms race, and this at a time when they controlled congress, and could have effectively opposed those actions, if they were so inclined.

As a result of its massive imperialist expansion, the US bourgeoisie is starting to feel short on troops. Soldiers dying and questioning what they are dying for, extended tours, as well as slight improvements in the economy, have all caused a drop in recruitment when the US war machine needs more troops for its adventures. To counteract this trend the military recently announced that it is raising the pay for soldiers. A debate has also broken out over whether to reinstate a draft. In any case, this will not happen before the elections, but the politicians are working out how to package it, and trying to determine how much opposition it will engender if and when they do. When individuals are forced into service in the military by economic circumstances, it appears to them they have made a choice. When they are forced by a draft, their lack of choice is made obvious. Hence, the trial balloons being floated by various bourgeois politicians (among them some of the most liberal of Democrats) are a way to measure mass reaction to the idea.

National security

There have been several highly public “intelligence failures” in the past few years. Foremost of these was the failure to prevent the attacks of 9/11. For various reasons, the Bush administration opposes investigations into the 9/11 attack, some obvious, and others perhaps unknown publicly. Despite the administration’s opposition, the 9/11 commission has presented the definitive government version of events. These commissions tend to draw a version of the “facts” convenient to the bourgeoisie. Kerry immediately endorsed the findings of this commission, which include “revelations” about the alleged hijackers that seem to prepare the way for aggressive moves toward Iran. Thus Iran replaces Iraq as the accused helpers of al Qaeda.

Also, there has been a highly public (as these things go) battle between the Bush administration and the intelligence services

over the politicization of intelligence around the Iraq war. As is well known, the Bush administration pressured the agencies to produce intelligence to justify its agenda, and trotted out “evidence” for public consumption which the agencies had disavowed beforehand. This evidence included “childish” forgeries and old graduate term papers copied verbatim. Then, when these frauds were exposed, the administration leaned on the very intelligence agencies who warned against using such obviously phony data, to fall on their swords and accept blame for the failure. The administration even went so far as to publicize the name of one of its agents, as punishment when her husband went public with evidence that the administration was lying. Caught up in these shenanigans, the administration and the intelligence agencies failed to foresee the strength of the post-war Iraqi resistance. Then, US military and intelligence forces, along with contractors, resorted to torture in Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, to extract information from prisoners about the nature and strength of the insurgency. All this was further embarrassment for US intelligence.

It is possible that CIA director Tenet’s resignation in June, at a time which could be highly inconvenient for the Bush administration, is fallout from some aspect of this maneuvering. In response, Bush has used the resignation to nominate Goss, a Republican congressperson from Florida, who may not be very good for the post, but who enhances Bush’s chances of reelection in the key swing state of Florida. In their turn, Democrats, fearful of being labeled “soft on terror” if they fight the nomination (for their own partisan reasons) are deemed likely to pass his nomination without a fight.

These problems, combined with the ramping up of the domestic police state under the “war on terror” at home, have made revamping, modernizing and expanding the national security apparatus into a pressing agenda item for the US ruling class. Through a series of commissions and inquiries, the US bourgeoisie is grappling with how to resolve this crisis. While this is a widely-held goal of the big bourgeoisie, they are in the process of working out the depth of the changes and features of the new apparatus. Complicating matters, there are powerful corporate and bureaucratic interests who benefit from the existing system, on the one hand, while others are salivating at the prospect of lucrative contracts they might reap from changes to the intelligence structure. As one analyst described it, the intelligence community operates as a series of independent fiefdoms, protecting information from each other, rather than sharing it. There have also been several reports of intelligence agencies punishing whistle-blowers in this insular environment. Behind all this, the bourgeoisie is concerned that their intelligence apparatus, built up during the cold war to fight a second super-power, is poorly equipped to gather intelligence on small scale resistance from multiple small governmental and non-governmental forces (termed “asymmetric warfare”, a euphemism for a situation where US military force outguns enemy forces by a factor of thousands).

The Bush administration has been hostile to attempts to address this crisis. The Democrats play up this fact, but only as an election-year ploy. This is because while the crisis is very real for the bourgeoisie as a whole, they have not yet worked out solutions, and there is a great deal of difference over the various proposals on the table. Most importantly, while this crisis is very

real for the big bourgeoisie, for workers, a more efficient system of spies, informants, assassins and mercenaries to do the bourgeoisie's bidding is hardly in their interest.

Israel and the Palestinians

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon pushes forward building an apartheid wall surrounding Palestinian population centers in the occupied West Bank. This wall, touted as a "security fence", goes so egregiously out of its way to separate Palestinians from their lands and livelihoods, that even the Israeli courts have objected in some cases. The wall; the Israeli military checkpoints on every road the Palestinians use; the Israeli-helicopter-gunship attacks on streets filled with Palestinians (carrying out "selective assassinations"); the bulldozing and bombing of Palestinian crops and residences; all these have combined to create ever worsening conditions for the Palestinians. Meanwhile, Yasser Arafat and the other Palestinian bourgeois "leadership" do little to ease conditions for the masses of Palestinians. The Palestinian resistance engages in many heroic acts, from children throwing stones at Israeli soldiers, to guerilla attacks on those soldiers patrolling their neighborhoods. Yet, the more desperate they are, the more young Palestinians are willing to blow themselves up, and take as many Israelis with them as they can. In this they are encouraged by various reactionary Palestinian forces who hope to gain leverage and power for themselves through the mayhem. This tactic in turn leads to greater Israeli support for the hard-line Zionists. In short, the situation is a huge mess and getting worse. There are possible solutions to this crisis, starting with remaking Israel as a single, unitary, and most importantly secular, democratic state, where all have equal rights, no matter what their religious or ethnic heritage.

The Bush administration has made muted objections to the worst of Israeli abuses, but always tied to strong condemnation of the Palestinian leadership and the resistance movement. US rulers' objections to Israeli repression of the Palestinians are mostly for show. As for the condemnation of the Palestinian leadership, the US ruling class would like them take on more of the repression against the Palestinian masses. It hopes this would give a freer hand to the Israeli state to promote the interests of US bourgeoisie there and elsewhere.

Don't look for Kerry to change this policy. Kerry's campaign web site states, "John Kerry and John Edwards support the creation of a democratic Palestinian state dedicated to living in peace and security side by side with the Jewish state of Israel." Pretty words, until you look at the practical reality. The various two-state "solutions" which have been put forth, in their details, are not so pretty. First, a Palestinian state would be relegated to tiny, divided parcels of land, sliced up by Israeli roads and settlements, and would be deprived of water and arable land (these would be claimed for the "side-by-side" Israeli state). This is true of any plan which has actually gotten down to drawing lines on a map, and the infamous wall is an attempt to create "facts on the ground" to set those lines in cement (literally). Second, Kerry's pronouncement explicitly upholds the theocratic nature of the Israeli state ("... Jewish state of Israel"). To preserve its theocratic foundation, Israel deprives Palestinians citizens of the basic democratic rights enjoyed by Israeli citizens. Only remaking it as a secular state with equal religious rights for

all can change this. Third, and closely related, any two-state solution is predicated on the Palestinians renouncing their right to return to the lands they were ejected from in 1948 (and since), by the creation of Israel. To preserve its Jewish majority, a religious Zionist state must refuse the influx of Palestinians which would result if this fundamental democratic right were recognized. Fourth, note that all this is predicated on the Palestinians being "dedicated to living in peace and security" with Israel. To put it all together, Kerry promises that if the Palestinians first prove that they are "dedicated to living in peace" by renouncing all resistance up front, then they will be given the great gift of a series of tiny bantustans in which they can scratch out what living they can from the bare dirt.

Note, most explicitly, none of this is to endorse the anti-semitic line of the National Alliance and like-minded dreck who have been showing up at US demonstrations on the subject. They claim that US policy toward Israel is dictated by the Jews, for the benefit of Israel. The US bourgeoisie, not US Jews, shape US-Israeli relations for the benefit of the US bourgeoisie, not for some imaginary "Jewish conspiracy", and many Jews, US and Israeli, oppose Zionism and the oppression of the Palestinians.

Democratic rights

The bourgeoisie is also debating over the need and desirability of restricting democratic rights indefinitely. In this, there is definitely significant difference in the rhetoric, and there may or may not be significant differences in actions, between the two bourgeois parties. Overall, there are several impetuses behind this attack on democratic rights. As mentioned, the bourgeoisie is seizing the current situation to expand its imperialist wars across the globe. They are also exporting jobs, and cutting wages and benefits for workers domestically. All of this has the potential to arouse resistance, both from rival imperialists in many forms, including terrorism, and from the workers being squeezed. In part, the US bourgeoisie seeks greater powers of surveillance and repression as a preemptive measure.

The Bush administration authored the Patriot Act, and has defended it aggressively, claiming it is required for the war on terror. (Actually, most of the provisions in the Act were already drawn up before 9/11, waiting in the wings for an opportune moment to push them through.) The Republicans fought aggressively to crush a bill somewhat restricting the scope of the Act, and limiting searches of library records, for example. The Homeland Security Department under Bush appears to be a department of political policing. Its most public activity seems to be raising the terrorist threat level when the Bush administration is sagging in the polls. This has become blatant enough that even the capitalists' premiere news organ, *The New York Times*, has recently written several editorials on the topic. This activity is only Homeland Security's most public face, though. In quiet, it is involved in massive data mining projects, in which it aims to collect huge quantities of data on every citizen, and search it for "patterns" which could indicate some sort of dissident activity. They are also ramping up random searches and risky flier lists to harass people suspected of an array of undisclosed activities. All of this is outrageous.

Some (but by no means all) Democrats certainly make noises in opposition to this. Yet, in practice their opposition looks quite

different. Both Kerry and Edwards voted for the Patriot Act, as did most Democrats in congress. In the Senate, Kerry defended the Act, saying that it “is going to make it a lot more difficult for new terrorist organizations to develop” and that “it streamlines the ability of law enforcement to do its job. It modernizes our ability to fight crime”. In an interview with MoveOn.org, Edwards defended his vote for the act and claimed that the only problem was that Ashcroft has “abused his discretion”. In 2003, during the Democratic presidential primary debates he again defended it, saying that “there are provisions [of the Act], which get no attention, which did good things” (the poor, maligned act). In general, the Democrats speak of the need to balance “genuine security” with civil liberties, in other words, they advocate a more measured approach to the erosion of democratic rights. In his time, Clinton pushed through the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, which deeply eroded the rights of the accused to appeal their sentences, the main difference being that Clinton acted quietly, while Bush acts bombastically.

Economy

On the economy, Republicans somewhat defensively note that the recession which has marked Bush’s term started under Clinton, and Bush has engineered a (jobless) “recovery”, 4 years later. This recovery is one which no one but the major stockholders of the biggest corporations can see, as their portfolios grow. Job reports released in early August suggest that the “recovery” such as it was, has stagnated, and though never strong, is weaker than was commonly thought. Further, consumer spending is poor, to a great extent because of record oil prices. These facts combined could spell real trouble for the economy. Meanwhile Kerry gives credit to Clinton for the economic boom of the 90’s, and yet, both the boom and the implosion which marked its end were largely out of the control of anyone, Democrat or Republican. Such cycles are inherent to capitalism, and if policies or parties could end them within the framework of capitalism, they would, but they can’t.

Bush’s major economic policy initiative has been massive tax cuts for corporations and the rich, slated to grow each year for the next decade; budget deficits, and social programs be damned. One bourgeois analyst has pointed out that Bush tax policy has sought to eliminate taxes on investment and property, in favor of taxes on labor: clear class warfare on the workers. However, Kerry’s solution to the extended recession of the past few years and the current “jobless recovery” follows the neo-liberal trend toward market solutions and privatization as the answer to every problem facing humanity. With scant exception, this policy is agreed upon by the entire bourgeoisie today. Kerry says, “Some may be surprised to hear a Democrat calling for lower corporate tax rates [in direct opposition to Bush’s program of lower corporate tax rates]. The fact is, I don’t care about the old debates. I care about getting the job done and creating jobs here in the United States of America. We won’t do it through government make-work, but by making our economy work so that businesses put Americans back to work.” All of this is little different from Reaganomics’ (and “Bush-and-Kerry-nomics” too, apparently) neo-liberal “trickle-down” economics, mocked as absurdly slanted toward business and the wealthy at the time, and now repackaged as supposedly pro-worker.

Unions

Bush does little to conceal his allegiance to wealth and big business, beyond trying to sound uneducated with his “down home” demeanor. More generally, for several decades the bourgeoisie has been on a renewed push against the workers, to lower their wages and benefits, and increase their working week. To this end, they have been exporting jobs to underdeveloped nations, nations previously “liberated” and brought into the US “sphere of influence” by the coinciding imperialist push. They have also sought to bust up the unions. The unions do provide workers with something of a collective voice in contract negotiations, even though the union bureaucrats betray the workers at every turn. In spite of this misleadership, the unions represent a thorn in the capitalists’ side. While attacks on the workers by the bourgeoisie are a constant, their efforts have been imbued with a greater vigor with the fall-off of independent militant struggle by the workers since the 70’s.

Yet this, too, is not a feature of Republican administrations alone. Kerry is a strong supporter of free trade alliances, such as NAFTA, WTO and GATT. One of the central features of these agreements is to facilitate the busting of unions and the erosion of workers’ rights in all of the signatory countries, developed and underdeveloped. He promises not to listen to the broad worker opposition against these organizations, saying that would amount to “pandering to people and telling them you’re going to shut the door”, and argues that “it would be disastrous to just cancel NAFTA and withdraw from the WTO. You have to fix it.” When he talks of “fixing” these agreements, he talks about using them to raise the labor and environmental standards in developing countries, but judging by the Democrats’ record toward workers, this will not amount to much. During Clinton’s administration he repeatedly used the Railway Labor Act to ban rail and airline workers from striking. Carter invoked Taft-Hartley to try to break the ‘77-78 United Mine Workers’ strike, and threatened to call out the military to enforce it. At the same time, the Democrats’ brand of “fixing” these agreements is not all talk, either. In these developing countries, workers are organizing themselves into unions regardless of the wishes and laws and severe repression by the national capitalists. When the Democrats talk of helping these countries to develop our labor standards, they mean directing labor organizations in these countries into the relatively safe (for the capitalists) form they take in the developed countries today: legal, but legally hamstrung, and led by a sold-out union bureaucracy.

Domestically, Kerry talks about employers’ “unlawful activities, such as firing workers for union activity and discriminating against workers involved in organizing campaigns”, and promises to fight these with such forceful actions as “us[ing] the power of the Presidential bully pulpit” to “expose the practices that employers use to obstruct organizing efforts”. Thus, his campaign promise to combat illegal union-busting by employers? A promise to talk. The employers must be quaking at such strong words. Kerry also promises to make sure “the NLRB receives adequate funding”. The bourgeoisie portrays this board as a neutral body, blindly adjudicating labor disputes; however, like all bourgeois institutions, it favors the bourgeoisie, who often use it to break strikes and force settlements on the workers. The union leadership, for their part, go along with this.

The IBEW and UMW have endorsed Kerry, and gush about what he will do as President, without reservation.

Build an independent workers' movement

In sum, both the Democrats and the Republicans represent the interests of the big bourgeoisie. Where there are differences between their platforms, they represent different shades of opinion among the capitalists. Below any apparent differences, they are in complete agreement that promoting the interests of the bourgeoisie in both foreign and domestic affairs is the most important, the only important, goal. Over time, bourgeois opinion shifts with world economic and political conditions. This was seen for example in the bourgeois consensus, developed over the past few decades, that neo-liberal economic policies best support profit-making at home and abroad today. Along with this consensus among the ruling class, the policies and platforms of both main bourgeois parties have shifted to promote neo-liberalism. No matter whether Bush or Kerry is elected in November, the current policy course will continue more or less unchanged. Therefore, for workers to effectively push for an agenda in their interest, they must develop an independent workers' movement; a militant and powerful movement independent of the ruling class, and independent of the two parties which represent it.

When such movements have existed in the past, they have taken up the burning struggles of the day. Today, worker resistance is in an extended lull and there is no independent movement, only scattered independent voices. However, when it rises again, it will again take up these questions. Today, these questions include union struggles, such as the recent grocery workers' strike in California, but wouldn't be limited to union struggles only. Also of vital interest to workers are numerous other questions involving local and national political struggles: struggles over democratic rights and the growing police state; over the oppression of immigrant and national minorities under supposed anti-terror initiatives; over shifting the economic burden of the expanded military and police apparatus onto the back of the workers; over abortion and reproductive freedoms; the list goes on and on. All of these directly impact workers' interests, and workers today can unite on these questions and more, whether they plan to vote for Kerry, Nader, or sit the election out.

Then there are the anti-imperialist struggles which came up around the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq. This is also an arena where the workers have a vital interest, and an independent movement would seek to have a voice. The recent falling off of the anti-Iraq occupation struggle illustrates the need for independence particularly clearly. The outrages of the occupation have continued unabated since the start of the war early last year: the imposition of a puppet government, the torture scandals, massive bombings and missile attacks on residential neighborhoods, and so on. Yet, because Kerry supports the war and occupation, the Democratic party and their "fellow travelers" withdrew their support from the movement as the election geared up. With their support gone, demonstrations opposing US imperialism in Iraq have dwindled to a small handful of sparsely attended expressions of outrage and opposition. The mass opposition hasn't disappeared, only the establishment-liberal

resources for organizing it. Electing their man is more important than the torture and murder of Iraqi masses. Despite the objections of the Democrats and the ruling class, the workers can continue their struggle on this front, but to do so, they need organization. In doing so, the workers will clarify their understanding of the bourgeois parties and what they really stand for.

While this election offers no choice for those who seek an end to the occupation of Iraq, the end of imperialism in general, the end of policies favoring the minority of capitalists and suppressing the majority of workers in this country and in the world, it is important to follow and understand what the candidates are actually saying, and how this translates (or doesn't) into public policy. This can also help workers to see clearly the duplicity of the bourgeois candidates, and to recognize their actual class allegiances. Direct experience of a few betrayals goes a lot farther than any words can.

Even though an independent movement will seek to undercut Democrat and reformist influence among the masses at every turn, independence isn't the same thing as "boycottism" or sectarianism. For example, an independent position calls for attending demonstrations and protests on issues of burning interest to the workers, whether they are called by pseudo-Marxist revisionists, bourgeois-reformists, or left- or even mainstream Democrats. What is important is not who called the demonstration, or their motives for calling it, but the content of the demo: a protest of the Iraq occupation is a protest of the Iraq occupation, even if called by Democrats hoping to use it to embarrass Bush. However, in such participation, workers also need to jealously guard (and use) the right to speak in their own voice.

Workers and youths wanting to build independence from the ruling class need to study and understand the workings of capitalism, imperialism, the class struggle. Bourgeois analyses of these can be useful and revealing, but these analyses often obscure certain central issues, issues of particular interest to workers. Marxist analyses by contrast are made from the class perspective of the workers, and clarify aspects of capitalism to which bourgeois analysts either blind, or which they try to obscure. For example, in *Capital*, Marx shows definitively how the interests of the workers and those of the capitalists are in fundamental antagonism, an antagonism which cannot be resolved within the bounds of capitalism. Building on this, Lenin demonstrates in *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* that imperialism is not a policy decision made by individual "bad" rulers. Imperialism is required by the current phase of capitalism: that is, today every capitalist nation, and the US in the forefront, *must* pursue imperialist aims, or be overtaken by other nations which do so. Workers also need to understand thoroughly why they must seek an independent class stand, an understanding which will come out of this study as well as practical experience in the movement. Only with a solid class understanding is it possible to grasp the first thing about world events today. Out of this understanding also comes the recognition that workers hold the key to the future.

Those who want results and not just feel-good symbolic acts also need to learn from the workers, to know better what issues are pressing to them, and what questions resonate with them, to better draw them forward. They need to reach out to other

workers and activists, who may not currently see the need for workers to act independently, or agree with particular independent positions. This means working outside of insular circles in which some activists work today, and contacting workers who are not yet active in the struggles central to their own lives; leafletting in working class neighborhoods, starting formal and informal discussions in the workplace, and so on.

Informed by these investigations, they need to carry this knowledge into practice. They need to build demonstrations, seek to draw out connections between domestic and foreign events, between the struggles of US workers, and those of workers in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, the Philippines, everywhere the US military is crushing their class brothers and sisters. They need to write and distribute material analyzing current struggles: material

with content, content which will draw workers and activists forward to a deeper understanding of current events and the class realities behind them. At every turn, they need to raise the question of class, because “independence” without class consciousness always devolves into support for the ruling class. These actions, informed by serious study of the world, will in turn inform further study. There is a great deal of work ahead, and there are no easy shortcuts, however, history demands it of us, and there is no work so meaningful or so rewarding.

Down with both bourgeois parties and their corporate masters!

Build real resistance with an independent movement! □

Liberal economists try to pump up the Democrats

by Pete Brown

The working class in the U.S. is hurting. Even by the standards of life under capitalism, conditions are bad. And they're getting worse. The recession of 2000-01 wiped out the gains many workers had made in the late 1990s, when high employment allowed wages to rise slightly. After the recession, the jobless recovery left laid-off workers standing on the curb as stock prices and profits recovered. Today unemployment stands at 5.6%, the same as it was at the end of the recession in November 2001. Thus after nearly three years of “recovery”, three years of the CEOs and stockjobbers stuffing their pockets, workers' job prospects remain stuck in recession mode.

For some sections conditions are even worse. Minorities and women were the last to be hired during the late-90s boom and the first to be fired in the ensuing bust, and a disproportionate number of them remain out of work. The official unemployment rate for African-Americans is 10%, over twice that of whites. But this figure understates the appalling situation facing blacks, as it only counts them as unemployed if they are actively seeking a job. Those who have given up job-seeking drop out of official statistics. But a recent study by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston estimates that one of every four African-American men in the U.S. is idle *all year long*. And this isn't counting those in jail, who number 10% of black men under 40. Those idled year round include 42% of black men aged 55 to 64. And jobless rates for black teenagers are “all but off the charts” (cited in Bob Herbert's op-ed column in the *New York Times*, July 19).

Now rising inflation is compounding workers' misery. As consumers workers are being hit with rising prices for gasoline, milk, housing, health care and other necessities. The measly raises in money wages workers have gotten recently are not

enough to keep up with rising prices. Real hourly earnings of production workers (nonmanagement employees including nurses, teachers, etc.) fell 1.1% in June alone, and real weekly pay is now back to what it was three years ago (*New York Times*, July 18). Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan recently testified to Congress that inflation is “not yet a problem” — but then Greenspan is not trying to get by on a tight budget!

Meanwhile conditions on the job are worsening. Productivity is surging as employers combine jobs, speed up their employees and make them do the work of the laid-off. And while wages are declining employers are demanding takebacks in benefits, especially health care and pensions. Everywhere in the U.S. employers are trying to push the burden of soaring medical costs onto employees, forcing them to pay higher co-pays for doctor visits and prescriptions. And employers are undermining the workers' pension funds, forcing more and more workers to continue working into retirement age to make ends meet.

This situation cries out for change. And the trade union leaders tell us to vote for the Democrats to bring about reform. But what have the Democrats actually done for us? For decades the liberal Democrats have rolled over and played dead for the right-wing Republicans. Since the time of Reagan's presidency liberal Democrats have given up the ghost, especially on economic questions. The mainstream liberal Democrats have moved to the right and taken up the mantle of “neo-liberalism”, which means they adopted Reaganomics. Workers need a fight against the capitalist offensive, but the trade union leaders want us to climb into the ring with one hand tied behind our backs.

Liberal economists try to revive

But recently a number of economists have tried to revive a reputation for liberalism and have taken to criticizing Republican

policies. Emboldened by the prosperity (for some parts of society) experienced under the Democratic Clinton administration followed by the economic slump under the Republican Bush administration, they are issuing a stream of articles and books critical of Bush and the Republicans. They are trying to pump up the Democrats and get them prepared for the upcoming 2004 election. They try to ignore, or hide, that the Democrats too are a party of the rich.

The liberals' critique of the Republicans is one-sided and shallow. When they criticize the Republicans for carrying out policies that favor the rich and injure the working class, of course that's correct. But it's one-sided in creating the impression that the Democrats under Clinton did not also carry out such policies. And the critique is shallow in not exposing that the underlying problem is capitalism. The liberals' analysis of what's wrong with the economy will expose things to a certain depth, but no further. The liberal economists know all the statistics; they understand that the working masses are suffering while the fatcats are getting fatter. And they understand the growing mood of the masses — growing frustration and anger at going deeper and deeper into debt, unable to afford health care insurance, a decent education for their kids or other necessities. So to keep up support for capitalism and its state system, the liberals have a set of reforms they trot out. They want to channel the masses' anger away from class struggle and into support for reforms which are actually very mild. They insist that the system is sound despite the flaws in it exploited by the Republicans. But their own analysis shows this is not true. Capitalism itself creates and expands inequality.

A Democratic attack dog

Take Paul Krugman for example. Krugman's academic specialty was in international economics, and he used to write textbooks on international trade — on how good it was for countries to trade, and utilize one another's comparative advantage to develop trade to the equal benefit of everyone, etc. — in other words, classical capitalist claptrap. Krugman first came to the attention of a wider audience in the late 90s when he wrote popular works extolling capitalist internationalism and criticizing the anti-WTO movement. Thus he showed that despite some liberal credentials he remained a bourgeois economist whose sympathy for oppositional movements was extremely limited. At a time when many were targeting the WTO for the evils of neo-liberal economics, Krugman leapt to the defense of international capitalist institutions.

In the year 2000, the last year of Clinton's presidency, Krugman was hired as an op-ed columnist for the *New York Times*, and there he has acquired a regular popular following. His columns often concentrate on economic questions, but more recently he has branched out into political and cultural issues. And for the last three years Krugman has concentrated polemical fire on the Bush administration. In fact he has evolved from an ivory tower economist into the perfect neo-liberal attack dog.

In his twice-weekly column Krugman bashes Bush for just about everything. For example recently he has opened up a polemic arguing that John Ashcroft is "absolutely the worst Attorney General ever." But like other mainstream Democrats Krugman was very slow, and very careful, about attacking Bush

on the central political issue of the Bush presidency, the war in Iraq. For a long time Krugman's criticism of Bush on Iraq was mostly confined to grouching about its financial cost and that Bush was hiding its cost.

Krugman has acquired a reputation as a critic of Bush's economic policies. He was skeptical of Bush's tax cut plans from the beginning, arguing that the government's surpluses of the late-Clinton years could not be expected to last. Then when Congress enacted Bush's tax cuts favoring the rich and scheduled to last for years, Krugman began bashing the plan in earnest. As the government's surpluses quickly turned into record deficits, Krugman kept up the attacks, accusing Bush and his team of irresponsibility and falsehoods. Krugman has also criticized Fed chairman Greenspan for supporting Bush's tax cuts. And he frequently warns readers about Bush's long-term goal to dismantle Social Security. Recently Krugman has tried to keep up with popular liberal Bush-bashers like Al Franken and Michael Moore, stridently denouncing Bush as a liar.

All this is fine. It's good to see an academic become politically involved and take a stand against some Bushite outrages. That Bush is a shill for the rich who couldn't care less about the results his policies have on ordinary working class people — it's fine to state, and reiterate, this truth. This helps open people's eyes and separates one from the fawning Congressional Democrats who used to lull people to sleep with tales of Bush's "compassionate" conservatism and the need to "find common ground" with the President.

Today Krugman is writing articles comparing Bush's health care plan to Kerry's. He says Kerry's plan is better for the average person. Well, duh! When you're sick, just about *any* medicine is better than swallowing poison! But there's actually not much difference between Bush and Kerry on the economy. Kerry is not proposing any big jobs program, something sorely needed right now. And his health care plan, though not as bad as Bush's, is far from extending medical insurance to the tens of millions now without it. Krugman defends profiteering HMOs, saying "after all, they're in business", so we shouldn't expect Kerry's plan to put a dent in their profits. Much less does Krugman (or Kerry) suggest replacing HMOs with national health insurance. This is the kind of thinking that doomed Clinton's proposal for health care reform.

The bourgeois blame game

Krugman's criticism of Bush is one-sided and at least implicitly pro-Democrat. His polemical fire is always aimed at Bush with never a word against the Democrats. First, on the federal budget: it's true that under Clinton the budget was temporarily balanced and even showed a surplus for a couple years. But to achieve this Clinton first had to give up any hopes for health care reform, an absolutely pressing need in American society. Then he led a savage attack on the poor under the banner of "welfare reform", joining Newt Gingrich and other Reaganite Republicans to dismantle the federal welfare system. In his columns Krugman doesn't explain *how* Clinton balanced the budget, by attacking the working class and poor. Nor does he mention that under Clinton the Pentagon budget continued at obscene levels, with hardly a peace dividend, as if the Cold War were still proceeding, and spending on "domestic security" —

police, jails, etc. — ballooned. So the budget was balanced, but the interests of the rich and the militarists were never compromised while the workers and poor were sacrificed.

Secondly, Krugman's critique is one-sided and shallow in blaming the economic slump wholly on Bush and his cronies. Krugman says nothing about how the Clinton boom paved the way for the Bush recession. What happened in 2000-2001 was a classical capitalist bust coming after the boom. The economy was headed into a recession as Clinton left office, and the recession would have occurred just the same if the Democrat Gore had taken office after Clinton. Krugman does not clarify the nature of the capitalist business cycle and so helps prop up the myth of "the new economy". This was the idea, widespread among stock market speculators in the late 1990s, that post-industrial capitalism had managed to permanently solve the problems that afflicted capitalism in earlier times and was no longer subject to crises. Under the masterful guiding hand of Clinton, his Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin, and Alan Greenspan, the "new economy" would supposedly continue growing steadily for all time.

"Irrational exuberance" — cause or effect?

Krugman did write articles expressing doubt about the "irrational exuberance" displayed by stock market speculators in the late-Clinton years. And he's vociferous in denouncing the greed of corporate shysters at Enron and other companies. All well and good, but Krugman stretches it to the point of *blaming* corporate illegalities for the collapse of economic growth in 2000-2001. This is blaming the symptoms for the disease. Long ago Marx analyzed that the longer a capitalist boom extends, the more desperate the capitalists are to cash in on the boom before it ends. Where before a profit rate of 10% might have been regarded as satisfactory, now a profit rate of 20% seems measly, and the capitalists are scrambling all over each other to beat it. This leads, naturally, to excesses and illegalities. But it's the onset of the slump, more than anything, that catches the corporate criminals, driving them into bankruptcy and exposing their machinations. The onset of an overproduction crisis catches out the criminals, rather than their crimes causing the crisis.

Krugman blames the symptom, the corporate criminals, but not the disease of capitalism itself. On the contrary; Krugman was and is a big defender of capitalist globalization. Nor does the government under Clinton's leadership come in for any criticism. If the corporate criminals are to blame for the economic collapse, why didn't Clinton do more to prevent their shenanigans? What was the Securities and Exchange Commission doing under Clinton's watch? What about the Energy Dept. and federal overseers charged with supervising Enron and other corporations involved in oil and electricity? And what about the FCC regulators who were supposed to be regulating telecom utilities like Worldcom? Clinton and his economic advisers, far from trying to rein in the irrational exuberance of the late 90s to prevent a crash, were in fact pushing for more globalization, more liberal trade policies, for continuing the Reaganite policies of deregulation and privatization. But Krugman's Democratic partisanship prevents him from spreading any blame for the recession to Clinton.

Nor does Krugman clarify basic economic forces leading to

the recession. It's not just a matter of stock market prices, of price/earnings ratios and other technical matters. In the late 90s there was a rapidly growing excess of industrial capacity in many sectors. Auto capitalists, for example, rushed to build new hi-tech plants that produced more cars with fewer workers. The glut of cars on the world market led to the near-bankruptcy of Chrysler and its buyout by Daimler-Benz. Other American car companies merged or worked out cooperative relationships with Asian car companies, as the auto capitalists tried to reduce the competitive anarchy of the world auto market. But there remained a big glut of auto industrial capacity. There was also a glut of oil on the world market. Other primary raw materials such as copper, tin, coal and agricultural goods were also glutting the world market, and their prices fell to historic lows. Overproduction of steel intensified consolidation as older plants were forced to close.

The early 90s were the glory days of the personal computer and related electronics equipment. Looking for high profits, capital flowed into this area of production, so that already by the mid-90s a serious glut in supply had developed. Coupled with this was a glut in the production of silicon chips. A shakeout of chip production followed, with many firms going bankrupt and others forced into mergers and buyouts.

Thus in many areas a crisis of overproduction was developing. Production was still expanding as the capitalists each strove to maintain and expand their market share. But consumer demand could not keep up with supply, as gains in productivity pushed goods out of plants at an ever faster pace while wages remained stagnant or grew at a very slow pace. The average wage has been in a general state of decline since 1973, and it was only at the end of the boom, after 1997, that lower-paid workers began to make any gains in wages. The only way workers could afford to buy more goods was on credit, and in fact "financial services" turned out to be one of the most profitable and fastest growing sectors of the economy in the 90s.

There were many signs that the growing overproduction was soon to break out into a fullblown crisis. The American economy was bent on globalization as the capitalists strove to make inroads into other countries. But America's closest capitalist allies were for the most part sunk into doldrums in the 90s. Japan was stuck in a deflationary spiral.¹ European countries exhibited only slow growth, with massive unemployment. And in the late 90s the Asian "tigers" (the newly industrializing countries — South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, etc.) were hit by a destabilizing financial crisis. The "new economy" gurus blew off these indicators, saying "it can't happen here", but such bluff could not overcome capitalist economic laws.

Due to the overproduction crunch, many areas of capital investment were drying up as sources of profit, especially the maximum profits sought by financial speculators. When the internet opened up as an area of commercial exploitation, speculators quickly flooded in capital to try and be in on the ground floor. But the orgy of speculation in dot.com stocks soon turned into a stock-market bubble which burst, bringing the

¹And apparently Japan still is stuck in deflation, despite growths in production the last two years. Its recent growth is due entirely to export sales. Domestic sales are still in decline, as are prices and wages (*New York Times* business page, July 14).

Clinton-era boom to a close.

Liberal prescriptions for a ruthless economy

Another example of a liberal ideologist who criticizes the excesses of “the new economy” is Simon Head, author of the book *The new RUTHLESS economy: work and power in the digital age*. The message of Head’s book is pretty obvious from the title. He doesn’t think the new economy is all it’s cracked up to be. In fact the new digitally automated workplace is an arena of ruthless exploitation.

Head isn’t actually an economist; he’s a working journalist. This is an advantage in that he presents some of the concrete human issues lying behind statistics about economic growth, rising productivity and profits. The average academic economist is mesmerized by these figures and, so long as they’re going up, can’t see much to complain about in the new capitalism. Krugman for example has no criticisms of Clinton-era capitalism, which he considers good times of low unemployment. But Head gives a devastating picture of working conditions in the new economy of the 90s.

Head particularly focuses on workers in the call center industry. This includes telemarketers and customer service reps, workers who take orders for products or dispense advice about warranties and malfunctioning products, etc. According to Head this is a very large segment of the service sector of the American economy. He estimates there are two-and-a-half to six million such workers.

Head’s book is a polemic against those who thought that in the new computer age the economy would free humanity from all mundane tasks; new jobs would all be creative and inspiring, with relaxed workers sitting around and consulting one another in an egalitarian atmosphere. In contrast Head describes the reality of the modern telephone call center, in which masses of low-paid employees work the phones under a harsh workplace discipline (including a strict dress code, even though their customers cannot see them). Workers are stuck inside little cubicles grouped around a supervisor’s desk, which is raised above them. With advanced computer software the supervisor can monitor 30 workers at a time, checking every word they say to the customer, making sure they are sticking exactly to the “script”, and timing their calls to the second. Workers must follow a script when talking to customers and must meet a quota of so many calls per hour; if they don’t, they’re fired for nonperformance. Break times are carefully monitored by the all-seeing supervisor.

Head explains the economic motive for making workers stick to a script. If employers hired more skilled employees — for example skilled maintenance workers who could actually figure out and solve customers’ problems on their own — they would have to pay higher wages to these customer service reps. The purpose of the script is to keep the job unskilled, so that low-wage high-school graduates can perform the job. Similarly with quotas: their motive is to ensure that the number of workers hired is kept to an absolute minimum, so that employers can keep their wage bill down as low as possible.

Head compares these methods to manufacturing, where jobs are also standardized and the workers subjected to speedup. Head concludes that the “new economy” isn’t really new, that the

new service industries are simply importing methods developed in the manufacturing sector, methods of ruthless exploitation. Further he argues (though he doesn’t try to measure this in an exact way) that the low wages in the new service industries have contributed mightily to the overall wage stagnation in the American economy over the past few decades. (Take-home pay, as a share of the economy, has now sunk to its lowest level since 1929, when the government first started keeping track. In contrast, after-tax profits as a share of the economy are now at their highest level since 1929.)

Reformist panaceas for a deadly disease

Head’s advice to workers in the new service industries is they should follow the path taken by manufacturing workers decades ago: they should get organized and join unions. Not a bad idea, but one that will very soon come up against a problem recognized by Head himself: that union organizing drives have to deal with a system of labor law stacked against the workers. Head himself recognizes this as he details how workers who try to organize unions are routinely fired. Such workers can then file suit with the NLRB, but even if they win their case years later the employer has defeated the organizing drive, and no penalty is assessed against the employer. So Head also recommends that present labor law be reformed. But he has no idea of the struggle needed to bring about such a change. Apparently all it takes is a few soft-spoken words by goodhearted intellectuals, and the politicians will immediately respond. During the Democratic presidential primary campaign of the last year a few of the candidates mentioned this issue, trying to win some workers’ votes in competitive primary races. But now, during the main campaign, Democratic candidate John Kerry is moving more and more to the right, and the concerns of the working class are dropping off from his rhetoric. Kerry and the Democrats take it for granted they can count on the votes of left-leaning working class Democrats; their main concern is to win over the “Kerry Republicans”.

So even if Kerry wins, the workers will be faced with an administration similar to Clinton’s, which bogged the workers down in red tape and helped the employers defeat hard-fought strikes. Take for example the Detroit newspaper strike, where capitalist employers at the *Detroit News* and *Free Press* bribed local police to work overtime breaking picket lines, busting workers’ heads and throwing them in jail. “Not to worry”, local union bureaucrats told the workers, “we have friends in high places.” They brought in national AFL-CIO leaders like Richard Trumka to assure the workers they were personally talking to President Clinton and Labor Secretary Reich. Instead of helping workers organize strong, militant, round-the-clock picket lines and spread the strike, the bureaucrats instead told the workers to rely on their corporate campaign strategy and filing charges of unfair labor practice against the employers. Supposedly the NLRB and the courts would prevail against the capitalists. But even when some rulings went against management, they simply refused to obey them and used their millionaire lawyers to keep up a barrage of appeals until finally, years later, the bureaucrats admitted the strike was completely lost.

Though Head’s advice to organize unions and change labor law is not bad, it’s misleadingly reformist by implying that these

are easily achievable tasks. Head thinks that because unions exist, it will be an easy thing for telephone service workers to join them, then defeat speedup campaigns and win higher wages. This is a serious underestimation of the present disorganization of the working class.

First of all, Head overlooks that a major obstacle to organizing drives is the union bureaucrats themselves, who are more interested in maintaining their cozy jobs in Washington than in disrupting capitalist industry. Only rarely do the bureaucrats put any effort into an organizing drive. Secondly, Head assumes there is some organized political force with influence in Washington — e.g., the Democratic Party — that can easily win labor law reform. But it isn't just a matter of slight tinkering with present labor law to "level the playing field." The passage of the Wagner Act legalizing industrial workers' right to organize only came about as the result of a massive strike wave in the 1930s. Even then the Wagner Act set up a federal bureaucracy that regulated workers' strike actions. These regulations became prohibitions — e.g., against secondary boycotts — in the 1940s-50s with Taft-Hartley, Landrum-Griffin, etc. Meanwhile the federal bureaucracy expanded into a giant force of lawyers, judges, arbitrators, mediators, etc. who take years to settle the simplest grievance — and more often than not settle it against the workers. To break through this bureaucracy will take a lot more than a few liberals sitting in Congress. Only when the working class is already organized and taking action will some sections of the ruling class come around and offer the workers some reforms to try and stave off revolutionary action.

Thirdly, Head believes that winning union recognition will easily solve the workers' problems. He says industrial unions in manufacturing have been effective in opposing speedup, and so

service industry workers can expect the same result from their unions. But here Head contradicts his own observation that the capitalists in manufacturing have been successfully implementing speedup to eliminate jobs for a very long time. The fact is, in order to fight speedup, workers require very good shop floor organization, organization that goes beyond that offered by the ordinary AFL-CIO union, in fact organization that often has to contend with restrictions imposed on workers by the AFL-CIO leaders.

Thus Head's thinking, like Krugman's, remains within the capitalist framework. He gives some interesting criticism of "the new economy", showing that it is ruthlessly exploitive just like the old industrial economy. But he understates what is needed to set things right and ends up searching for common ground between workers and capitalists. In such a search the desire for reform, no matter how sincere, gets lost on the wayside.

Workers need struggle

The liberal ideologists see the numbers, the unemployment statistics and so forth, and they know the working class is hurting. They understand the mood of the masses, and sometimes they reflect that in their criticism of the Bush administration. But what they won't do is call for workers to struggle. And that's the one thing the workers need right now. There's no end to issues: jobs, wages, health care, pensions, etc. etc. The capitalists are sticking it to the workers on every front, and the liberals are standing around contemplating the massacre. Workers need to take matters into their own hands and fight the capitalists at every turn. □

Abu Ghraib: imperialism requires torture

by Tim Hall

The torture is nothing new. The CIA has done it for decades. Your local cops, too. What's new is hundreds – thousands – of photos of American guards reveling in brutalizing and degrading those considered by the Bush machine as the enemy – ordinary Iraqis, poor, working-class people like you and me.

The Bush machine is very upset. Not at the torture, but at the photos, which gave the whole world a glimpse of the way U.S. imperialism treats its captives. It's like the Rodney King video, which gave the world a glimpse of the everyday brutality of the U.S. ruling class against the Black masses here at home.

The Bush machine is also upset because the exposure of its torture at Abu Ghraib prison starkly reveals the moral and political bankruptcy of U.S. imperialism's occupation of Iraq. All the claims, by Republicans and Democrats alike, that the U.S. occupation presents a positive alternative to Saddam Hussein for the Iraqi people are out the window. The U.S. crusaders tortured Iraqis in the same prison that Hussein did – and sometimes even tortured the same people! In fact, one of these men said that the

U.S. torture was worse! If you survived Saddam's prison you were a hero. But an Iraqi male survivor of U.S. torture is disgraced by the photos and may not be able to live in Iraq any more, while a woman survivor is considered so disgraced that she may be killed by her relatives.

The torture pictures revealed, in personal terms, the horrifying brutality of the drive of the U.S. ruling capitalists for world domination. As Lt. Colonel Nathan Sassman told *The New York Times* in December 2003, "With a heavy dose of fear and violence . . . I think we can convince these people that we are here to help them." Abu Ghraib graphically illustrates the nature of this "help."

An oil war is imperialism. And imperialism requires torture to impose its will on its rebellious subjects.

Torture – pure and simple

The lying capitalist news media has re-named the torture "abuse" to downplay its severity. Rush Limbaugh called it "a fraternity hazing." But this is torture, pure and simple.

The admissions of torturers themselves – the U.S. military – prove it. The military is investigating 127 deaths of its detainees. A report by Major General Antonio Taguba has revealed hundreds of beatings, rapes of both men and women, suffocations, extreme sleep deprivations, shacklings in excruciatingly painful positions, etc., that accompanied the sexual humiliation shown in the photos. The Iraqi man shown held on a leash by U.S. soldier Lynndie England has obviously been physically traumatized. And the Bush regime is withholding from the public over a thousand other photos and videos described by congressmen who saw them as even more shocking. In response to a storm of criticism, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has simultaneously “banned” further torture (in words) – and actually banned further use of cameras by American soldiers (so that his interrogators can operate unrecorded).

Additionally, it has emerged that the Abu Ghraib torture techniques, which combine brutality and humiliation, are a state-of-the-art method developed by the intelligence services of imperialist Israel, Britain and the U.S. This method of torture is called “R2I” (“Resistance to Interrogation”) and is an updating of combinations of physical and psychological torture developed by the CIA since WWII. Manuals have been written on it.

We’re not talking about a “hazing,” or a couple of stray episodes of “abuse” – we’re talking about sustained, systematic torture.

Torture approved from the top

The Bush administration is blaming the torture on a small handful of prison guards. But in fact the torture was approved at the highest levels of the U.S. government. Open discussion of the use of torture began in the wake of September 11. According to the administration spokesmen, after 9-11 “all gloves were off.” September 11 was a crime against humanity committed by Islamic fundamentalist imperialists; the Bush administration used this crime against humanity to justify its own imperialist crimes against humanity.

The media christened the new torture plans “torture lite.” The planned torture had bipartisan support; no prominent Democrat or Republican then opposed it. At first prisoners captured in the “terror war” were handed over to such countries as Morocco, Egypt or Jordan, where the most brutal methods were employed in collaboration with the CIA. Meanwhile a high-powered group of lawyers commissioned by Bush gave him the “legal” go-ahead to violate the Geneva Convention on treatment of prisoners. Once Iraq was invaded and large numbers of captives were taken, prison commanders known for their heavy hand were brought to Iraq from Guantanamo and the Utah state prison system. The commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, General Ricardo Sanchez, even sat in on some torture sessions at Abu Ghraib. The CIA, military intelligence and private contractors (hired mercenaries) governed the torture; the Army general in charge of Abu Ghraib prison was pushed out of control of the interrogation section of her own prison by them.

The conduct of the guards, who are being sacrificed for crimes that go to the top, was also inexcusable. The guards claim that they committed torture because of “orders” and “lack of training.” But how much training does it take to know that an order to suffocate an Iraqi to the point where he thinks he is

dying is inhumane? The pictures show that these guards reveled in the mistreatment. U.S. imperialism has corrupted a section of the soldiers into seeing torture as justified and Iraqis as less than human.

The criminals at the top have turned a few of their slaves into criminals. Now they are using them as fall guys.

The torture condemned by working masses

The Iraqi and Arab working masses reacted with utter disgust to the torture revelations. They correctly recognized that the torture methods were consciously selected to offend their deepest moral sensibilities. Even before the revelations commentators were saying that the U.S. had lost the battle for the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people and would sooner or later lose the military war as well. The torture scandal was another nail in the coffin of U.S. imperialism’s campaign to conquer Iraq. At the same time, many capitalists in the Iraqi elite continued to collaborate with the U.S. occupiers

Many working people in the U.S. were also revolted at the pictures. Fear that this revulsion would grow caused the U.S. authorities to suppress the release of all but the handful of photos that first came out.

Ruling class policy: hide torture

The extreme right in the U.S., utter flunkys of the ruling class, began a shameless campaign of “rage against the rage,” that is, of anger against those who were angered by the photos. Their master, Bush himself, pretended horror at the photos and declared that they did not represent “the America I know.”

So the U.S. military is investigating itself. It may sacrifice a few higher figures than the guards already charged. The CIA has dropped its director and has ordered a stop to torture at its facilities (though who will oversee the cessation without cameras?). And Bush is attempting to distance himself from the lawyers’ memo justifying torture. But it has emerged that this memo was studied before its release by Attorney-General Ashcroft’s office, Vice-President Cheney’s office and by the deputy counsel for Bush himself. Now Bush claims to have ordered the torture stopped. But why ban cameras, then? No, Mr. Cowboy, the blood won’t wash off your hands!

American soldiers ordered not to prevent torture

The falsity of the Bush administration’s claims to oppose torture was revealed again in a recent incident. On June 29 a group of American National Guardsmen from Oregon discovered some Iraqi officials torturing ordinary Iraqis. The torturers were using electricity, acid and were beating the prisoners. One Oregon guardsman threatened to shoot the torturers if they did not stop. Meanwhile, other Guardsmen contacted their commander, but the commander ordered them to withdraw, allowing the torture to continue. The Guardsmen, who apparently have not adopted the imperialist view of Iraqis as less than human, were very upset and gave statements and photos to *The Oregonian*, the Portland daily newspaper (see <http://www.oregonlive.com/galleries/news/index.ssf?iraq>).

Bipartisan torture, bipartisan imperialism

Bush has presided over torture but if Kerry is elected, the occupation and the torture will continue. Torture was carried out secretly by the CIA under the liberal Democrats Kennedy, Johnson, Carter and Clinton as well as under all the Republican presidents. Under liberals and conservatives alike the CIA trained and collaborated with torturers in Iran, Egypt, Jordan,

Morocco, the Philippines, Indonesia, apartheid South Africa, Haiti, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Nicaragua and in many other countries, not least of which was Vietnam, scene of unbridled brutality.

Imperialism requires torture. Basic humanity requires that we fight imperialism. □

To hell with Bush and Kerry, U.S. out now! Solidarity with Iraqi workers and poor! Fake 'sovereignty' in Iraq can't hide continued U.S. occupation

From Detroit Workers' Voice #41, July 1, 2004:

On June 28, Bush announced that the U.S. occupation of Iraq had ended and the country was now sovereign. What a lie! The massive U.S. military occupation remains. The U.S. with UN help, not the Iraqi people, picked the new government. The new Iraqi leader, Iyad Allawi, has been a long-time CIA operative. And the Bush administration has set in place an army of U.S. advisors and U.S.-appointed Iraqi bureaucrats to run governmental affairs behind the scenes.

But all this should come as no surprise. Bush has never told the truth about the war and occupation. He said it was about weapons of mass destruction and Iraqi ties to al-Qaeda that didn't exist. He claimed it was about liberating the Iraqi people. Only it turns out that instead of liberating the people, the U.S. occupation was turning Abu Ghraib prison into its own torture chambers and generally terrorizing the populace. What's true is this: Saddam Hussein's tyranny was replaced by a new tyranny. It was replaced by a new tyranny because the U.S. motive was not liberation but insuring that a class of billionaires who run the U.S. continue to exert their control over oil resources in the Middle East. Hussein, the former U.S. friend, had become a threat to U.S. domination in the region. For the U.S. capitalist rulers, the issue was U.S. power, not helping downtrodden Iraqis.

The Iraqi workers and poor are boiling with rage at the U.S. occupation and the more the occupation has tried to crush their opposition, the stronger the revolt has grown. With anti-occupation sentiment so high, the U.S. military's attempts to wipe out the guerrilla movement has been a debacle, as evidenced in their abandoning attempts to control the city of Fallujah. But in their struggle for liberation and democracy, the Iraqi workers not only face the U.S. military occupation but their Iraqi class oppressors. Part of the Iraqi elite has thrown in their lot with the occupation and its "sovereignty" scheme. As well, there are those ex-Baathists and Islamic fundamentalists trends who, unfortunately, dominate the leadership of the armed

resistance. They fight the occupation to impose their own brutal rule. The bombings of civilians and similar atrocities are indefensible and a sign of the reactionary nature of such trends.

In order to best support the Iraqi masses, workers and activists here need a class approach. We need to support the workers in Iraq getting organized in their own interests.

And a class stand is needed in relation to U.S. politics. For the rich here, the debate is over the best way to keep Iraq under imperialist control. Bush's "unilateral" policies have been a fiasco while Kerry claims he can do better by beefing up the military presence and getting more "multilateral" aid from international imperialism. We need a different framework. This framework is based on opposing imperialist interests, no matter whether it is the Republican or Democratic party version. We demand *U.S. out of Iraq now!* We need to target not only Bush, but the system of imperialism built to insure vast riches for a class of business tycoons. Let's encourage the mass disgust with Bush. But let's not allow this anger to be bogged down in the capitalist debate over whether Bush or Kerry has the best imperialist policy. The working masses need the truth about the imperialist politicians and their own independent class politics.

U.S. control assured under the banner of "sovereignty"

While crowing about the new "sovereign" Iraq, the Bush administration has made sure that the U.S. will continue to call the shots behind the scenes. The Iraqi people had no say in choosing this government. It was rigged up by the U.S. and the UN. They not only appointed CIA agent Iyad Allawi to lead it, but decided which Iraqis would fill the government ministries. And an army of U.S. bureaucrats will be working in the ministries as overseers, just in case Iraqi officials attempt something imperialism doesn't like. Indeed, the new U.S. embassy will be a virtual shadow government, employing 1,300 Americans and 2,000 Iraqis, more than double the number of

civilian officials employed by the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority.

All important aspects of governance will be subject to U.S. interference. For example, according to information in a Wall St. Journal article of May 13 and other establishment papers:

* The U.S. military will remain dominant over Iraq. U.S. authorities promise to consult with their hand-picked puppets about military operations, but also promise they will have final say as to what U.S. forces do.

* According to an edict issued by out-going Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) leader L. Paul Bremer in March, "operational control" of all Iraqi forces will be in the hands of senior U.S. commanders. So the U.S. will still decide where and when Iraqi forces are used.

* Supposedly the Iraqi interim government can tell U.S. forces to leave, but Allawi has already said he won't and the U.S. has made clear it's not going to be bound by anything the Iraqi interim government says in military affairs. In fact, the U.S. insists that all decrees issued by the CPA regarding the military are still in effect, including one giving immunity to U.S. military and civilian personnel from prosecution in Iraqi courts.

* The U.S. insists that CPA-issued laws on all other matters also continues in effect under the new "independent" government. Non-military laws supposedly could be altered, but this has been made very difficult.

* The out-going CPA appointed cooperative Iraqis to powerful posts or commissions in each ministry. They serve 5-year terms which means they'll continue to exert influence for years after elections are supposed to take place. This includes the new Iraqi national security advisor and the head of Iraqi intelligence. It also includes commissioners who will oversee media and telecommunications and decide who gets licenses to operate and who gets censored.

* While elections are promised in the future, the U.S. appointed a commission with the power to disqualify any parties or candidates that are associated with militias, that use "hate speech" or support terrorism. Since Bush considers anyone who seriously opposes his policies to be supporting terrorism, and since the different Iraqi political figures often are connected to militias and have bitter differences among themselves, this measure can be used to ban whomever the U.S. and its favored Iraqi leaders want.

* While the Iraqi government will have a degree of control of its own national budget, the funds coming from the U.S. will be under control of the U.S. embassy. Thus, the U.S. monopolies and cronies of the administration can rest assured that the government-guaranteed gravy train of profits will continue.

True, the interim government will have more control over the

routine operations of government. But the U.S. military remains the power behind the scenes. And all important decisions will have strong U.S. influence. While Bush blabs about freedom and democracy blooming in Iraq, his anointed Iraqi leaders are on the verge of banning all protests by declaring martial law or "emergency measures" amounting to the same thing. The occupation has a face-lift, but U.S.-backed repression over the masses remains. As former CPA leader L. Paul Bremer summed up, it's true that the CPA is gone "but it's very important to stress that that's about all that changes. There will be the world's largest embassy here. We will have more than 100,000 troops here. The embassy will be responsible for overseeing the spending of \$18.6 billion [of U.S. funds in Iraq]...". (Quoted by Daniel Pipes in *The Detroit News*, June 29, 2004, p.9A)

Bush administration is guilty of torture

While the Bush regime says this fake transfer of power shows its freedom-loving motives, the torture scandal shows the brutality of the imperialist occupation. The horrors of Abu Ghraib are not an aberration, but part of systemic terror carried out against the Iraqi masses, from indiscriminate shooting and bombing of civilians to mass round-ups in neighborhoods and lockdowns of whole cities. Such things occur in every imperialist occupation because there is no nice way to impose your will on an entire nation by force of arms. The horrible task of imposing the U.S. dictate in Iraq has led to some committing war crimes while others have become disgusted with the war.

Soldiers who carried out atrocities bear responsibility for their actions. But while Bush blames a few low-ranking soldiers for torture, in fact torture was planned and tolerated by the military brass and the Bush administration. Documents have shown that Rumsfeld approved or rescinded various forms of torture according to whim. It's also been shown the U.S. generals were aware of and took measures to hide the torture. As well, Bush officials were busy redefining legal definitions of torture to give the administration a free hand to torture, including even deliberate killing of prisoners. Bush continues to deny he would actually approve torture. Yet nothing has happened to Rumsfeld. The author of the opinion permitting killing prisoners, then assistant attorney general Jay Bybee, was rewarded with a position on the 9th U.S. Circuit Court. Meanwhile, in a formerly-secret document of Feb. 7, 2002, Bush states "*I accept the legal conclusion of the Attorney General and the Department of Justice that I have the legal authority to suspend Geneva [conventions on prisoners of war] as between the United States and Afghanistan. I reserve the right to exercise this authority in this or future conflicts.*" In the same document Bush also agrees that he can ignore U.S. laws and treaties at will. For someone who abhors torture, Bush spends all his time finding ways to facilitate it.

Kerry and Democratic Party imperialism

Bush's fiasco in Iraq has fueled widespread opposition among the masses. But there are different class forces in this opposition. There is the just anti-occupation sentiments of the masses. And there's the cynical stand of a section of the imperialist bourgeoisie who fear Bush's debacle in Iraq will set

back the cause of U.S. world domination. This section of the bourgeoisie has to a large extent rallied around Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry. Kerry voted for Bush's war, but blames Bush for the Iraq mess. So what's his gripe? He would have been more friendly to other imperialist countries (France, Germany, Russia, etc.) and the UN so they would contribute the troops to assist the U.S. military in occupying Iraq. This, he believes, would have provided a cover for U.S. intervention and the troop strength to secure Iraq under U.S. control. Kerry also attacks Bush for not having enough U.S. troops available for Iraq and other possible theaters for U.S. intervention. He is not against the occupation, but for a stronger one.

Even the most liberal Democrats opponents of Bush confine themselves to measures acceptable to imperialism. For example, Congressman John Conyers, who has spoken at anti-war rallies, advocates bringing back the draft. He bills it as an anti-war measure, promoting the hoax that a draft will make the wealthy hesitate to go to war since their children might get drafted. Actually, this reflects a growing concern among the bourgeoisie in general that U.S. troop strength is inadequate to defend their world empire. Meanwhile, Kerry promotes universal national

service measure that would pave the way for a draft.

Support the workers and poor in Iraq!

Supporting the Iraqi people requires opposing this bipartisan militarism and war. It means not placing our hopes on the bickering between the bourgeois politicians, but on the working masses. The capitalist send the sons and daughters of workers off to die for their world empire while the same workers are driven down here at home for the sake of capitalist profit-grabbing. We should build up a trend based on a class stand against the capitalist war-makers, one that exposes not only Bush, but the imperialist Democrats.

It is also vital to support efforts of the Iraqi workers and poor to build up their own class organizations. This is the only real alternative to both the occupation as well as the threat of clerical oppression in Iraq. The Iraqi workers are taking the first steps to reviving their own unions, revolutionary political parties, unemployed organizations, women's rights groups, etc. Let's promote the class struggle in Iraq as we fight Bush and imperialism here! □

Workers are fed up with Bush's occupation of Iraq, Bush and Kerry support it

by Mark Williams

A condensed form of the following article was turned into a leaflet as Detroit Workers' Voice #42, August 5, 2004. It's available at www.comunistvoice.org/DWV42.html.

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The occupation of Iraq has been a fiasco for the Bush administration. Not only has Bush aroused the anger and resistance of the Iraqi working masses, but the workers in the U.S. are increasingly fed up with the occupation. The workers are seeing past the flag-waving rhetoric and lies of the administration and are looking into the real motives behind the Iraqi war. They are increasingly aware that it was not self-defense or liberation that was the motive for the war, but protecting U.S. domination in that oil-rich region. They have seen Bush's promises of democracy shattered by the reality of the torture at Abu Ghraib and the suffering of the Iraqi masses under the U.S. military and their hand-chosen Iraqi helpers. American workers have seen thousands of their sons and daughters killed or wounded for a worthless cause. The toll on the Iraqi population has been much worse. And there is no end in sight for this nightmare as Bush's fake declaration of Iraqi sovereignty still leaves the U.S. as the supreme power in Iraq.

While there are presently not many large or militant demonstrations, there are clear signs of growing anti-war sentiment among the workers. Networks of worker-activists in the trade unions and workplaces have been carrying out anti-war organizing and are getting a good reception among rank-and-file workers. Anti-war resolutions have been passed by many local unions. This June, delegates to the conventions of two large national unions, AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) and SEIU (Service Employees International Union) passed resolutions critical of the occupation. The AFSCME resolution called for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. Worker disgust with the occupation is also reflected in the initiative of Local 10 of the ILWU (International Longshore and Warehouse Union) for a "million worker march" in October despite opposition from the president of the AFL-CIO, John Sweeney. This march has gotten support from several other unions including the NEA (National Education Association).

Further evidence of the disgust of workers and other sections of the masses has been the large and enthusiastic audiences for

the anti-Bush, anti-war film "Fahrenheit 9-11". Even the bourgeois polling agencies recognize a serious shift against the occupation among the masses.

While the fact that anti-war resolutions were passed by two large national unions indicates worker sentiment against the occupation, they also bring to the fore a glaring contradiction. For while the AFSCME and SEIU adopt anti-war resolutions, the leaders of these unions are also mobilizing the workers to become foot soldiers for Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, who is in favor of continuing the bloody occupation. As well, most of the AFL-CIO union leaders aren't even interested in making the war and occupation a big issue.

Kerry and the occupation

While many workers are angry at Bush's Iraq debacle, they are not necessarily as clear about Kerry. Even among those workers and activists who look at Kerry somewhat critically, the intense hatred for Bush often drives them to place their hopes on Kerry. This is understandable. But what would a Kerry administration actually do about Iraq? Both Kerry and Edwards voted for Bush's Iraq war. Neither Kerry or Edwards has expressed any regrets for voting to go to war. They merely whine that Bush botched things up and they had no idea Bush would be so incompetent. To distinguish themselves from Bush, they say they would have gotten support from other imperialist powers like France, Germany and Russia so the U.S. would not have to go it alone. These countries would then "share the burden" of the takeover of Iraq. In other words, the working class youth of these countries could also be killed and maimed alongside U.S. troops for the sake of big-power access to Middle East oil. In short, they would have been competent imperialists.

Indeed, Kerry would enlist the other big power so that the occupation could last indefinitely. True, he chides Bush for not having "a realistic plan to win the peace and bring our troops home." But what's the Kerry plan? In the July 4 *Washington Post* Kerry argues that "Our goal should be an alliance commitment to deploy a major portion of the peacekeeping force that will be needed in Iraq for a long time to come." The alliance Kerry is referring to has nothing to do with peace, but is an alliance with other capitalist powers to militarily impose their will in Iraq. This alliance is to be dominated by the U.S. As Kerry puts it, what's needed is "an expanded international security force, preferably with NATO, but clearly under U.S. command." (April 30 speech in Fulton, MO) In the same speech, Kerry declares we should be ready to send more U.S. troops to Iraq. And in this speech he also revealed the sordid imperialist motives for the occupation. In appealing for the European powers to join in, Kerry stated "Iraq's failure could endanger the security of their oil supplies." So according to Kerry, control of oil resources is what's at stake. In summation, Kerry's position is that the slaughter of the Iraqi masses and the slaughter of U.S.

and other countries' workers must continue because the imperialist bourgeoisie needs to control Middle East oil resources.

Of course, Kerry hastened to add the occupation will be a mighty blow to Islamic terrorists. Rubbish! First of all, the potential oppression under Islamic theocracy cannot justify a brutal U.S. military dictate. The imperialist war and occupation has brought untold suffering to the Iraqi working people. That's what's the main impetus for the widespread hatred of the occupation among the Iraqi masses. But Kerry, like Bush, doesn't care about what the Iraqi masses think of the occupation, but what's best for imperialism. Secondly, while Islamic fanaticism is not the main reason the occupation is hated in Iraq, the occupation has fueled its influence. It's the tyranny of the occupation that has given Islamic terrorists another opportunity to paint themselves in liberation colors.

Given Kerry's stand on the occupation, it's little wonder his campaign has decided to de-emphasize it as an issue. He knows his stand on the occupation differs little from Bush's and by not calling attention to this, Kerry hopes the anger against the occupation will sink Bush while leaving himself unscathed. At the same time, with his muted criticism of Bush's handling of the occupation, but not the occupation itself, Kerry appeals to the section of the imperialist bourgeoisie that's upset with Bush's bumbling. Such cynical tactics only further show his contempt for the anti-war sentiments of the working people.

“Anti-war” Kucinich accepts Kerry's pro-war convention platform

The issue with the Democratic Party is not just Kerry's stand, however. It's the imperialist nature of the party as a whole. It's innumerable ties with the bourgeoisie mean it will always be a bastion of imperialism and war. Just look at the unprincipled deal over the Democratic Party platform on Iraq between the mainstream party leadership backing Kerry's position and delegates of Congressman Dennis Kucinich, one of the most liberal Democrats.

Among the Democrats, Kucinich has been one of the most strident critics of the Iraq war. He has emphasized the need to bring U.S. troops home quickly. But the pro-Kerry forces insisted that no questioning of Kerry's views would be allowed. They insisted that the platform reflect Kerry's position of a long-term U.S. military occupation. In response, Kucinich instructed his delegates to capitulate to this for the sake of party unity against Bush. The platform allows the U.S. military occupation to last indefinitely. As the chairman of the platform committee, Governor Vilsack of Iowa put it, U.S. troops would “stay there until the job is done.” Likewise, the platform takes no position on whether the war was just or not, merely saying that “people of good will disagree about whether America should have gone to war in Iraq.” In other words, the Democratic Party welcomes both pro and anti-Iraq war forces, provided the anti-occupation forces now shut up and support the occupation.

If Kucinich was really the great champion of peace, he could have at least forced a debate on Iraq which would have exposed Kerry a bit. But he backed down instead. As it turns out, Kucinich wants a quick withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq —

except if John Kerry doesn't. Indeed, while Kerry is trying to show he's even more for the war machine than Bush, Kucinich decided to whitewash this and defend his retreat by stating “John Kerry is immeasurably better than George Bush and it's not even a close comparison.” (interview with Amy Goodman on the radio show *Democracy Now*) Hmmm. Kerry and Bush are for the war and occupation. Kerry and Bush backed the police-state Patriot Act. What a huge difference!

What explains Kucinich's capitulation? Well, for all his peace rhetoric, Kucinich own stand was never what it seemed. Even though he emphasized a timetable for U.S. withdrawal, he too wanted a multinational imperialist military force to replace the U.S. occupation, and conditioned U.S. troop withdrawals on this. So when push came to shove, Kucinich's stand had a lot in common with Kerry's.

There was no protest from other liberal Democrats either. For example, Congressional Black Caucus members like Charles Rangel of New York and John Conyers of Michigan are spearheading efforts to restore the draft. This is floated as a peace measure under the bogus notion that if children of the wealthy may be drafted, the capitalists will be hesitant to launch wars. But in reality efforts to revive the draft coincide with a growing worry among a number of liberal and conservative politicians alike that the military needs more troops for such things as conquering Iraq and launching other wars of aggression in the name of fighting terrorism. Thus, even the most “left-wing” Democrats tailor their policies to serve imperialism.

Union leaders' hypocrisy: anti-war resolutions while supporting Kerry

The conflict between the anti-war mood among the workers and the stand of the Democratic Party has been reflected in developments in the AFL-CIO trade unions. The top AFL-CIO union leaders have long been tied to the Democratic Party, telling the workers that this party stands for their interests. This is clashing with the growing anti-war sentiment of the rank-and-file. An example of this occurred at the June national convention of AFSCME. One of the resolutions introduced from the floor called for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. The national union leadership tried to nullify this by adding wording calling on Bush to “bring our troops home as soon as possible.” This wording would avoid conflicting with Kerry's stand of an indefinite U.S. occupation of Iraq. But this change was challenged by several local union officials and activists who wanted troops out “now”, and this wording wound up in the final resolution approved by a large majority of the delegates.

Despite the anti-war sentiment of the rank and file, the AFSCME bureaucrats continued their all-out support for Kerry. AFSCME president Gerald McEntee said the war in Iraq is one of the reasons Bush had to go, but at the same time he's mobilizing the union into an all-out campaign for pro-war Kerry. Around the same time the SEIU national convention also passed an anti-war resolution, but again, the SEIU bureaucrats were enthusiastically backing Kerry. Not surprisingly, Kerry was a featured speaker at both the AFSCME and SEIU conventions.

Thus, the anti-war resolutions do not mark a break with the multilateral imperialism of the Democrats. The union leaderships

still back the Democrats. And even the resolutions do not mention the Democrats complicity in the war and tend to blame all the ills of the occupation on the mistaken policy of Bush. They pretend that if only Bush weren't there, the U.S. would have a wonderful foreign policy. They denounce Bush's unilateral imperialism but either support or are silent about the Democrats advocacy of multilateral imperialism.

While the AFSCME resolution politely "asks President Bush to bring our troops home now", it doesn't mention a single word about Kerry or other Democratic supporters of the occupation. The AFSCME resolution's words against Bush's "unprovoked pre-emptive war" sound good, but ignore that Kerry's speech to the convention also promised pre-emptive military actions "to get the terrorists before they get us."

The resolution criticizes the Iraqi adventure, but from the standpoint that it weakens the U.S. "war on terrorism." But the U.S. "war on terrorism" is itself a fraud. The conflict between the bin Ladens of the world and a Bush or Kerry is not between terrorism and anti-terrorism. It's between a small, upstart terrorist and the defenders of a world corporate empire that has never hesitated to carry out its own terrorism and back pro-U.S. terrorist regimes. Indeed, when Kerry first returned from Vietnam, he justly helped expose the U.S. military's terrorism against the Vietnamese people. From Vietnam to Abu Ghraib, terrorism has always been a bipartisan weapon of "our" ruling class.

The AFSCME resolution thus has nothing to say against the basic imperialist program of U.S. world domination. Instead it talks about "the ideal of international cooperation and mutual defense under universal rules among nations." In the real world, these words simply mean that the U.S. imperialist efforts to impose their will around the world would be better served with a coalition of imperialist powers (France, Germany, Russia, etc.) and the blessings of the UN. What the resolution tries to prettify was spelled out in Kerry's speech to the AFSCME convention as follows: "And we're here to build a strong military, and lead strong alliances, so that our military is never overextended and young Americans are never put in harms way because we went it alone." More multinational casualties to defend the U.S. empire — that's the essence of Kerry's differences with Bush's foreign policy.

The SEIU resolution follows a similar pattern. It talks about "bringing our troops home safely" though it doesn't even specify if this means immediately or not. It talks about the need for a foreign policy that will "give high priority to improving the lives of people around the world" and other nice things. But from the resolution, you would get the impression that all this would happen if only Bush wasn't running things. There's not a word on the Democrats and their imperialist foreign policy, but promotion of working with the UN, which has worked to help the U.S. occupation or Iraq.

U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW)

One of the forces pushing for anti-war resolutions in the unions is an organization of left-wing union activists called U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW). Certain local unions and a few national unions are among the groups affiliated with USLAW. National and local SEIU leaders are among USLAW's

supporters, and the recent national SEIU resolution mentions that the union supports the principles of USLAW. It also appears that local AFSCME union officials who are affiliated with USLAW were instrumental in fighting for the anti-war resolution passed at the AFSCME convention. It's good that USLAW has taken the initiative to push the anti-war issue to the fore in contrast to the bulk of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy. Unfortunately, USLAW is not also helping the workers develop their own class politics that really breaks free from the grip of the Democratic Party politicians and the labor traitors at the heads of the AFL-CIO unions.

For example, recently their web page featured a USLAW statement called "The Occupation of Iraq Must End." It calls for "an end now to the U.S. occupation" and raises the issue of supporting organizing attempts by Iraqi workers. But this statement also reflects some of the general underlying problems in how USLAW is orienting the workers. While pointing out the rotten nature of Bush's occupation, the statement never raises the question of Kerry and the Democrats' imperialist policy. It states:

"It's time to acknowledge this tragic mistake and to hold to account Bush and those who prosecuted this disastrous war. At the polls in November, let's resoundingly reject four more years of bravado, unilateralism, and squandering of precious lives and the public treasury on corporate cronyism, militarism and global domination. In helping to defeat George W. Bush, the labor movement can demonstrate that the American people will turn out of office anyone who follows his policies of war, occupation, and attacks on working people. But no matter who is elected U.S. president in 2004, the anti-war movement, including its labor component, must be prepared to challenge U.S. foreign and domestic policies that harm our people and the peoples of the world and to hold all our elected officials to a course of peace and social justice at home and abroad."

Such USLAW statements do not mean that this group is simply a bunch of die-hard Kerry supporters. And the above USLAW statement makes some bows to the more radical activists in the organization. While it implies that Kerry is the alternative to Bush, it doesn't explicitly say so. And it talks about opposing any elected official opposed to peace and justice. But to talk about opposing anyone against peace and justice without mentioning the warmongering and anti-worker record of Kerry and the Democrats is empty rhetoric. It's a sham for the statement to confine itself to dumping Bush in the elections while avoiding what Kerry in office would mean. Why not level with the workers? Why not explain that Kerry is also for beefing up the military machine, is also for the occupation, is also in favor of neo-liberal "free-trade" measures to benefit the capitalists, etc.?

The answer is the USLAW wants to make sure its resolutions are acceptable to zealous pro-Kerry union bureaucrats. USLAW doesn't see mobilizing the rank-and-file against the union misleaders as a key issue. Rather they emphasize getting resolutions quickly passed in a lot of unions by making them palatable to the AFL-CIO leadership. That's why the Executive Board of

the SEIU can hail USLAW's principles while backing Kerry for president. After all, the class-collaborationist AFL-CIO hierarchy has no intention of rejecting militarism or imperialism, provided it comes in a Democratic Party package.

True, it could be argued that almost any statement against the war by the unions would improve the atmosphere a bit. Besides, it may be workers themselves will not accept an explicitly anti-imperialist resolution, but only a broader one. But that does make the task of providing the workers with an anti-imperialist orientation go away. Indeed, it emphasizes the need for such work.

But USLAW has not been up to this task. It's not just that it supports resolutions taken by unions which don't hit at the Democrats or imperialism. Their own statements do not do this. The problem is USLAW does not focus its efforts on bringing a real anti-imperialist message to the workers through its own literature. Nor does USLAW have any idea of developing anti-imperialist organizational forms among the more class conscious workers so they can better spread these views among their class sisters and brothers. Rather USLAW seems content to provide material which the AFL-CIO bureaucrats can use to tap into the anti-war sentiment of the rank-and-file while simultaneously deceiving the workers with dreams of a peaceful world if only Bush isn't re-elected.

The paramount importance that USLAW attaches to quickly getting many unions to adopt anti-war resolutions also ignores that the bulk of the bureaucrats are masters of adopting resolutions which are then ignored rather than used to mobilize the workers for struggle.

Build a class movement against bipartisan imperialism

Covering over the contradiction between opposing the Iraq occupation and supporting the Democrats blunts the workers ability to do anything about the war, militarism and imperialist foreign policy. For the workers to really be an anti-war force, they need not only hatred for Bush, but the ability to see through the two-faced Democratic politicians. The workers need to establish their own independent class politics, not the Bush-lite imperialism of Kerry and Edwards. The AFL-CIO hierarchy isn't going to orient the workers in this direction. This is a task for the

rank-and-file workers and militant activists themselves.

The workers need to build their own class trend. Such a stand does not consist of mere sniping at Bush's fiasco, while wading deeper into the quagmire of occupation. We must demand an immediate and unconditional end to the occupation. We must take every opportunity to expose not only Bush, but the imperialist policy of Kerry and the Democrats. We must not denounce Bush's Iraqi adventure because it diverts attention from the "war on terror", but also denounce the "war on terror" as a pretext for endless imperialist wars overseas and repression at home.

In order to wage an effective struggle, we must target the class force that is behind the Republicans and Democrats. The capitalists finance both parties and both parties protect the worldwide interests of the multinational corporations. The same capitalist class that exploits the workers and poor here also stomps on the workers around the globe in a never ending quest for new markets, new investment opportunities, resources and cheap labor. The capitalist monopolies have built a system of imperialism. And it this system that we must target. Only then can we get at the root causes of war and oppression.

It's also in the workers interests to promote solidarity with workers and poor in Iraq. The struggle of the Iraqi masses against the occupation is a blow against our common enemy, the imperialist bourgeoisie. But solidarity also means promoting the Iraqi workers movement as the alternative to the Iraqi exploiters, be they part of the so-called "sovereign" government recently installed by the U.S., or the ex-Baathists and Islamic fundamentalists who want to rig up their own oppressive tyranny.

Rank-and-file workers must expose the hypocrisy of the union misleaders who one moment denounce the occupation and the next moment rally support for pro-war candidate Kerry. We must not hope for unity with these class traitors, but build up our own trend independently of them.

Workers and activists should fight for such a stand at the workplaces, union halls, and communities. We should circulate leaflets that really tell the truth about the occupation and the root causes behind it. We should develop networks of militant workers. We should work to mobilize our coworkers into the mass protests. This is an orientation that can allow the workers to begin to put their own class stamp on the anti-war movement. □

Fan the flames of hatred for unjust war and repression! **Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* burns Bush**

by Jeff Stacks

On its opening weekend at the end of June, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* earned \$23.9 million, making it the #1 box-office seller, and breaking the record for films released in under 1000 theaters. In three days it had broken the domestic record for a documentary, which had been set by Moore's own *Bowling for Columbine* over a 9 month period. All this was in spite of it being initially released exclusively in small, or art-house type, theaters. For weeks after its wider release, *Fahrenheit* continued to sell out theaters all over the country. As of July 22, it had garnered \$94 million. The success of this movie is an important political fact, and it dispels several myths: that Americans don't care about politics, and will always prefer the escapist fluff churned out by the media giants; that virtually all are united behind the Iraq war and the "war on terrorism".

Especially during the first couple weeks of its release, the movie itself had a major politicizing effect. In places where organized leftist groups exist, activists had an easy time distributing literature, carrying petitions, etc. There was often a buzz of political talk in ticket lines, and spontaneous discussion groups were known to form after the movie, sometimes lasting over an hour. Seeing the movie in such large groups, with people calling out comments, hissing, clapping, laughing, etc., made for an exciting experience, and created a communal feeling. Many left the theater with a renewed, or awakened, interest in some form of political activity.

The film's appeal reached beyond the left community. In some conservative southern towns like Mobile, Alabama, it struck a nerve. Not long after all the artificial hoopla about Ronald Reagan's death, *F-9/11* drew sell-outs and long ovations in Simi Valley, CA, "the Great Communicator's" own final resting place. In spite of fierce boycott campaigns by some right-wing groups, a section of Bush 2000 voters lauded the movie, reflecting a growing distaste for the neoconservative trend in the Republican Party. And importantly, Moore's movie has been received well by enlisted folks and their families.

It is now undeniable that there are people in every corner of the country seething with hatred of George Bush and critical of some of the basic policies of the US government. There are several reasons for the film's wide appeal, and many issues are raised by Moore. Only a few of these things will be discussed below.

Viewing *Fahrenheit 9/11* is an emotionally affecting experience. The destruction of the twin towers (in a sequence of inspired artistry); a mother's tale of losing a son whose last letter from Iraq was full of despair at being trapped in the desert for no good reason; the rage of Iraqis under attack. These are some things that hit especially hard. Just as profound is the anger and disgust of seeing Bush and other capitalists behave like creatures from another world.

The film also exposes things that have been undercovered or ignored in the major media. For example, we are reminded of the disenfranchisement of black Floridians in the 2000 elections,

followed by the refusal of Al Gore and the Democratic Senators to allow debate on the issue. We are told in detail of the intimate business relationship between the Bush and bin Laden families. We meet some of the US veterans of the Iraq war, duped amputees in a bleak VA ward.

No doubt a major contributor to the enlivening and refreshing effect the movie has had is its revealing scenes of class society. This elemental awareness of socioeconomic classes is rare in movies that reach a mass audience in modern America. For instance, we get a glimpse of a seldom-seen side of America: capitalists speaking freely and at ease with themselves. We see Bush quipping, without a stutter, to a banquet hall full of millionaires: "This is an impressive crowd: the haves . . . and the have-mores". The elation of his audience is almost palpable. "Some people call you the elite", he relishes, "I call you my base." How liberating it must feel, freed from the tortures of feigning concern for the interest of "America" in general! In another scene, we are a fly on the wall at a conference on the business opportunities in post-war Iraq. A participant confides to the camera that the war is "good for business, bad for the people". In several other places it is implied that imperialist wars are fought by the poor in the interest of the rich. This comes across especially in the scenes in Flint, Michigan, where massive unemployment has made the military the number one job opportunity around. One scene in Flint follows a duo of vulturous marine recruiters on a typical raid of a lower-class mall. And towards the end of the movie Moore quotes George Orwell to the effect that foreign war is a mechanism for keeping the oppressed down.

Moore also points to absurd examples of government repression, such as the police infiltration of a Northern California pacifist group. Domestically, the Republican-Democrat "war on terrorism" features the enlargement and refinement of government anti-immigrant, surveillance, political policing, and other repressive capabilities. This continues the work of previous administrations: the increased militarization of the police throughout the "war on drugs"; the development of "concentration camp" methods (as a judge described the treatment of protests at the Democratic Convention) to hinder large political demonstrations. Construction of police-state institutions such as the Department of Homeland Security is now proceeding apace, and will continue for many years. The first and major victim after 9/11 has been the Muslim and Arab communities. Other immigrants, notably Mexicans, have suffered as well. And as the years go by, wider and wider sections of the population will be victimized.

So *F-9/11* features at times an emotional and sincere identification with the working class; expresses outrage at government repression; and has some internationalist sympathy for the Iraqi people. But alas, Moore is essentially a satirist with a working-class touch, and not a consistent analyst of class society. His work reflects the fine qualities of the laboring class as well as its misconceptions. He sees no working-class path in the current crisis, and the film suffers from an accommodation to

the Democratic electioneering.

For example, along with the many hints that the poor are sent to kill and die for the rich, we get myth-making about the supposed defensive nature of the armed forces. The US military was and is created primarily for aggression and “defense” of economic and strategic capitalist interests abroad. In this “unipolar” era of world history, where the US is unrivaled militarily, nothing is more clear. With its “precision bombing” and “shock and awe” campaigns, the US seeks not merely to defeat the immediate enemy, but to strike fear into any government or other force that would oppose the American plan for global dominance. Further, the aggressive nature of the military doesn’t change in the rare case that the enemy of the moment fires the first shot. But Moore insinuates that the Army is simply the natural outlet for selfless idealists. He waxes that “They fight so that we don’t have to . . . so that we can be free.” He presents that the problem is that Bush’s crude leadership and audacious diplomacy has clouded the conscience of the soldiers.

This distortion is really unfortunate. The wide hatred for Bush is due in large part to his bloody-minded war-mongering. Unlike the Democratic Party strategists, Moore seeks to connect with the popular anti-war feeling. He doesn’t refer to the huge anti-war protests in the US and over the world in early 2003, but he denounces the Iraq invasion, and has a level of sympathy for Iraqis and their anti-occupation feelings. However, the whole myth of the “war on terror” is that it’s defensive. In fact the “war on terror” is the misnomer for a series of open wars, covert interventions, and for the expansion of a military presence across the globe. The list of enemies includes many reactionary forces, such as the Taliban, as well as some progressive ones, such as peasant fighters in Columbia and Nepal. It is not a war to defend the nation against attacks, nor is it mainly a response to 9/11. It is a series of military and related operations in pursuit of a number of objectives, among them the reordering of the Middle East in accordance with a strategic ideal, and the crushing of forces threatening undermine friendly regimes around the world. Moore ridicules various absurdities of the “war on terror”, such as the playing with “terrorist threat levels”, but he doesn’t challenge the false defensive rationale.

The bombing of Afghanistan, just two months after 9/11, was the initial salvo of the boundless “anti-terrorist” offensive. Democrats look back fondly on the Afghan war as a golden time of bipartisan unity. Only with their eyes on the electoral spoils do some of them quibble, often along the lines of official critics like Richard Clarke (whom Moore favorably interviews in *F-9/11*) that Bush’s war was “slow [!] and small”. The attempt to create a level of acceptance for this war among a still very traumatized population included a constant barrage of bloodthirsty patriotic hysteria on TV and radio. (It is awful for Moore to go along with Clarke’s assertion that Bush’s hand was forced on Afghanistan by the vengeful cries of the populace.) With its torture and mass killings of prisoners in alliance with local warlords, random bombings of weddings and other civilian gatherings, the war and occupation of Afghanistan is every bit as outrageous as that of Iraq. And as in Iraq, the “democracy” being implemented there is a feeble charade. The puppet government of Hamid Karzai in Kabul is maintained only by US soldiers and shaky agreements with entrenched warlord factions. In conditions of mass hunger and a growing insurgency in the south, humanitarian organizations such as Oxfam and Doctors Without Borders have lately

made it known that the US-led occupiers have a habit of allowing food only to those who inform on opposition militias.

Rigorous analysis of international affairs is not Moore’s strong point. The US has long sought to undermine Hussein’s Baathist regime in Iraq, which had sought to carve out a regional hegemony at odds with US domination on crucial points. This proceeded throughout the 90s following the first Gulf war in attempts to engineer military coups and the imposition of crippling (mainly for common Iraqis) sanctions. Insofar as Moore deduces a cause of the Iraq war, he attributes it to the immediate profiteering motive of influential corporations close to the Bush administration. He also intimates, along with the Democrats, that it was a distraction from the “real” war on terrorism. These superficial explanations fail to explain the universal capitalist agreement on the necessity of US domination of Iraq, the region, and its oil.

Many leftist writers have criticised Moore’s portrayal of the US relationship with the Saudi Arabian sheiks. These relations with Saudi Arabia are part of a system of relationships with several Arab monarchies and mainly with Israel, the major military power in the region. Ever since FDR cut a deal with the kingdom in 1944, Democratic and Republican administrations have protected the House of Saud, mainly in order to ensure the flow of oil and oil profits, and also because the Saudi government has helped out over the years in recruiting and financing anti-democratic forces in the region and the world – from funding the mujaheddin in 1980’s Afghanistan, to the recent offer to help bring to Iraq an adjunct occupation force from various muslim countries. After the first Gulf War, the US established its own bases in Saudi Arabia. The huge flow of recycled oil money into the US economy gives the US an added reason to help maintain this brutal tyranny. Its fall now would jar the economy even in the event that the US were able to control Iraqi oil production.

Moore dwells extensively on the issue of Saudi relations. The hypocrisy of the leaders of the “war on terror” is made tangible as they rub shoulders with the medievalist tyrants and lackeys of the Saudi dynasty, who also have an agreement with al Qaeda. But Moore reduces the whole issue to being a mere Bush family affair. And he even goes further in contending that the Bush dynasty is sold-out to the Saudis! It’s the same ass-backwards sentiment reflected in the title of his recent book, *Dude, Where’s My Country?*.

No doubt some are attracted to this and other nationalist aspects of the movie. Moore’s foolish ideas about the Saudi influence are compounded by his tendency to carp about “Saudis” in general, and not mention that the ruling faction is a tiny minority of the population there. And there is indeed a tone of light-minded jingoism in the crude national stereotypes used in his depiction of Bush’s “coalition of the willing”. Thus the film’s appeal to conservatives is more than just a measure of the widespread anger with Bush. Moore’s grasp of class dynamics is shaky, and he tends to lose it altogether when it comes to international politics. Along with his nationalism, this weakens the effect of the international sympathies Moore does express, such as for the besieged Iraqis. The basic prerequisite for a principled internationalist appeal is support for the working masses of a given country in struggle against their domestic oppressors, as well as against imperialist attacks. Some commentators, mostly from the right, have noted Moore’s short scene of pre-war Iraq,

in which children play and fly kites. They fume that Moore is prettifying Sadaam's rule. Most likely his device is mainly to heighten the contrast between daily life and the horrible reality of bombing. That life before bombing was no walk in the park was due to the heartless UN sanctions, but was also (and primarily) due to the oppressive Baathist rule. Given the widespread confusion on the left of internationalism with supporting the bourgeoisie of subordinate countries, expecting perfect clarity on this from Moore would be a little naïve.

Finally, there is the pressing question of what to do about one's outrage. Michael Moore has said, "I don't like this film being reduced to Bush vs. Kerry. The issues in it are larger than that . . ." Indeed. The Iraq war, the "war on terror", corporate censorship and propaganda, the rich tricking the poor into fighting for empire, the impoverishment of the working class — all will continue to plague us after November. At the very moment, according to polls, that over half of respondents opined that the US should have never gone into Iraq, the Democrats prevented Kucinich supporters from inserting into the party platform the mild rebuke that the war was "mistaken from the beginning". Kerry's main complaint about the "war on terror" is that Bush is neglecting it. All the establishment politicians, and especially the Democrats, are busily devising new and clever ways to pressure and cajole young men and women into bloodstained uniforms. Kerry's "trickle-down" program of corporate tax cuts can only increase job insecurity.

It is true that Moore doesn't share the attack-dog mentality of Democratic Party hacks in the "Anybody but Bush" crowd. He supported Nader in 2000 against a similar campaign, and has built up a following among people who are somewhat disaffected with the Democrats. Kerry, for his part, doesn't want much to do

with Moore and his populist leanings. Yet one sees again and again in the enthusiastic letters from viewers posted on Moore's website that the overriding message taken away tends to be merely "vote Bush out". Further, the movie gives the impression that a big change will come from a Democratic victory. This begins at the beginning, with a dreamy reverie of Gore's abortive victory celebration in 2000. It continues with Lila Lipscomb finding in the White House the source for all the grief of losing a son. It ends with the confident assertion that "we won't get fooled again" with Bush out of office, as if he's the first to lie the people into war. (Just one example is the fake "Gulf of Tonkin incident" that was used by a Democratic administration to get congressional backing for a full-blown war against Vietnam.) Actually, since the Democratic convention at the end of July, his campaigning for Kerry around the movie has become more and more open.

Moore has the popular view that if "rabble-rousers" apply enough pressure to the Democrats, they will stop favoring big business over the masses of people. But the Democrats have not betrayed their working-class base, as Moore believes. On the contrary, they agree with the Republicans on all the major issues of the day because they are based in the same class of "haves and have-mores" that Bush appeals to. No sooner than Bush will they oppose the oil and financial interests behind his family fortune. People angered and energized by the images in *Fahrenheit 9/11* should feel the need to move beyond Moore's "quick-fix" of getting the vote out for a more tactful party of exploiters. They should come around to the idea that we need to build a long-term movement within the class that has no natural interest in putting a respectable face on a world empire, or in enriching the bosses who cheat us. □

About the California and Washington state grocery workers' struggles

The following article by Helen Jones, one of the supporters of the Communist Voice Organization in Seattle, was originally intended as a leaflet in support of local grocery workers. It deals with the experience of the California strike as well as the issues in Washington state. Following this article, a second article

discusses the Washington state settlement. In both struggles, the workers faced not only intense pressure from the capitalists, but sabotage from the class-collaborationist leaders of the UFCW. □

Support local grocery workers' fight to save their benefits and wages

Western Washington Grocery Workers, On The Offensive

Sixteen thousand local grocery workers in King and Snohomish Counties face a strike or lockout in the coming weeks. They are members of United Food and Commercial Workers Union fighting to stop the owners of Safeway, Fred Meyer, Albertson's and QFC from slashing hard-won medical benefits by 30%. The employer's proposal also includes a 24% reduction in wages, and a two-tier system which would significantly reduce wages, benefits and full-time options for new hires, and reduce pension contributions. Given a 10% yearly turnover rate, this means that eventually the lower pay and benefits would apply to all grocery employees. A two-tier system is unfair to new hires, divides the workers, and acts to drive down the wages and conditions for all. It also means that employers would use the workers on the lower tier to do jobs normally done by higher paid workers. Despite knowledge of the employers proposals, the UFCW workers have been kept in the dark about the substance of their unions' negotiations for months, not knowing exactly what may be bargained away. Only in the last few days have the union and the owners decided to go public with their proposals and demands.

This situation is atrocious. The capitalists methodically squeeze the working class with the top union leadership working alongside them. Concession-bargaining is universal in labor negotiations in the U.S. these days, and is an assault against the working class as a whole. As a result of the drive to cut costs and increase profits, in the grocery business and every other business, forty-one million (15-16%) Americans lack any health care coverage, with the number increasing. The capitalists' systematic, but piecemeal drive to cut medical benefits is their way of making the workers shoulder the cost of outrageously high-priced medical care. This drive is also a manifestation of the perceived increase in the capitalist's power to achieve those cuts.

While the grocery millionaires' will is certainly to be greedy, what also must be considered is not their *will*, but their *power*, the *limits of that power*, and the *character of those limits*. For the grocery millionaires, the workers can lose medical benefits, wages, and full-time work, so long as the food chains rake in

their millions. For the grocery workers, it is time to stand up, despite the union misleaders, and refuse to accept concessions. Let the millionaire grocery owners pay for the rising medical costs! Or let them use some small fraction of their wealth and power to fight for a single-payer health care plan.

Grocery Workers' Experience With the UFCW, Past and Present

Western Washington area grocery workers are rightly concerned about undertaking a strike within the current climate of Wal-Martization of labor practices. Washington grocery workers are aware that the UFCW grocery strike in Southern California lasted five months, and that the agreement finally reached in February solemnized almost the same labor concessions that were on the table at the beginning of the strike. Seventy-thousand workers in California, mostly minorities, showed courage and sacrifice, suffering huge personal losses. In Washington, UFCW workers do not want to go through the same hardship as the California workers and win nothing. Yet it appears very likely that the company executives in Washington will be willing to suffer through another fight in order to compel changes in labor practices that will lower their costs and increase their profits in the long run, just as they did in California.

Therefore, the Washington workers must consider why the California strike failed. In California, the workers did vote for the strike, but the strategy was dictated by the union leaders. They decided to pull the pickets from Ralphs stores just three weeks into the strike, and saved picketing of Safeway until three months into the strike. The purpose and effect was to isolate the strike, and to permit one of the companies to continue operating throughout the strike. The leadership did not work to mobilize workers in other sectors of the economy. For example, the Amalgamated Transit Union (mechanics and transit employees) had 2400 workers on strike at the same time, and there could have been coordinated efforts. The union leaders slashed strike pay in December. They only used their standard "feel good," liberal tactics, getting local celebrities and politicians involved in a demo, several months into the strike. In addition, the union leaders did not solicit strike funds or even hold regular meetings

to keep morale up and the members informed. Finally, the union focused undue attention on a particular individual — CEO Steve Burd, as if one person were to blame for all that was at stake. The California strike did not fail because of the will of the workers or the lack of solidarity from other sectors of the economy, or the inability of labor to achieve such a victory. The loss is attributable to the union leadership, which works hand in glove with the corporate interests.

The top union leaders in California betrayed the workers, just as they have here in Washington in bargaining and strikes of recent decades. Western Washington saw precisely the same tactics undertaken by the UFCW Local 1105 in 1989 — narrowing the strike, excluding Safeway from picketing, “me-too” agreements, etc. Furthermore, the kind of behind-the-scenes concession bargaining currently being engaged in only results in more concessions. The UFCW workers saw this in previous contract negotiations in 1983 and 1986 — with the union negotiating away hard won wages and benefits.

And in preparation for a possible strike here, the UFCW Locals in Puget Sound are already making the same mistakes as their Southern California counterparts: failing to keep the membership active and informed through meetings, failing to draw other unions into the discussions on how the employers proposals will affect all working people, undue focus on Steve Burd, etc. The preparations and outcomes of these labor struggles are being closely watched in other regions, by other business owners planning to cut costs and increase profits.

Enough of the union traitors past and present, country-wide. The Western Washington grocery workers can, by their resistance to the employers’ pressure, prove that at a difficult moment there are still people in our midst who can uphold our common interests as workers, and refuse to become the miserable

slaves of their bottomless wallets.

Support the Grocery Workers, No to Concessions

For the workers, time is of the essence. Nothing good can come from behind the scenes dickering over how much to steal from the workers. They should refuse any concessions at all, call for a mass meeting, and vote on what they want to happen next. If the workers choose to call for a strike, they should formulate a strategy of their own, one that will make the strike effective. They can do this by implementing the opposite of the California leaders’ choices: by garnering support of other unions and workers generally, holding regular meetings, hitting the streets with leaflets announcing their demands, building solidarity with other unions. They should work to really shut down the stores, with big picket lines and roving picket lines. Grocery workers and those who support them should spread the strike to other sections of workers, boycotting all the stores involved. Activists can organize rallies and marches in support of the strike, to draw attention to the strikers and raise consciousness regarding the issues they are taking on — issues of wages, healthcare and pension benefits, and justice which are pertinent to all workers. Workers of all industries and activists should demonstrate their solidarity with the grocery workers at picket lines, marches and rallies, and with support strikes. Attacks on healthcare, wages, pensions are a class-based attack by the capitalists on the workers, and a class-wide, fighting mobilization is needed to confront them. □

Seattle/Northwest local of UFCW negotiates concessionary contract while keeping workers in the dark

by Helen Jones

On August 16th, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) ratified the contract tentatively agreed upon by by union leaders and local grocery owners by an 83% vote. The contract directly affects around 11,000 Local members, and will affect thousands of additional grocery workers since several other local markets signed agreements to offer whatever came out of the collective bargaining. The details of the agreement were not released until the very day the proposed contract was voted on and the workers had just a few hours to review it and vote. The union recommended a “yes” vote on a contract which it claims “preserves affordable healthcare, protects livable wages, healthy pension plans and prevented the introduction of a two—tier system.”

Yet the proposed contract is completely concessionary, and is a huge bite out of local workers income. From the beginning

of the negotiations in March, the union leadership announced its own proposed cuts to members’ healthcare and other benefits which would “save \$120 million dollars for the employers” — “although this does not seem to be enough for them.” Just how much the union’s leaders saved the company is now detailed in the local papers.

The new contract means employees will pay 15% of medical costs, as well as \$7 per individual or \$15 per family per week, in addition to higher co-pays for doctor visits and higher deductibles. As noted in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, “[w]hile the fees are modest, the payments represent a major shift for many grocery workers, who have been willing to accept lower wages in exchange for generous health care benefits. Currently, workers start at \$7.72 an hour.” That’s a major shift. But the workers don’t need to worry, the new contract also establishes a raise scale of 30 cents an hour after the first year, a bonus of 30 cents an hour for those who stay through the second year, paid in

a lump sum at the end of it, and another 30 cents in the third year. Workers are reportedly relieved that a two-tier system was largely fought off, although the contract solemnizes a provision whereby new employees are covered by a separate health maintenance organization for the first 35 months of employment before qualifying for the established health care plan. Read another way, the new hires will be treated to lower cost (and most likely lower-quality) health care. Finally, other details of the new contract include a reduction of Sunday pay from time and a half to time and one-third.

The complicity of the union leaders with the employers in the pillaging of the workers is evident. UFCW members were kept in the dark on the substance of the negotiations over several months, both sides going public only in the last few weeks of negotiations. The workers knew that the employer was proposing substantial cuts in medical benefits for current employees, and also severe reductions in wages and medical and pension benefits for new hires, creating a two-tier system that would quickly be universal given high turnover rates. Grocery workers also knew that its union was proposing mild improvements in more technical areas of the contract. (See www.ufcw1105.com/negotiations/grocery_proposals.htm.) Beyond the outrageous pie-in-the-sky employer demands, and toothless union proposals, nothing was known for months, except that the union was trying to “save the employer” money at the expense of its members from the outset. There were no meetings of the rank and file called, no details provided of what was actually on the table, no preparations or discussions regarding a strike (besides an informal request a few weeks ago that members solicit support for a strike in their neighborhoods in advance), no drive to get other unions or the community involved, and a federal mediator was called in before members could consider what was on the table and what to do about it. Workers were railroaded.

The UFCW Local 1105 website openly details the steps to the concessionary contract, including the aforementioned facts. It also includes, for example, a lament by the Seattle Mayor Greg Nichols that “Seattle does not need the bitterness and rancor that occurred during the 4-months grocery strike and lockout in Southern California. Companies there lost hundreds of millions of dollars in profits. . . . The workers, in turn, lost tens of millions in wages.” While the Seattle Mayor wants to appeal sympathetic to the workers, he tries to create a mood of threat and fear. This

mood permeates the whole website.

Hence, there was a sentiment among many grocery workers during the months of negotiations that a strike should be avoided at all costs. The empty and infrequent murmurs of a possible strike from union leaders were never a real threat, and the possibility of a strike was downplayed generally. In the stores, primarily only experienced grocery workers were enthusiastic about fighting to maintain the status quo via a strike. The union website contains one statement by one union member encouraging the workers not to give up any of their benefits, and even that call does not even mention the word strike.

While the union was doing nothing to fight to maintain their members’ wages and benefits, the northwest grocery workers were regularly reminded, via attachments to their paychecks, how costly their benefits were to their employers, and how the owners must compete with Walmart. Besides this, the loss Southern California dampened workers hopes that a strike would be effective in maintaining anything — let alone gaining anything in the current contract negotiations. UFCW in Southern California led a four-and-a-half month strike that ended in January, resulting in a contract that was full of concessions, and was considered a loss. The Northwest UFCW Locals were silent about the whole issue, so it festered in the back of everyone’s minds. How could they choose to analyze the errors of the Southern California UFCW, which failed to hold meetings, failed to prepare and organize effectively for a strike, and failed to garner community and workers support—without going against the constraints of the reformist leadership of the UFCW?

The workers face tremendous pressure from the bad economy, the takeback offensive of the employers, and neo-liberal government officials. But in the face of all this, the grocery workers are stirring and becoming ready to struggle. The bad conditions themselves are giving rise to the desire to struggle. But this struggle will have to break out of the constraints placed on it by the reformist AFL-CIO leadership. The failure of the Southern California strike and the surrender in Seattle are results of their conciliation of the bourgeoisie. The UFCW leadership was afraid to carry the struggle through to the end, and sought to appease the employers at every step, rather than to extend the workers’ struggle. The fight against the takeback offensive must therefore also be a fight to build up an independent movement of the working class. □

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

by Joseph Green

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The Trotskyist groups claim to be Leninist and anti-imperialist. But in reality, they follow a revisionist theory which tramples on the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism and has much in common with Stalinism. If Marxist communism is again to be the banner of the revolutionary proletariat, it is necessary to distinguish between revisionism, such as Stalinism and Trotskyism, and revolutionary Marxism. Part one of this survey of Trotskyist theory appeared in *Communist Voice* for December 2002 and dealt with the theory of "permanent revolution", Trotsky's version of the "transitional program", and his denigration of the right to national self-determination and of anti-fascist struggle. Part two, in *Communist Voice* for March 2004, dealt with "socialism in one country" and the nature of the transition to socialism.

Fantasy assessments

Trotsky's writing was spicy. He frequently backed his views by referring to mass upsurges and revolutions—that, however, never took place. He often wrote of the great things that *would* have happened, if only his prescriptions had been followed. It sounded great, but how was he sure about all this? In fact, his assessments were often mere guesses, and were sometimes

ludicrous. They were illustrations of how things would have to work if his formulas were correct, not serious studies of the concrete situations he was supposedly talking about. It gave a shiny, superficial revolutionary sheen to his writing, but it was a revolutionism that trailed off into fantasy.

Nor would Trotsky go back and correct his theory when his predictions turned out to be wrong. He would just make more predictions. He would ignore his own blunders, or blame his followers for the consequences of his own errors. This allowed him to live in a world of great events which seemed always to be on the verge of happening, and just never seemed to actually happen. And it led to his mistaken assessments and fantasies becoming models of Trotskyist reasoning down to the present.

The search for an anti-imperialist dictator

Trotsky, as all progressive people should have, opposed the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the mid-30s and supported the Ethiopian side of this war, but he mistakenly identified the cause of the Ethiopian people with the fate of the late absolutist ruler of Ethiopia, the emperor Haile Selassie. In an article of April 22, 1936, he wrote that the issue was "making a choice between two dictators [Mussolini and Selassie—JG]". He waxed enthusiastic about Selassie, comparing him to revolutionary heroes of the past, and bubbled with excitement that "the victory of the Negus [the Ethiopian emperor—JG] . . . would mean a mighty blow not only at Italian imperialism but at imperialism as a whole". He had no doubt about this. Said Trotsky, one must be "completely blind" to fail to be inspired by this prospect.

Apparently Selassie and his royal entourage must have been among the blind people Trotsky was referring to. On May 2, 1936, just a week and a half after Trotsky called on the working class movement to choose between dictators and back Selassie, the supposed revolutionary emperor fled Ethiopia, leaving the Ethiopian people to continue fighting fascist occupation on their own, as they in fact did. Ethiopia was never fully pacified. But as for Selassie, it wasn't until 1941-2 that, side by side with a British force, his troops would reenter Ethiopia. Far from Selassie striking a blow at world imperialism, Western imperialism propped him back up on the throne.

Trotsky's vision about Ethiopia sounded very revolutionary. He dazzled his readers with talk of the revolutions of the past, and the prospect of striking a blow at world imperialism as a whole. But it was a guess, not an analysis based on the internal situation in Ethiopia, and it was utterly at variance with the facts about the Ethiopian empire. Underneath the revolutionary sheen of Trotsky's verbiage, he was, in fact, taking a conservative stand, indulging in a conservative fantasy, because he ignored the need to build up an Ethiopian resistance movement independent of Selassie.

But the story doesn't end here. Although Selassie fled Ethiopia, Trotsky never looked back. He never admitted his error, never discussed what had led him to make this error, and

never referred to what was actually happening in Ethiopia. Instead, Trotsky's letter was circulated in the Trotskyist movement, and became a model for how Trotskyists should approach the anti-imperialist movement. Under the title "On Dictators and the Heights of Oslo", it appeared in the June 1, 1936 issue of the American Trotskyist journal *The New Internationalist*. It became a Trotskyist classic. The American SWP's Pathfinder Press included this article in its collection of Trotsky's writings published in the 1970s. But, although the editors of this collection included footnotes and explanatory material and occasionally discussed difficult points in Trotsky's works, they didn't bother mentioning that Selassie had fled Ethiopia. They weren't embarrassed by the contradiction between Trotsky's assessment of the struggle in Ethiopia and what actually happened; they just swept it under the rug.¹

The French revolution that wasn't

Excited by the huge strike wave that broke out after the Popular Front won the national election of 1936 in France, Trotsky argued that the socialist revolution had begun. So said his article "The Revolution Has Begun" of June 9, 1936, which concluded that events were "heading towards a climax. . . . The choice lies between the greatest of all historical victories [proletarian revolution] and the most ghastly of defeats [fascism]." This can be found at the end of his 1936 pamphlet *Whither France*, containing articles from November 1934 to June 9, 1936 that argued that "henceforth remains the choice only between Fascism and the proletarian revolution", and that this choice was going to be made soon. But history records neither a socialist revolution nor a fascist regime in mid-1930s France.

France did face the real possibility of a fascist takeover in the mid-1930s. But although workers mobilized in large numbers against fascism, they were not ready to, or in a position to, carry out a proletarian revolution. Trotsky couldn't deal with this situation. Instead he tried to prove that there was no immediate alternative but socialism or fascism. When reality refused to conform to his writing, he blithely blamed everyone else, including his own supporters as well as the reformists and Stalinists. On June 5, 1936 he denounced some French Trotskyists for having believed, since the outbreak of the major political crisis of February 1934, that the revolution "would take place 'tomorrow,'" and hence seeking "to perform some sort of

¹ Trotsky's stand toward Selassie is discussed in detail in the article "Anti-imperialism and the class struggle" (Part two of "the socialist debate on the Taliban") in the June 20, 2002 issue of *Communist Voice*. See the sections "Trotsky and the Emperor of Ethiopia" and "Donovan and the Emperor of Ethiopia". This material not only describes the theoretical basis of Trotsky's error, but gives a brief account of the nature of the Ethiopian empire; why Selassie fled (in part out of fear of being attacked by oppressed nationalities inside Ethiopia); who actually resisted Italian invasion after Selassie fled; and Selassie's conservative influence on the subsequent anti-colonial movement in Africa.

Trotsky's article "On Dictators and the Heights of Oslo/A Letter to an English Comrade, April 22, 1936" can be found in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-36)*, Pathfinder Press, Second Edition 1977, pp. 317-320. Footnote 339 identifies the text as reprinted from the June 1936 issue of *New Internationalist*.

miracle" and engaging in "adventures and zigzags that have retarded in the extreme the growth of the revolutionary movement". But at the same time, he himself spurred them on to continue to believe that the revolution would indeed come tomorrow; it was only several days later, on June 9, 1936, that he announced that the revolution was here.

Trotsky never admitted that he had misjudged the situation. He insisted that he had always been right because, in his view, there *would have been* revolution in June 1936 if only the French workers had had "revolutionary leadership". Indeed, the revolution would supposedly have been accomplished almost effortlessly. Meanwhile he quietly shelved his claim that France had faced either proletarian revolution or fascism, rather than explaining why it had proven wrong; he never considered which of the tactics and slogans he put forward were therefore also wrong; and he never looked into whether it was his views that had spurred his followers into "adventures and zigzags" in the search for "some sort of miracle". As a result, later Trotskyists have continued to take *Whither France* as a model for dealing with mass upsurges.²

World War II would bring either world revolution or world totalitarianism

Trotsky also predicted that World War II would bring either world revolution or the replacement of all bourgeois-democratic regimes with totalitarian ones. This was behind his declaration in 1940 that the current issue for the world was "either socialism or slavery", and "today it is a question of saving mankind from suicide". The choice was to take place quickly, and he stressed that the "great tasks" of the revolution "loom directly before us

² The statements from Trotsky between November 1934 and June 1936 are taken from the pamphlet *Whither France?*, Merit Publishers, 1968, which translates into English the original pamphlet of 1936 and adds an introduction. Trotsky's denunciation of his own followers is on p. 146, in the article "The Decisive Stage", June 5, 1936. Trotsky's subsequent claims about the lack of revolution being due only to the lack of revolutionary leadership can be found in a number of other places, such as "The New Revolutionary Upsurge and the Tasks of the Fourth International", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*, July 1936, p. 336. Indeed, he claimed that, with proper leaders, a socialist revolution could have been accomplished in June "almost without civil war, with a minimum of disturbance and of sacrifices".

Merit Publishers, which put out the 1968 edition of *Whither France*, was one of the predecessors of Pathfinder Press, and was SWP's publishing house. In the "Publishers Note" to the 1968 edition the SWP drew a parallel to the events in May/June 1968 in France; said this is why *Whither France* was being reprinted; and hinted that socialist revolution was imminent, saying that the factory occupations "squarely posed the question of power, Which class was going to rule France?" So in the mid-30s, Trotsky, unable to indicate what workers could expect to accomplish in the mass upsurge and political crisis of the times, unable to show how revolutionaries should utilize mass upsurges that aren't at the level of revolution, lost his head and predicted imminent revolution. And 50 years later, the SWP could think of nothing better than to hold this up as a model for revolutionaries to repeat.

in the next two or three years, and even sooner”.³

Moreover, Trotsky was confident that the outcome would be socialism, because, among other things, the Trotskyist movement was supposedly infinitely more powerful than the left-wing socialists at the time of World War One. He wrote that, “The Fourth International in numbers and especially in preparation possesses infinite advantages over its predecessors at the beginning of the last war [World War One].” But, Trotsky wrote in 1939, if the revolution should somehow fail to materialize, this would mean “the replacement of democracy wherever it still remained by a totalitarian regime”. Moreover, it would mean that the “socialist program” was at fault, and Marxism would have to be replaced with “a new ‘minimum’ program...the defense of the interests of the slaves of the totalitarian bureaucratic society.”⁴

World War II did usher in a series of revolutions and major changes. But this historic shake-up created a world far different from Trotsky’s grandiose predictions. The result of World War II was neither world socialist revolution nor world totalitarianism. Bourgeois democracy, reformism, and intermediate forces of all types, far from being wiped up, remained important parts of the world political scene; and they are still with us to this day. Western Europe, for example, saw the beginning of a new reformist wave. And the pace of the world changes made a mockery of Trotsky’s perspective. Instead of a quick revolutionary consummation in two or three years, there were protracted struggles, including the collapse of the old colonial system. World War II itself lasted until 1945, and the related revolutions and liberation struggles continued on long afterwards; for example, Chiang Kai-shek in China was finally overthrown four years later, in 1949, while the independence struggle in Vietnam continued till the mid-1970s.

And what about Trotsky’s prediction about the role of the Fourth International? Compared to the revolutionary socialists of World War I, the Trotskyists during World War II were infinitely less in numbers, contact with the masses, or activity. The Fourth International played no significant role in the revolutionary

³See the section “Either Socialism or Slavery” of the “Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution”, May 1940 in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939-1940)*, Pathfinder Press, 219-220.

In discussions in Mexico with leaders of the American SWP in 1938, Trotsky had been even more optimistic about how fast World War II would give rise to revolution. He said that “What is clear is that in the countries involved in the war the collapse will come in not four to six years but in six to twelve months, . . . And the revolution will come not after four years but much earlier, after some months.” (“Discussion of March 23, 1938”, included under the title “A Summary of Transitional Demands” in the second or 1974 edition of the pamphlet *The Transitional Program for the Socialist Revolution*, pp. 237-8.)

⁴For his assessment of the strength of the Fourth International, see the “Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution”, May 1940 in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1939-1940)*, Pathfinder Press, 219-220. His statements of 1939 are from “The Present War and the Fate of Modern Society”, which is part of a letter to James P. Cannon of September 12, 1939. It is in the pamphlet “In Defense of Marxism”, which is a compilation of writings by Trotsky which was issued by the SWP in 1942 through their publishing arm of that time, Pioneer Publishers. Its text is available online at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1942-dm/ch01.htm.

movements during the war; it was a minuscule fraction of the socialist movement of that time, deeply split ideologically and in decline; and its major achievement was simply to survive the Stalinist murder of Trotsky and the agony of the war.

Trotsky’s predictions were based simply on repeating his old formulas, which couldn’t envision any type of struggle but that for immediate socialist revolution. It is not Marxism, but Trotskyism, which should have been discarded as a result of the experience of World War II. And as to his talk of the great role the Fourth International would play, this was mere fantasy and play-acting.

The supposed capitulation of the Chinese communists to Chiang Kai-shek

While pretending that the Fourth International was a major force, Trotsky repeatedly denounced the Chinese Red Army and Communist Party. In his view, these were spent forces. So he was contemptuous of their struggle against Japanese fascist invasion. According to him, with proper revolutionary leadership, the Japanese invasion could have been defeated in a mere year or two, and he wrote “This war, now nearing its third anniversary, might long since have been finished by a real catastrophe for Japan” if it had been conducted properly. As usual, he gave no reason for this optimistic assessment, other than his belief that revolution would immediately sweep China and, posthaste, set the “Japanese soldiery aflame with its blaze”. But, he claimed, this didn’t happen because the united front tactics used by the Maoists had put them “in bondage” to Chiang Kai-shek, the Kuomintang, and the Chinese bourgeoisie. This, in his view, was why the war lasted more than a couple of years, and why the Chinese struggle was supposedly being crushed.⁵

In fact, Trotsky sneered at the gigantic struggle unfolding in China because it didn’t fit his formulas. He dreamed of the quick, shiny, ever-victorious onslaught, which existed only in his rhetoric, and closed his eyes to the need for protracted, difficult, and circuitous struggles such as the then-ongoing one in China. A beautiful fantasy, or protracted work mobilizing the actual mass forces in China, it was clear which Trotsky considered more revolutionary.

Moreover, while Chinese communist strategy had its problems, it was absurd to say that the Maoists had capitulated to the bourgeoisie. The Maoists led a revolution that would eventually overthrow Chiang Kai-shek regime in 1949. They weren’t enslaved to the old bourgeoisie, but they were building up the strength to overthrow it. True, they ended up building, not a socialist country, but a state-capitalist one, and they eventually

⁵He denounced the supposed capitulation of the Chinese communists repeatedly. See “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International” in Spring 1938. (Look under “Backward countries and the program of transitional demands” in the pamphlet *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, p. 98.) Also see “The Great Lesson of China” in *Manifesto of the Fourth International on the Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution*, May 1940, *Writing of Leon Trotsky (1939-1940)*, p. 203, which is where he talked of how fast the Japanese invaders should have been defeated and claimed the Chinese communists were in “bondage” to Chiang Kai-shek.

replaced the old bourgeoisie with a state-capitalist bourgeoisie. But as Trotsky not only denied that the Stalinist Soviet Union was state-capitalist, but denied the very possibility that there could be a state-capitalist regime and new bourgeoisie, his theories are useless in dealing with the errors and eventual tragedy of the Maoists.

No intermediate trends

Trotsky repeated denied the existence of intermediate political trends, to say nothing of the importance for revolutionary tactics of dealing with them. His theory was that, for example, the peasants could only follow either the revolutionary proletarian or the counterrevolutionary bourgeois policy, and so their specific class politics could be ignored. He would, for example, deny the existence of a non-socialist democratic revolutionary movement among the peasantry, saying that it wasn't a fully or genuinely independent trend, by which he meant a trend capable of pushing aside the proletariat and overthrowing the bourgeoisie by itself. This way of defining the specific class characteristics of peasant politics out of existence gave rise to many absurd assessments.⁶

In the 1905 revolution in Russia, not just the workers, but the peasants rose up in a powerful revolutionary wave. They burnt down many landlord estates, peasant soldiers refused to obey tsarist officers in the army, and peasants organized their own congresses and councils. Yet Trotsky's major work on "permanent revolution" of 1906, *Results and Prospects*, was based on such assessments as that "that the peasantry are absolutely incapable of taking up an independent political role."⁷

It's not that Trotsky completely ignored peasant action. In his book *1905*, written in 1908-9, chapter 17, "Peasant Riots", was devoted to the peasant movement. It gave a description of the

peasant movement and even discussed the two national peasant congresses held in latter 1905. But what did he conclude from this? With a huge movement controlled by no other class, their own national gatherings, and their own political groupings, didn't this mean that the peasants had their own class trend? Not for Trotsky. He was dramatic and vivid where he pointed to the quaint peasant features of the congresses, but vague about peasant politics. Thus he wrote that "In a folkloric sense this [the Second Congress of the peasants union in Nov., 1905] was one of the revolution's most interesting gatherings; one saw many picturesque characters, provincial 'naturals,' spontaneous revolutionaries who had 'thought it all out for themselves,' village politicians with passionate temperaments and even more passionate hopes, but with rather confused ideas." And he couldn't resist giving "a few profile sketches" of these peculiar characters. But as to peasant politics, he was blind. He could see that the most progressive peasants, while diffuse and vague in their politics, were "adopting a revolutionary course". And perhaps he implied that they were simply following the proletariat when he cited peasant resolutions in favor of proceeding in agreement with workers and of the possibility of a general agrarian strike. But he couldn't see the emergence of a peasant trend which strove to put its own class features on the revolution. That's presumably why the chapter's title is simply "Peasant Riots". And then in chapter 22, "Summing Up", he hardly mentioned the peasant movement.⁸

Again and again, Trotsky would wave aside the significance of the intermediate political trends and declare that they were going to vanish. Thus in Nov. 1934 he declared confidently that "Whatever path events take in France, Radicalism [the name of the liberal party in France] will disappear from the scene, rejected and dishonored by the petty bourgeoisie which it has definitely betrayed." The masses following the Radicals, said Trotsky, were hesitating before deciding what to do. "This situation of hesitation, of irresolution, will not, however, last for years, but for months."⁹ Needless to say, the Radicals didn't disappear, nor did the political situation resolve itself in a mere matter of months.

Unfazed by this, several years later Trotsky was again predicting the demise of the intermediate forces, this time in the coming war, World War II. This was part of his reason for believing that this war would give rise rapidly to revolution, in a mere couple of years. But in fact, despite the discrediting of the European bourgeoisie of many countries during the war, intermediate political forces continued to exist. Left-wing partisan movements in France, Italy and elsewhere had to contend with bourgeois-democratic trends of various types, both revolutionary and conservative, and the partisan movements themselves fought on democratic issues that the Trotskyists were skeptical of.

⁶ The distinction in the class stands of the peasantry and the proletariat is discussed in the section on "permanent revolution" in Part One of this article in *Communist Voice* of 15 December 2002. In particular it points out that "In a country with a large peasantry, the workers might be allied with the peasantry as a whole in a struggle against large landlords, foreign colonialists or other oppressors who weighed down on all the peasants. But the richer peasants would not back socialism. It was only the poor peasants and agricultural laborers that could provide a firm agrarian class support for socialism, and only when they no longer saw obtaining or clinging to their own small plot of land as their salvation." It criticized Trotsky for not taking serious account of the fact that the democratic and socialist revolutions therefore involved "different class alliances". See in particular *CV* #33, p. 30, col. 1 and p. 31 col. 1-2.

⁷ Ch. V, *Results and Prospects*, p. 72, emphasis as in the original (all page references to *Results and Prospects* or to *Permanent Revolution* are to the English-language pamphlet *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, Pathfinder Press, 1986). Trotsky believed that recognizing the existence of an independent peasant movement would mean renouncing the struggle for proletarian hegemony in the revolution. In other words, he made the struggle for proletarian hegemony into a matter of *rhetoric*, by defining the peasant trend out of existence, and a matter of *fantasy*, by imagining the most favorable outcome to any revolutionary measure he could imagine, and recoiled before the real tasks of providing proletarian guidance to the revolutionary struggle.

⁸ *1905*, Translated by Anya Bostock, Vintage Books, 1972, pp. 193-4, 195, 250-274. Trotsky's "Preface to the First Edition" pointed out that the book was basically written in 1908-9, but a good part of the text was lost, and so had to be rewritten in 1922.

⁹ Section 6 "Must the 'middle classes' inevitably go over to fascism?" of the article *Whither France?* in the pamphlet of the same name, pp. 17-8.

The abstract hypothetical

Sometimes Trotsky's fantasies were expressed in his fondness for the rhetorical device of the abstract hypothetical question that omitted the concrete circumstances of the situation envisioned. He spared his opponent-of-the-moment with questions like "What if a dictator like Haile Selassie emerged at the head of the Indian struggle for independence?" He posed such problems as "What if British imperialism attacked the Vargas dictatorship in Brazil?" These questions were supposed to have easy and obvious answers. Anyone who tried to deal with these questions on Trotsky's terms would be forced to descend into his world, where politics and events always followed Trotsky's script, as that was assumed in the hypothetical question, and their consequences thus always turned out to be exactly what Trotsky said they were.¹⁰

Trotsky generally left out the context to his hypothetical events. For example, when he painted the picture of an emperor like Haile Selassie being the leader of the Indian independence movement, he didn't bother to ask what situation in India could give rise to this, and what it would mean for the Indian struggle. Nor had he investigated the class and political background that gave rise to the empire and absolutist tyranny in Ethiopia; indeed, his hypothetical question was supposed to replace such investigation. But Ethiopia was an empire; India was a colony. Ethiopia lacked any significant proletariat; India, although a colony, was far more developed than Ethiopia and had a sizeable proletariat. Selassie's tyranny and oppression of non-Amharic nationalities had given rise to opposition among Ethiopians; there was a variety of class forces involved in the struggle in India. It would make sense to examine the different political forces in India, and what fate they had in store for India, but Trotsky's hypothetical actually detracted from that, with its implication that it didn't matter what force was at the head of the Indian liberation movement, and hence that any force could lead the resistance to Italian aggression in Ethiopia. Trotsky's hypothetical invited one to view things without their material or class background; one was supposed to reason simply from the abstract ideas of a revolutionary tyrant and a struggle for independence. This was supposed to be sufficient to allow one to formulate an anti-imperialist policy towards Ethiopia.

Trotsky taught this method to his followers. In the real world, Trotsky's theorizing — and his mechanical rules — again and again clashed with the events taking place. His followers learned to ignore this in their own theorizing. Thus his fantasy about Selassie is still raised today by Trotskyists who are arguing over whether to back a reactionary regime if only it is in conflict with a stronger power.

¹⁰ With respect to Selassie, see "On Dictators and the Heights of Oslo", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*, p. 317. Of course the point is not that Trotsky's opponent of the moment in this article was correct. On the contrary, Trotsky was arguing against Maxton, who was betraying the anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggles by taking a hands-off attitude to Mussolini's aggression against Ethiopia. But Trotsky's method of argument backed up his own errors. With respect to Vargas, see "Anti-imperialist Struggle is Key to Liberation", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1938-39)*, p. 34.

Disregard for party-building

It may seem strange to talk about Trotsky's non-partyism. He was a leader of the Russian Communist Party, and later founded the "Fourth International" of Trotskyist parties. He talked about the need for the "revolutionary leadership" of the working class. But when one examines his activity, it turns out that he had little to say about the process of party-building. He saw the party as a tool he could use to accomplish this or that aim, and he would fight for the leadership of existing parties, but he didn't care much about the process of building up the party. Moreover, he championed a series of views that denigrated the importance of the party, presenting it as a force supposedly holding back the self-activity and initiative of the revolutionary masses.

Substitutionalism

From when he broke with Lenin at the Second Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP) in 1903 until he reversed himself and joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, Trotsky was a bitter opponent of Leninist views on party-building. One of the first slogans he raised against Lenin in 1903 was "substitutionalism": he cursed Lenin as a dictator and declared that the idea of a centralized party amounted to substituting the activity of the party for that of the working class as a whole. Trotsky appealed to the "self-activity" and spontaneity of the working class; he held that a disciplined, centralized party would crush the self-activity and even the very thinking of the masses, and be a dictator over the workers and even over the party members themselves. He thus counterposed the building of a centralized party to the spontaneity of the masses, and to certain mass organizations that he believed would incorporate proletarian self-activity.

Similarly, he opposed the idea of fostering socialist consciousness in the class because this meant going against some of the spontaneous tendencies that arise among rebellious workers. This was part of the reason for his bitter attack on Lenin's pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* It's true, of course, that class oppression drives the working class to struggle and makes it sympathetic to the demand for change. But the consciousness even of a rebellious class is bound by the fashionable ideas of its time, unless it consciously organizes itself to develop revolutionary theory and to apply it to the problems of the working class struggle. Revolutionary theory naturally must be tested against the experience of the mass movement and the class struggle, but this testing includes whether it can distinguish between the good and the bad tendencies that arise in the spontaneous movement, generalizing and promoting the positive tendencies and fighting the negative tendencies. For example, there has always had to be a conscious struggle against the ideology of pure-and-simple trade unionism in order to develop a political workers movement, moreover a revolutionary one, and today there also has to be a conscious struggle against the almost-universally held idea of the socialist nature of Stalinist state-capitalist society if communism is going to arise again as the banner of mass proletarian revolt. The consistent carrying out of such a conscious struggle requires the building of a consistently

revolutionary party, which itself does not arise simply by spontaneity. Trotsky demagogically attacked the need to go beyond spontaneity as the advocacy of dictatorship over the working class, and wrote, in his bitter attacks on Lenin in 1904, that "the development of bourgeois society leads the proletariat spontaneously to take shape politically".¹¹

Although Trotsky changed his mind on centralism when he joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, "substitutionalism" has continued down to the present to be a favorite theme of Trotskyist theorizing on the party. This concept is interpreted in different ways by different Trotskyist trends, but it leads them all to skepticism about party-building.

Now, no doubt, there are more than enough examples of parties that have oppressed the masses, sometimes with great violence and savagery. Any party which has oppressed the masses in the name of serving their interests might be called "substitutionalist". The problem with Trotskyist theorizing isn't the term "substitutionalism" in and of itself. It's one of many terms that might be used to describe the oppressive behavior of certain parties, organizations, and institutions. But Trotsky used the term to hold that a revolutionary party would inevitably be oppressive, simply because it was a disciplined or well-organized party.

Trotsky seemed to have felt that his views about organization were verified by the Russian revolution of 1905 and, in particular, by the emergence of the Soviets. Neither the Bolsheviks nor the Mensheviks nor any other party had foreseen the Soviets, which could thus be regarded as a creation of the self-activity of the masses. Moreover, no single party came to the head of the Soviets, but instead the various factions and parties cooperated. Trotsky held that, indeed, Soviet decisions were simply obvious and beyond party. As he wrote: "From the hour it came into being until the hour it perished, the [1905 St. Petersburg] Soviet stood under the mighty, elemental pressure of the revolution, which most unceremoniously forestalled the work of political consciousness." And, he said, "Its 'tactics' were obvious. The methods of struggle did not have to be discussed; there was hardly any time to formulate them."¹² Moreover, Trotsky himself played a prominent role in the St. Petersburg Soviet, which, in his view, made him essentially the leader of the revolution and made his personal activity far more important than the influence of mere party organizations on the revolutionary movement.

There is no doubt of the tremendous importance for the revolution of the spontaneous movement in general, and of the Soviets in 1905 in particular. But Trotsky's viewpoint was one-sided. Without the previously achieved level of party organization among the masses, the St. Petersburg Soviet and other Soviets would have been hamstrung from the beginning.

¹¹ Part IV: "Jacobinism and Social Democracy" in *Our Political Tasks* (1904), sixth paragraph. This raving polemic against "Maximilien Lenin" (i.e. he denounced Lenin as Maximilien Robespierre, the head of the Reign of Terror in the French revolution) isn't easily, if at all, available in print, but it can be found on-line at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1904/1904-pt/ch05.htm.

¹² Trotsky, Ch. 8 "The Creation of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies", 1905, p. 106.

Moreover, had the St. Petersburg Soviet lasted more than 50 days, it would soon have found differences among the different proletarian forces as to how to proceed, as the Soviets in 1917 did. Trotsky ignored the whole range of party work necessary if the Soviets were to play their revolutionary role, and glossed over the political complexities of the Soviets themselves.

Trotsky was influenced in his anti-organizational views by the stand of a number of socialist leaders in Germany, Austria and Poland. His view of party organization was particularly close to that of Rosa Luxemburg. Luxemburg stressed the role of the mass strike and revolutionary mass action in opposition to the growing conservatism of much of the German socialist leadership. She was no doubt right in this. But she saw the growing conservatism as the inevitable result of party organization, thus denigrating party organization rather than seeking to build up truly revolutionary organization. Moreover she thought that the conservative party leaders would be forced, at the moment of crisis, to go along with the revolution by the spontaneous mass upsurge. This too denigrated the need to build up revolutionary organization. And her views on organization were widespread in the left-wing of the German socialist movement.

This view of the party was reflected in the way the Social-Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPL), in which Luxemburg did much of her work, was organized. The leadership of the SDKPL was informal; the leaders weren't too concerned about organizational matters; and they weren't bound by holding definite posts. One of her serious biographers, J.P. Nettl, claims that

"At some stage a formal party decision was reached that she should not concern herself with organizational matters at all, that she should not participate in any of the official conferences or congresses; in public, at least, Rosa Luxemburg ceased from 1901 to have any official standing in the party at all! Not that she relinquished for one moment her say in matters of importance. On the contrary, she continued to formulate the party's strategy and much of its tactics, and it was her pen that provided the vivid and uncompromising presentation of its case. . . . And nothing shows more clearly the orientation of the SDKPL as a pressure group, exercising influence on other parties rather than power in its own back-yard."¹³

This system meant that the leaders of the SDKPL weren't bound by any discipline. However, the members of the SDKPL were bound by decisions taken by these leaders — at least to a certain extent. It seems that "Central control [in the SDKPL] was loose enough to permit those whose ideas on organization differed from the elite consensus to do what they pleased in their particular territory." So long as the SDKPL leadership didn't have to worry about it, a local region might be organized along strictly centralized lines or loose lines, as the local leadership

¹³ J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. I, p. 265. Nettl could not find a direct record of this decision, but says that Luxemburg repeatedly referred to it in letters.

might see fit.¹⁴

Luxemburg and some other prominent SDKPL leaders also worked in the left-wing of the German Social-Democracy, and their theories on spontaneity reinforced similar tendencies among other German leftists. The result of this denigration of party organization was that the German left found itself at a loss during World War I. The official Social-Democratic Party wasn't rejuvenated by the crisis; on the contrary, its leadership utterly capitulated to the chauvinism of the German bourgeoisie. It was necessary for the German Lefts to decisively separate from the opportunist leaders and to build their own party organization. They weren't prepared for dealing with this, and this hindered their struggle a great deal.

Denigration of committee-members

From the start, Trotsky's slogan of substitutionalism was connected to the suspicion he raised about "committee-men" in general. The committee-people were those who took part in the underground and illegal committees of the RSDLP. Trotsky found the source of conservatism and substitutionalism in the party in the full-time revolutionary workers on the committees and in the committees themselves. Trotsky recognized that it was indispensable to have some committees, and hence committee-people, but Trotsky denigrated what could be expected from the committees. Now, no doubt there is no guarantee that committee-people will have proper views. They are subject to the same struggle of views that the revolutionary movement as a whole is subject to. But Trotsky found the source of wrong views among committee-people to reside precisely in their being committee-people.

The denigration of the committee-people, however, is denigration of work to build up the structure of the party. It is impossible to build up a strong, stable proletarian party without the utmost effort to the building up of party committees. It takes effort to learn how to connect these committees to the masses, and to train revolutionary workers and activists so that they know how to run committees,

Trotsky, however, presented his denigration of committee-people as if it were a defense of rank-and-file supporters of the party from the leadership. But this is not so. At the same time as he began to curse Lenin and deprecate committee-men, he defended the right for certain leaders to have a permanent position in the party no matter what their current political stands and activities. Indeed, he first broke with Lenin at the Second Congress of the RSDLP precisely over who would be on the editorial board of the Party's main journal. He was fond of various of the major figures of the Party leadership and felt that they should be above judgments by the Congress. He told the Congress that it had "neither the moral nor the political right to refashion the editorial board".¹⁵ In his autobiography Trotsky wrote

"In 1903, the whole point at issue was nothing

¹⁴ Nettl, *Ibid.*, p. 262-3.

¹⁵ Cited from the Minutes of the Second Congress by Lenin in *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. See section M. "The Elections. End of the Congress". *Collected Works*, vol. 7, p. 314.

more than Lenin's desire to get Axelrod and Zaslitch off the editorial board. My attitude toward them was full of respect, and there was an element of personal affection as well. . . . My whole being seemed to protest against this merciless cutting off of the older ones..."¹⁶

Now, Axelrod and Zasluch were not underground committee-people in Russia. They had worked abroad on *Iskra*, the party journal, and they were not involved in organizational work in Russia. Trotsky thus defended part of the top party leadership from a Congress where mere committee-people and other delegates could have a say about its work. He didn't invent some plan whereby the masses of the workers could spontaneously judge who should be on the editorial board. Instead, his denigration of committee-people went along with his advocacy that the top leadership of the party would be free from any discipline whatsoever to the whole party.

Trotsky as disciplinarian

When Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, he changed his views on party organization. As a leader of Bolsheviks, he became a zealous partisan of centralism. Indeed, he became not only a centralist, but a notoriously heavy-handed one, so much so that his enthusiastic biographer Isaac Deutscher describes him repeated as a "disciplinarian", indeed as "one of the sternest disciplinarians".¹⁷ Discipline is important in a revolutionary party, but Trotsky may have been something of a martinet. And this was true not just within the party, but in his attitude to the relation of the masses to the party. He could—and did—take centralism to an ugly extreme, as in the trade union controversy of 1920 where he wanted to rebuild the trade unions as institutions that imposed the state's views on the workers rather than representing the views of their members.

It wasn't until several years later, when he found his leadership position threatened, that Trotsky began to worry about inner-party democracy. But he maintained his belief in centralism until his death, and it is centralism that he held to be the main feature of the Leninist view on party organization. So the question arises: did his belief in centralism mean that, from 1917 on, he had finally recognized the role of party-building?

No, it did not. Trotsky reduced the issue of party-building simply to strict centralism. In his autobiography, he explained his change of view on party affairs by saying that formerly, "I thought of myself as a centralist. But there is no doubt that at that time I did not fully realize what an intense and imperious centralism the revolutionary party would need to lead millions of people in a war against the old order."¹⁸ But he did not see the need to revise any of his former views denigrating party-building. Formerly he had denounced the centralism of the Bolsheviks as

¹⁶ Leon Trotsky, Ch. 12 "The Party Congress and the Split", *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*, p. 162, Pathfinder Press. Zaslitch is the old transliteration of a Russian name, and is now more commonly transliterated as Zasluch.

¹⁷ Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed/Trotsky: 1921-1929*, p. 29, also pp. 30, 32, 51 and more.

¹⁸ Chapter 12, "The Party Congress and the Split", *My Life*, p. 162.

something that would crush the self-activity and initiative of the masses. Having become a strict centralist, he did not bother to explain why centralism and mass initiative were now compatible.

But centralism, important as it is, is only one aspect of a revolutionary party. If it is wrong to regard a centralized party as automatically "substitutionalist", it is also wrong to regard centralism as the sole feature of revolutionary organization. There are different types of centralism, and there are prerequisites for the development of a true revolutionary centralism, and for it to be a democratic and revolutionary centralism.

In the statement cited above, Trotsky claimed that he had always seen himself as centralist. This is hard to take seriously with regard to the period of his open fight against Leninism of 1903 - 1917; but there is a grain of truth in it. Prior to his split with Lenin at the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP, he had dreamed of a rigorous centralism. In 1901, he wrote:

"If one of the local organizations refuses to recognize the full powers of the Central Committee, the CC will have the strength and the right not to recognize this organization. It will cut it off from the revolutionary world by breaking its links with it, it will stop sending it literature and other working material; it will dispatch into the field of its activity a team of its own and, having supplied it with all the necessary means for action, declare it to be the local committee."¹⁹

A Party might well endow its Central Committee with the right to reorganize local organizations that radically deviate from party policy and that resist all efforts to resolve the situation. But Trotsky gave an extreme formulation of this. He exuberantly described how the offending organization and its comrades were to be strangled by being deprived of materials; and they were not only to be cut off from the party, but from the revolutionary world. And such a penalty was suggested in 1901, at a time when the political basis for the unity of the Russian proletarian party hadn't yet been established, as a way of enforcing the full powers of the Central Committee.

Then, at the 2nd Congress of the RSDLP in 1903, Trotsky coined one of the most extreme formulations of centralism. He described party rules as a system of "organized distrust" of the Party towards its organizations.²⁰ But as soon as he split with Lenin later at this Congress, he began cursing centralism with the same exuberance as he had embraced it.

So Trotsky had originally envisioned a strict centralism. He returned to it when he joined the Bolsheviks in 1917. And later he maintained a strict centralism in his Fourth International. The Statutes of the Fourth International adopted at its founding Conference in 1938 focused mainly on the rights of the International Executive Committee and the smaller International

Secretariat, including the right to immediately expel national sections or individual members. Point IV did say that the internal structure of the Fourth International was supposed to be based on democratic centralism. But it only explained this as the need for submission to international discipline — the national sections "are required to observe the decisions and resolutions of the International Conference, and, in its absence, of the International Executive Committee, represented during the intervals between its meetings by the International Secretariat", although the sections do have the right of appeal from one body to a higher body or to the International Conference. There was no mention in the Statutes of the elective principle, or of the general responsibility of higher bodies to lower bodies or the membership as a whole. The closest thing to this is Point VII, which specified that the International Conference was the supreme authority for the Fourth International. It was supposed to be composed of the "delegates, or their mandated representatives, of all sections".²¹ But in practice, the International Conferences could not be organized in any regular fashion; and who was represented there depended largely on the International Executive Committee and the International Secretariat.

Point III of the Statutes said that the national sections "are formed on the platform and in accordance with the organizational structure defined and established by the founding congress of the Fourth International (September 1938)". But, aside from passing comments in resolutions devoted to particular countries, the Statutes themselves are the only document of the Congress dealing with organizational structure. There was no other general document on party-building or general organizational problems. And the Statutes said nothing about the internal organization of the individual sections, other than that there is only supposed to be one in a country—and despite Trotsky's efforts, that provision was often honored in the breach rather than the observance. The basic principle of the organizational structure was simply submission to international discipline.²²

²¹ "Statutes of the Fourth International", *Documents of the Fourth International: The Formative Years (1933-40)*, Pathfinder Press, 1973, pp. 177-179.

²² The Trotskyist IEC seems to be modeled on the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), and the Statutes are reminiscent of the regulations concerning the ECCI in the *Constitution and Rules of the CI* adopted at the Sixth Congress of the CI of 1928. The Sixth Congress tended to go overboard on everything, and the Constitution and Rules were no exception; they went overboard on the issue of centralism. But the Statutes of the Fourth International were even worse. The CI Constitution described democratic centralism as including both centralism and the elective principle, and it also mandated reports by higher Party committees in general to their constituents; the FI (Fourth International) Statutes only referred to centralism, and only to international discipline at that. The CI Constitution was concerned not only with the international bodies of the CI, but with the structure of the national parties; the FI Statutes are not. The CI Constitution preserved the basic principle that a member of a Communist Party must work in a basic unit of the party; the FI Statutes replaced this requirement with the demand for working under "centralized international leadership". Perhaps Trotsky still didn't concede that he had been wrong at the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903 to oppose the view that only those who worked in a party
(continued...)

¹⁹ As cited in Trotsky's later *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, 1903, which identifies this as from a document written two years earlier. The original document is not available. The 1903 report can be found at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1903/siberian.htm.

²⁰ Trotsky's statement is cited from the Minutes of the Second Congress in section H. "Discussion on centralism prior to the split among the *Iskra* in the Lenin's *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. See *Collected Works*, vol. 7, pp. 254-5.

Something similar to Trotsky's swing between anti-centralism and over-centralism can be seen with respect to the SDKPIL. As remarked above, Rosa Luxemburg and others of its leaders held ideas denigrating party building and centralism. But for several years, the SDKPIL went to the opposite extreme, and the leadership was subordinated to one individual, Leo Jogiches. Nettl says that

“from 1907 to 1911 for all intents and purposes the SDKPIL was Jogiches. . . . He could be an extremely harsh and intolerant leader who brooked little opposition; . . . Those who disagreed with him found it simpler to resign, and between 1908 and 1911 several prominent members of the SDKPIL Central Committee . . . quietly dropped out. Those who remained were subjected to increasingly rigid discipline and cavalier treatment—the choice was to put up and shut up, or go.”²³

But this didn't mean that the SDKPIL discarded its disdain for organizational matters during this period. The SDKPIL leadership didn't abandon its anti-organizational theories. It simply vacillated at the top between informal looseness and subordination to one individual. This vacillation was facilitated by its disdain for party-building.

The history of the proletarian party

At this point, it will be useful to digress into the history of party-building itself. It shows that, while Trotsky counterposed organization to workers' self-activity, one of the key measures of the progress of the workers' movement was the extent and type of organization it created.

Indeed, when Marx and Engels called on the working class to build up their party, they didn't simply endorse the existing idea of a party, nor simply call for centralism. They worked throughout their lives to create a new type of party. For that matter, the development of the mass proletarian party strongly influenced the development of modern political parties in general.

At the outset of their political activity, Marx and Engels participated in the Communist League, for which they wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. CL was an international organization of communists, mainly workers. Marx and Engels worked to rid it of a conspiratorial character, and to provide it with a more scientific doctrine based on the class struggle. Many of its members went on to be leading members of the most radical trends in the revolutions of 1848-9, but they mainly participated individually in the movement as the CL was too narrow to be able to directly influence the revolutionary movement. In 1852, with the end of hopes for the revival of the revolutionary wave of 1848-49, the CL dissolved.

Over a decade later, Marx and Engels sought to have the International Workingmen's Association unite the socialist activists of each country, divided into separate doctrinal circles, into a common organization devoted to the ongoing workers' struggle.

It also established links with the mass economic struggle. Its mobilization of international support for strikes created a sensation in the working class, and forever changed the general idea of the nature of political activity. At the same time, while mass meetings of strikers voted to join the IWA, and many unions affiliated to the IWA, only a core of its members played a direct role in it. As one history of the IWA puts it,

“Of course, these collective adhesions did not amount to an actual joining up of the masses at large with the International; but active individuals and groups, becoming segregated from the mass, constituted the effectives of local branches, and these formed a moral link between the organization and the toiling masses. In this way, the political and moral influence of the International steadily increased.”²⁴

The Congresses of the IWA were the scenes of important and influential political debates about the relationship of economic and political struggle, but the IWA itself couldn't achieve any lasting unity on these issues. There were different trends in the IWA aside from revolutionary socialism, with the reformists pulling it one way, the anarchists another. At the apparent height of its influence and power after the working class uprising of the Paris Commune, the International essentially broke into parts at the Hague Congress of 1872. The official International ended in 1874, while the anarchists established their own “IWA” which gradually dwindled away.

There were attempts to rebuild an international through holding new congresses, such as the Universal Socialist Congress at Ghent in 1877 or the International Socialist Congress at Coire in 1880, but these congresses didn't give rise to anything. Organization can't simply be called into existence at will. The next step in the proletarian political organization required the development of nationwide political agitation, something which the First International hadn't really achieved. The success of the German social-democrats in this helped spread Marxist influence, and paved the way for the formation of the Second or Social-Democratic International in 1889.

At its best, the Second International fostered a form of mass socialist workers party that had never been seen before. It did not have the narrow conspiratorial form of many revolutionary circles of the past. It was intimately connected with both the political and economic mass struggle. It took part in the ideological struggle of trends. Also it had a mass membership, but these members enrolled individually and were supposed to come to party meetings, read the party press, and take a certain part in activities. As well, they were supposed to elect the party leadership and determine party policies. The Communist League had also had an active — and quite dedicated and talented — membership, but it had been a narrow group with limited links to the masses. The IWA had a broad membership, but much of it had been enrolled en masse. What was new was the fusion of political activity and a mass character. At its best, this allowed the masses to put their stamp on politics in a way never achieved before.

²²(...continued)

organization could be regarded as party members.

²³ Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg*, vol. 2, p. 570.

²⁴ G.M. Stekloff, Ch. 7: “Development of the International—The International and Strikes”, *History of the First International*, pp. 96-7.

Like the IWA before it, the Second International changed the conception of working-class political action forever. It also gave rise to a wide spread of socialism among the masses. But it wasn't always at its best. Some social-democratic parties could be quite detached from mass struggle, arguing that nothing could be changed until the revolution, and they could restrict activity to parliamentarism. They might only penetrate among a certain section of workers, and in general barely penetrated among the most nationally-oppressed workers. As time went on, the Social-Democratic International grew numerically, but it came to be dominated by its opportunist and class-collaborationist wing. The crucial moment came at the outbreak of World War I, when most of official Social-Democracy went over to a social-chauvinist position of defending the war effort of its own national bourgeoisie against the workers of other lands.

This gave rise to the task of developing truly revolutionary workers parties to replace those of the Second International. It wasn't just that there were some bad leaders in the Second International, but the very structure of these parties had failed in the face of the revolutionary crises brought by World War I and its aftermath. The Bolsheviks came from within the Second International, being originally a faction of the RSDLP. But the party organization built up by the Bolsheviks was different from that of other Second International parties. This was partly due to different conditions: the RSDLP was built up under conditions of Tsarist dictatorship and illegality rather than the milder and legal conditions facing the main parties of the Second International. But the Bolsheviks also developed a party of a different character from the ordinary party of the Second International: for example, they persisted in the struggle against reformism, their party apparatus threw itself into the revolution rather than recoiling from it, and they were more tightly linked to the mass motion of the working class.

After World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, the Third or Communist International sought to build up this new type of party internationally. The crises and revolutionary ferment that followed World War I provided conditions for the development of these parties. It was more centralized than most social-democratic parties, and it required a higher level of discipline. But it was also fostered a higher level of independent activity from its members, a greater role in mass action, and a higher level of theoretical knowledge and consciousness. At their best, the communist parties showed an outstanding ability to maintain an independent stand despite repression and persecution from the bourgeoisie, and to lead revolutionary struggle. They also spread to sections of the masses that the social-democrats tended to ignore, such as the colonial world and nationally-oppressed workers in the industrial countries; the communist banner was planted firmly in the midst of the national liberation and anti-imperialist movements.

But the Third International parties too weren't always at their best. They were faced with having to transform themselves rapidly, generally under harsh conditions of bourgeois repression and reformist obstruction. They had to overcome social-democratic carry-overs and develop new organizational traditions, develop new leadership cadre, learn methods of winning the masses to support militant initiatives in the face of reformist and social-democratic opposition, and deal with the crisis of revolutionary theory that broke out in conjunction with World

War I. They had some remarkable achievements, but overall they had mixed results, and rough organizational methods were sometimes used to force the pace of change, or to achieve unity. Moreover, Stalinism eventually corroded the Third International and turned the communist parties into an ugly caricature of what they had been. Centralism usually remained, but it was now bureaucratic centralism to subordinate the rank-and-file to whatever policy the leadership wanted. In the Soviet Union and other state-capitalist countries that developed, the parties became parties of the new state-capitalist bourgeoisie, whose role was to suppress any resistance from the working class.

Today revolutionary activists face the task of assessing the experience of party-building in the past. We have to see what general lessons can be learned from this history to help guide the building of anti-revisionist parties in the future. Today the working class movement is disoriented and disorganized everywhere. But as the movement revives, the issue of political organization will again come to the fore.

Trotsky himself lived during a period when the methods of party-building and the forms of organization were being tested, questioned, and revised. This was the period when the transition between the social-democratic and communist methods of organizing was on the agenda. He began his political activity in the period of the crisis of social-democracy prior to World War I. He joined the Bolshevik Party in 1917 as it decisively separated from the Second International by carrying out the Bolshevik Revolution. He was a leader of the Bolsheviks in the early days of the Third International, which sought to build a new type of party world-wide. And he later sought to build up a supposed Fourth International.

Yet it is notable how oblivious he was to the history of party-building. His polemics on substitutionalism were little more than the old polemic of direct democracy against representative democracy. They were abstract, detached from the history of what organization had meant for the proletariat. He didn't examine the attempts to develop revolutionary organization, and so he couldn't see the level of party-building as itself a reflection of the degree of revolutionary maturity and readiness of the working class. He simply counterposed spontaneity to party committees, and he didn't see the continuing struggle to develop forms of party organization that expressed the revolutionary initiative of the working class. He didn't notice that the development of the socialist party with its dread committees and committee-people, far from repressing the initiative of the workers to express their views, had in general encouraged an unprecedented outpouring of worker activism and initiative in politics and in theoretical matters. And he didn't see the lessons about the role of centralism, and the conditions for centralism, that are suggested by the history of party-building.

Throughout Trotsky's political life, he was concerned with who is in the leadership of a party, which he might call the problem of "revolutionary leadership". But he never dwelt on the tasks of party-building in themselves. He never considered the momentous changes in the nature of the party organization itself that were taking place during the period of his activity. The party organization was for him a mere tool, that could be fashioned at will by its leaders.

The International Left Opposition and the Fourth International

After Trotsky was exiled from the USSR, he organized an international organization of his supporters, the International Left Opposition, in 1930. In 1934 it became the International Communist League, and in 1938 the supposed Fourth International. One might expect that, as part of his appeal for workers to rally around this trend, he would put forward an appeal for workers to take part in party-building, and that he would contrast his view of party-building to that of the social-democrats and of the Stalinists. But this was absent from Trotsky's calls to build a new international.

Indeed, he was impatient with this issue. In the mid-20s, the CI undertook what it called the Bolshevization of the communist parties. The idea was that it wasn't sufficient that the parties maintained the old social-democratic party organization, but with communist leadership. Instead they should transform the basic organizational structure of the parties. Trotsky couldn't see anything in this but an anti-Trotskyist ploy. In a major article, *The Third International After Lenin*, he wrote that

"If by Bolshevization is understood the purging of the party of alien elements and habits, of social democratic functionaries clinging to their posts, of freemasons, pacifist-democrats, idealistic muddle-heads, etc., then this work was being performed from the very first day of the Comintern's existence; at the Fourth Congress, this work with regard to the French party even assumed extremely sharp combat forms. . . . Of course, the work of purging was also necessary after 1924 and alien elements were quite correctly removed from many sections. But taken as a whole, the 'Bolshevization' consisted in this: that with the wedge of the Russian disputes . . . the leaderships being formed at the moment in the communist parties of the West were disorganized over and over again."²⁵

Thus Trotsky pooh-poohed the need for fundamental changes in these parties, other than their adapting Trotskyist leadership. For Trotsky, the task of overcoming social-democratic traditions was mainly purging the membership and leadership of these parties, and he particularly mentioned the struggle against allowing French communists to be Freemasons. This was an example of how he approached what he called the "problem of revolutionary leadership". This was, he believed, all that was required for them to be carry out the various policies that he advocated. He didn't see that the changeover from social-democratic to communist parties marked a new development in the meaning of party organization, as had the change from the Communist League to the IWA, and from the IWA to the Social-Democratic International.

²⁵ Section 2, Part 4, Subsection 11: "The Question of the Internal Party Regime", in *The Third International After Lenin/The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals*. This work is available at www.marxists.org, and this passage at www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/works/1928-3rd/ti07.htm.

The CPUSA, for example, strove, among other things, to deal with putting units on a factory basis; with integrating the party's foreign language federations into the common organization of the party; and with not only fully integrating African-American comrades into the party's work, but orienting the party toward a consistent and aggressive struggle for the rights of black people and other minorities. It had some successes and some failures in these attempts. But despite the increasing Stalinist domination of the CI, and the eventual elimination of the CPUSA's revolutionary character when it degenerated into a left-fringe of the Democratic Party, in the meantime it set a new standard for revolutionary working class organization in the US.

There was, as mentioned earlier, one issue of party organization that Trotsky was concerned with, namely, maintaining strict centralism. The organizational plans for the International Left Opposition, the International Communist League, and the Fourth International were similar in insisting on strict world centralism, administered by a small leading group. In between international conferences, affairs would be handled by an International Bureau (later called the International Executive Committee) of 15 members. And the functions of this group would be exercised between its meetings by an International Secretariat, which could have as few as three members. They would rule on all the main affairs of the Trotskyist organizations of different countries. The main feature of the world Trotskyist organizational structure was the power given to these bodies.

These bodies were copied from the Communist International, which had a powerful Executive Committee and a Political Secretariat. The CI had mixed experience with international centralism. The CI mandated organizational and political changes that helped convert the socialist left-wing from World War I into a durable international movement. But some of the methods of CI influence on the national parties were rough, and the Stalinists eventually perverted centralism into a form of behind-the-scenes dictation to the parties. Trotsky didn't analyze this experience, but simply copied a few features, and turned it into a cover for his own personal dictation to the Fourth International. He didn't bother about the preconditions needed for revolutionary centralism, and didn't consider whether they existed in the Trotskyist movement. Lenin had written that "Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end in phrase-mongering and grimacing."²⁶ I will return later to what these conditions are. For now, it suffices to note that "phrase-mongering and grimacing", along with a myriad of splits, is an apt description of the internal disorder that has always existed in the world Trotskyist movement.

The International Bureau and the International Secretariat, while given total responsibility over the Trotskyist movement, never developed any real cohesion. Their composition continually changed radically as many of their members left or were denounced by the Trotskyist movement; the relationship between the International Bureau and its own International Secretariat was at one time a matter of dispute; and Trotsky's personal intervention also incited splits. Moreover, the apparatus was

²⁶ See Chapter II, "One of the fundamental conditions for the Bolsheviks' success", in *Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*".

infiltrated by the Stalinist secret police. For example, Mark Zborowski, better known in the Trotskyist movement as "Etienne", was one of the main workers in the Trotskyist apparatus, with the full confidence of Trotsky and of Trotsky's son, Leon Sedov. He worked at the International Secretariat, often as the most influential leader after Sedov. But Etienne was a Stalinist agent, and there were others. Thus, in the case of the Fourth International, hostile agents repeatedly found their way to the very helm of its international headquarters.²⁷

An example of Trotsky's version of centralism can be seen in his fight against the Spanish Trotskyists of POUM. Because of its role in the Spanish Civil War, POUM is one of the best-known of the Trotskyist parties of that period. In the mid-30s, it achieved a certain mass support and was larger than the rest of the world Trotskyist movement combined. But due to differences between Trotsky and POUM's leadership, it was regarded with hostility by the official world Trotskyist organization. The differences weren't dealt with by comradely means but by raw sectarian pressure; Trotsky sought to destroy the POUM. He denounced its leadership in harsh terms as bankrupt, criminal, betrayers of the working class. In 1936 the International Secretariat sent people to Spain to form a Trotskyist "section" in Barcelona with the intention of replacing POUM; it spent a good deal of its time issuing material denouncing POUM, but accomplished little. And Trotsky promoted the development of factional work within POUM.²⁸

Meanwhile Trotsky and the International Secretariat (IS) pressured Trotskyists elsewhere to denounce POUM; for example, Trotsky turned on Victor Serge and others, calling them "strikebreakers" for their friendly relations with POUM. The intervention by the IS in the factional disputes of various other Trotskyist sections was made dependent on the attitude of the

²⁷ For the instability of the leading Trotskyist committees, see Tony Cliff, Chapter 12: "Why the Fourth International failed to take off" *Trotsky: the darker the night the brighter the star 1927-1940* (Vol. 4 of Cliff's biography of Trotsky), pp. 302-3. Etienne's importance in the Trotskyist movement and his role as an agent of the Stalinist secret police is well-known. See for example Isaac Deutscher's *The Prophet Outcast/Trotsky: 1929-1940*, pp. 347-9, 366, 390-6, 405-10, 422. For more on Etienne and the general problem of the infiltration of the Trotskyist movement, see the book by the major Belgian Trotskyist Georges Vereeken, *The GPU in the Trotskyist Movement*. The irritability of Trotsky towards his own followers, his intolerance of any differences, was notorious in the Trotskyist movement. It was, for example, one of the themes of Vereeken's book, Vereeken himself having been a victim of Trotsky's ire. In his book, the ever-loyal Vereeken tried to shield Trotsky personally from much of the blame by pointing to provocative maneuvers by Etienne and other agents. But even Vereeken pointed out that it was the Trotskyist movement's own "sectarian and sterile methods of discussion" that "opened the door wide to the Zborowskis and their like" and that Trotsky himself bears some responsibility for this. (p. 375). More accurately, Trotsky inspired this sectarianism in the Trotskyist movement.

²⁸ See Vereeken, Chapter 11 "The Spanish Civil War" and Chapter 13 "The final break between the International Secretariat and the POUM", *The GPU in the Trotskyist Movement*. Trotsky defended carrying out "factional work" within POUM and other dissident Trotskyist organizations in "Once More on Comrades Sneevliet and Vereeken", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)*, p. 33.

local Trotskyist leaders towards POUM. It wasn't sufficient for Trotskyists to have criticism of POUM's policies, they had to be hostile to POUM. For example, the Belgium Trotskyist leader Vereeken was critical of the POUM leadership, but wouldn't call them "traitors" or "renegades". As a result, while Trotsky and the IS agreed with Vereeken on the main local dispute of the moment among Belgium Trotskyists, they denounced him anyway, saying he "wants to separate the Belgian question from the Spanish question". World Trotskyist organization amounted to mechanical dictation against its local sections.²⁹

The murderous Stalinist repression against POUM put Trotsky's attacks on it into the background. The Stalinists killed large numbers of members and leaders of POUM, and viciously slandered POUM in order to justify these murders. But Trotsky's campaign against POUM illustrates his own attempt to deal with differences by suppression.

Overall, Trotsky as leader of the Fourth International didn't pay serious attention to building up durable organization, but reduced matters to centralism alone, and he created a repulsive form of centralism. From an organizational point of view, the world Trotskyist movement of that time, and since then, has displayed two contrasting aspects. The many splits—along with the theorizing on factionalism that will be mentioned in a moment—gave rise to a loose splintered movement, while the official movement around Trotsky, and some of the subsequent Trotskyist organizations, was rigidly and bureaucratically centralized. This was not party-building, but a caricature of it.

Regroupment

Some of Trotsky's methods reflected that the purpose of the Fourth International was to capture larger organizations, rather than build up its own. At first the International Left Opposition insisted that it wasn't building separate parties. As late as 1933, an ILO conference insisted that it "regards itself as a faction of the Comintern and its separate national sections as factions of the national Communist parties. This means that the Left Opposition does not regard the organizational regime created by the Stalinist bureaucracy as final." As a result, it wasn't clear to some Trotskyists "whether one ought to limit oneself to internal work with the Communist Party or create independent ties with workers

²⁹ For Trotsky's denunciation of Serge as a strikebreaker, see "Discussions with Trotsky, March 20, 1938" in *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1937-38)*, pp. 287-8. For Trotsky's connection of Belgium and Spanish issues, see "Two Manifestations of the Same Tendency, May 12, 1937", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1936-37)*, p. 290. (Note that "Vereeken" is apparently an older spelling or transliteration of Vereeken.) Vereeken wrote that all the fuss was "because we had not used the terms traitor and renegade in referring to the leaders of the POUM". (Vereeken, Ch. 14, *Ibid.*, p. 193) He also sought to soften Trotsky's responsibility for the wrecking campaign against POUM by noting that Trotsky tried to send a private letter to Nin and other POUM leaders in 1936 with a more conciliatory approach. (Ch. 11, *Ibid.*, p. 164-6) It doesn't strike him that there was something two-faced in Trotsky's combining a private approach to POUM leaders with a continuing public campaign against them—and anyone who would talk to them—as strikebreakers and class traitors, and that this showed a contemptuous attitude on the part of Trotsky towards the world Trotskyist organization as well as towards POUM.

outside of the party". It wasn't until July 1933 that Trotsky changed his mind and wrote that the task is "preparing" to build new parties and a new International.³⁰

This made the Trotskyists into a strange sort of faction of the CI, namely, an external one. Be that as it may, the orientation was to capturing Stalinist organizations rather than building up new ties among the working class. It wasn't just that their ability to build these new ties would be limited by the small size of the Trotskyist grouping, but putting effort into building these ties would be a violation of their view of their task of factional work within another party. Moreover, even after Trotsky decided that new parties had to be built, indeed even after the Fourth International was proclaimed in 1938, the orientation remained towards winning over or capturing other organizations. The emphasis shifted, however, to capturing social-democratic organizations. Such orientations diverted attention from party-building and building up a proper organizational life, and focused attention on the means of factional struggle.

This was reflected in Trotsky's occasional use of the term "regroupment", and this term has become even more widespread among Trotskyists after Trotsky's death. It's not party-building, but the "regroupment" of revolutionary elements from other parties and trends that Trotskyism worries about. Here the problem is not the term "regroupment" in itself, nor the idea that there are periods of major regroupment in the working class movement. Clearly there are dramatic periods where parties split, trends disassociate, and new political groupings come rapidly into being, or a previously existing trend can grow rapidly. But this is only one aspect of the life of a revolutionary trend. Indeed, what can be accomplished in such a period depends on whether the new trend has achieved a certain development prior to a period of regroupment. If a new trend hasn't gained a certain size, organization, and political clarity prior to a regroupment, it will suffer for it afterwards. It will either have to find some way to painstakingly accomplish all the work it has neglected, or it will break up in disappointment and confusion. Moreover, if a trend succeeds in consolidating itself after a regroupment, it will be faced with the task of further growth through its own development, not just dramatic further regroupments.

For example, the mass parties of the Second International weren't formed mainly by regroupment, but by the gradual building of what then was a new type of party. The Third International was created rapidly during a turbulent period of crisis and with many regroupments, but its parties in various countries only proved durable to the extent that they were able to gradually and painstakingly, over a period of time, transform themselves into a new type of party. Moreover, this was only possible because the Bolshevik Party and Leninist theory had developed previously through a protracted period of revolution-

³⁰ The first quote is from "The International Left Opposition, Its Tasks and Methods", a document from the International Preconference of the International Left Opposition, Feb. 4-8, 1933, *Documents of the Fourth International: The Formative Years (1933-40)*. The second quote is from "Again on 'faction' and 'second party' in "On the state of the Left Opposition, December 16, 1932", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1932-33)*, p. 30. The third quote is from "It is necessary to build communist parties and an international anew, July 15, 1933", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1932-33)*, p. 311.

ary struggles. If the Bolsheviks had simply waited for regroupment, or focused their tactics on it, they wouldn't have gained the mass experience and built up the organizational structure that served them so well in the revolutionary crisis of World War I. Instead, they would have had the same problem as the German Lefts, who were faced with having to make up in a short time for their denigration of party-building prior to World War I. The German Lefts merged in December 1920 with a large part of the Independent Social Democratic Party, which had split from the official social-democrats, and this was a crucial political event that multiplied the size of the new German communist party. But it didn't make up for the previous lack of attention to party-building.

But the Trotskyist slogan of regroupment centers attention only on dramatic and rapid change, in particular, on mergers of groups. Anything else is denounced as reformist gradualism. In a discussion with American Trotskyists, Trotsky said: "In the good old times the social-democrats would say: Now we have only 10,000 workers, later we'll have 100,000, then a million, and then we'll get to power. World development to them was only an accumulation of quantities: 10,000, 100,000, etc., etc. Now we have an absolutely different situation. We are in a period of declining capitalism, of crises that become more turbulent and terrible, and approaching war."³¹ Thus Trotsky ridiculed the work of expanding revolutionary consciousness and organization among the masses. He regarded it as mere quantitative work, supposedly unsuitable for the present era of crises and cataclysms and unworthy of real revolutionaries.

Factionalism

Trotsky's definition of the International Left Opposition as a faction, rather than an independent organization, went along with his general tendency throughout his political life to resort to building factions. Sometimes, such as during the years of his denunciation of Lenin, he built his faction in the name of opposing all factions. Sometimes, as with the International Left Opposition, he built it more candidly. But the best known aspect of Trotskyist theorizing on factionalism is the putting forward of the demand for freedom of factions as the supposed revolutionary alternative to Stalinist forms of party organization (although I don't think that Trotsky himself was likely to use the phrase "freedom of factions").

A faction isn't simply any group of people with common views or with dissenting views. A full-blown faction is an alternative party-within-a-party. It has its own discipline, formally or not, and its own group decisions which it pursues within the party. The idea of a party as a union of factions is sometimes defended as a way of providing rights to those with different views. And no doubt, if a faction decides matters prior to the party meetings which are supposed to assess situations, and then pushes through its prior decisions, it magnifies the power of these views. The internal decisions of the faction become the real source of party decisions; the internal organization of the faction

³¹ "How to Fight for a Labor Party in the U.S., March 21, 1938", *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution with introductory essays by Joseph Hansen and George Novack*, Pathfinder Press, p. 121.

isn't subject to the rules binding others; and it can act clandestinely behind the back of other comrades. The meetings and elections where other party members expect comrades to set forward matters as impartially as possible, so they can be judged, instead become forums for the factions. In such a situation, all members who aren't in a faction become relatively powerless. The life of the party then centers more and more on the struggle between the dominant factions, and on the decisions of the factions, rather than on the declared resolutions of the organization.

The appropriate attitude towards factions depends on the type of organization. There is no one common organizational structure good for all types of organizations — parties, unions, representative councils, neighborhood councils, etc. — and for all situations. But the history of Marxist party-building shows a continual struggle to surmount factionalism and to create a class-based centralism. With respect to his work to develop a mass proletarian party, Marx sought to have the IWA gradually dissolve away the sectarian nature of a number of the activist circles in different localities. He wanted it to develop in conjunction with the general movement of the working class rather than as a grouping of factions with special sectarian views. As he said: "The history of the International was a *continual struggle on the part of the General Council* against the sects and amateur experiments which attempted to assert themselves within the International itself against the genuine movement of the working class."³² The Second International at its best developed the idea of the individual adherence of workers and activists to the party and its common program rather than simply being a collection of different groupings in different localities. The Third International at its best attempted to develop parties of revolutionary action that would be free of the reformist wings which, at crucial moments, paralyzed the parties of the Second International. This meant that Marxist party-building needed to find pro-party methods of fostering discussion of differences and further development of revolutionary theory rather than fostering the wrangling of sectarian and factional groupings. The progression from the IWA to the Third International is, in part, a history of the attempts at developing such methods of party life.

But the Third International decayed, and Stalinism eventually perverted democratic centralism into bureaucratic tyranny. The Stalinists present such tyranny as proletarian unity, discipline, and centralism, and denounce any opposition as impermissible factionalism. Yet the history of Trotskyist organization, with its attempt to implement some sort of freedom of factions, showed that it was no alternative. Trotsky and the International Secretariat often took hasty administrative action, and demanded that their followers accept it in the name of following discipline. And since then, militant Trotskyist organizations have tended to have a harsh and barren internal life, similar to that of Stalinist organizations. The freedom of factions did not promote a satisfactory internal life, nor did it even allow activists with some differences to remain together in a common organization. Far from Trotskyist theorizing on factions allowing organizations to

reconcile unity with a vigorous internal life and differences of opinion, the Trotskyist movement, both during the life of Trotsky and afterwards, has been notoriously splintered. It has split over every issue that it has confronted.

Trotskyist theorizing on factions has diverted them from a serious struggle to develop an alternate style of organization from that of Stalinism. It does not show how to develop a true democratic centralism. Moreover, Trotsky himself had a difficult time reconciling the demand for freedom of factions with his own view of party centralism. His actual theory on factions was more complicated than a simple demand for freedom of factions, was not altogether consistent, and doesn't seem to be completely worked out in any one writing. He demanded freedom for Trotskyist factions when they were working inside other political organizations, or for factions that he approved, but would not grant such freedom to other factions. There are several aspects to his position on factions:

* He held that "The discussion of serious questions is inconceivable without groupings" or tendencies or temporary factions.³³ Thus Trotsky denied the possibility that ordinary methods of party life could be developed to deal with differences, new ideas, the research of troubling issues, etc. He assumed that anyone with an idea must be a factionalist or a pre-factionalist, and that theoretical work and the discussion of differences always took the form of factional fighting. This resulted in Trotskyist theorizing about party life getting reduced to centralism on one hand, and factionalism on the other. And it would imply that factions are not only acceptable, but are a necessary aspect of party life that must be encouraged, so long as they don't become "permanent" and "ossified" and thus "troubling". After all, "wherever there are two opinions, people inevitably group together".³⁴ Just as Trotsky reduced the main point of Leninist organization to centralism in and of itself, thus creating an empty parody of Leninism, he reduced the question of political differences within a party to the conflict of groupings and factions.

* Trotsky also held that factions were undesirable. In 1923, in giving a list of factions that had arisen among the Bolsheviks, he pointed to some that might have split the party if they had existed for a few more months.³⁵ In 1935 he would give a different list of factions to try to show that they really weren't that serious. Yet he still held that "permanent factions" were "a disturbing symptom that signifies either that the struggling tendencies are totally irreconcilable or that the party as a whole has reached a deadlock." Moreover, he was also concerned that factions might resort to "extreme measures". This was acceptable when working as a faction inside a broader organization and seeking to isolate reformists, but it would be wrong to "transfer

³³ "Factions and the Fourth International, 1935", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*, p. 188. A footnote by Pathfinder Press indicates that this article was from the Trotsky archives in the Harvard College Library, and it "was not published anywhere". Yet it is one of Trotsky's few later statements on the general issue of factionalism.

³⁴ "Chapter 3: Groups and Factional Formations, December 22, 1923" from the pamphlet "The New Course", *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)*, p. 79.

³⁵ "The New Course", *Ibid.*, pp. 81-3.

³² Letter of Marx to Bolte, 23 November 1871 *Correspondence 1846-1895/A Selection with Commentary and Notes*, International Publishers, p. 315, emphasis as in the original.

such methods to work inside a revolutionary organization". He looked towards the development of "a sense of proportion" in factional struggle.³⁶

Thus Trotsky sought to establish rules of factional warfare. He hoped that the "program and definite tactics" of "a revolutionary party" would place "definite and very distinct limits on the internal struggle of tendencies and groupings in advance." He failed to see that the very organization of factions meant that the usual methods and limits of internal party discussion, whether well-considered and desirable ones or crude and harmful ones, were being set aside. And in fact, the history of the Fourth International shows that the Trotskyists never found a way to civilize factional warfare. Of course, if everyone would agree beforehand on the limits of factional dispute, and on who was still a revolutionary and who was a reformist, and on the serious political issues, then things would go well — but in that case, why was there a need to form factional groupings in the first place? In fact, factional warfare has its own logic. And this logic was never more evident than in seeing Trotsky's own angry pronouncements towards those he had differences with in the Trotskyist movement.

* Trotsky held that "it is impossible to avert such a situation [the creation of "permanent factions"] . . . by simply banning factions. To wage a war against the symptom does not mean to cure the disease."³⁷ Such considerations were supposed to prove that a party must allow freedom of factions.

There's no doubt that a revolutionary party can't be guaranteed against factions by decree. But, for that matter, there is not a single organizational rule or political decision whose implementation can be guaranteed by fiat. The implication of Trotsky's argument, however, is that there is one sphere of organizational life where rules may be enforced mechanically and immediately, and another sphere — that of the factional struggle — where rules are harmful because one has to look for the cause of problems. In reality, there isn't such a distinction. It is an important principle of party-building to avoid mere administrative action in all issues.

To deal with the cause of problems, rather than symptoms, it is important, not to specially exempt factionalism from condemnation, but to strive for proper methods of party-building. For example, the late Marxist-Leninist Party of the USA, from which the Communist Voice Organization is descended, stressed the need for party bodies to "strive to avoid arbitrary, administrative actions and...instead made wide use of the method of consultation and education". Moreover it held that "the authority of the Party's decisions is not based solely on their being majority decisions", and hence attention has to be paid not just to making decisions on this or that issue, but to whether there is a basis for making a decision. It was held that "if no basis exists to take a decision on a matter of principle", then there should be work to establish such a basis by means such as "the accumulation of further revolutionary experience on the issue"

³⁶ "Factions and the Fourth International", *Writings of Leon Trotsky (1935-36)*, pp. 184-9.

³⁷ "Factions and the Fourth International", *Ibid.*

and "theoretical work".³⁸ The MLP wasn't always successful in implementing this ideal, but this was what it strove for, and the desirability of avoiding bare administrative action was a repeated theme of inner-party organizational life. On some difficult issues of revolutionary theory, while comrades and party units had their own views, the MLP put off an overall decision for years while having the Party as a whole work to establishing the basis for a decision. It was precisely because the MLP was opposed to factionalism, that it developed a number of methods of internal party life, consultation, discussion and research. If attention is focused on forming groupings and factions, then it is not going to be focused on other ways to deal with political issues.

What was the Trotskyist alternative? Trotsky imagined that he was treating the cause of the inner-party diseases, rather than dealing with mere symptoms, but this simply meant the Fourth International would give a political reason for its administrative actions. Neither Trotsky nor the International Secretariat showed any recognition of the limits of immediate decision from above. The Fourth International would constantly judge between various factions of its supporters and demand that they immediately merge or otherwise accept a decision on the rights and wrongs of political controversies.³⁹ The supposed freedom of factions provided little protection for any of Trotsky's followers who differed from him on any issue. Trotsky and the International Secretariat often took hasty administrative action, and demanded that their followers accept it in the name of following discipline.

* Trotsky held that it was desirable to form factions in other left-wing organizations, or in that of rival sections of the Trotskyist movement. The Trotskyists would insist on freedom of factions for their own work. But if the work was successful, and Trotskyists won over the left-wing organization, Trotsky held that it should lead to the expulsion of various former leaders. They and/or any faction of theirs would be banned, and the organization should be turned into a centralized Trotskyist party.

Thus workers might well believe that they were defending the right for Trotskyists to be in some workers' party because it would be repressive Stalinism not to allow factions. The Trotskyist rhetoric about factions would probably be understood this way by most people. This is a natural interpretation because it is the only way in which factions can provide a safeguard

³⁸ See "On the organization of the Party" in "Documents of the Second Congress of the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA", *The Workers' Advocate*, January 1, 1984, pp. 51-2. Although it doesn't say so, this section is essentially an extract from the General Rules of the Party.

³⁹ For example, the Founding Conference of the Fourth International passed a resolution "On the Greek Question" that demanded that the two competing Greek factions "shall fuse immediately, combining themselves in a new organization under the name 'Revolutionary Socialist Organization (Greek section of the Fourth International)." p. 271, And the Emergency Conference of the Fourth International passed a "Resolution on the Unification of the British Section" that demanded that the four separate British factions adhering to the Fourth International "give up their separate organization" and merge "into one powerful organization". *Documents of the Fourth International: The Formative Years (1933-40)*, pp. 271, 359. Many more examples could be given. What's the difference between demanding that the separate organizations or factions merge, and banning the separate organizations and factions?

against repression by the leadership. But if the Trotskyists ever obtained a majority in the workers' party of interest, they would—if they followed Trotsky's advice—then proclaim a different principle, and expel certain wings of the party. However consistent these two different principles might appear to the Trotskyists, it would no doubt be regarded as a hypocrisy by large numbers of those who had been trained in the defense of the freedom of factions.

Thus Trotsky was not actually a defender of freedom of factions in general. He held that such freedom would be extended only to revolutionary groupings. This indicated that Trotsky had come to believe that a revolutionary party should not contain reformists, which was correct to that extent. But it also meant that his talk of not banning factions was relative. In his view, the party leadership would judge which factions to ban and which to tolerate. It might not ban factions simply on the grounds of their being factions, but it could and should do so for undesirable ones. But if so, factions couldn't provide a safeguard for dissidents, because the factions would need the approval of the party leadership. And if so, it would be just as legitimate for other organizations to ban Trotskyist factions, if they believed the Trotskyists were disruptive, as it would be for Trotskyist-dominated organizations to ban those they believed to be reformists, Stalinists, or otherwise nonrevolutionary. All this means that the Trotskyist stand on factions doesn't guarantee a satisfactory internal life for a political party. This is verified by the harsh attitude of most Trotskyist organizations to dissident groupings in their own ranks.

Trotsky's dual attitude to factions was outlined, for example, in his discussion with American Trotskyists in 1938 concerning how to deal with a Labor Party, if such a party emerged. He thought that only a "loose opportunistic party" would accept that the Trotskyists enter as a party. And "If in the labor party we become the predominant tendency, ...then we become the advocates of centralizing this loose party. We demand that the workers eliminate the fakers, etc."⁴⁰ It is of course legitimate and even necessary for a truly revolutionary proletarian party to exclude reformists. But that can't be done while accepting the rights of factions, except, at base, via double-talk and hypocrisy.

Thus Trotsky sought to reconcile factionalism and centralism through a complex series of ideas about how factionalism should be regulated and which factions should be accepted. Trotskyism is not a theory of party-building but in large part a theory of factional-manoeuvring and how to take over other parties. When Trotsky's conceptions about factions are examined as a whole, they are consistent only in their directing attention away from party-building; they denigrate the need to find and test more appropriate methods of party life. Any organizations that tries to follow these rules will be at risk of fostering the evils of factionalism without, however, having obtained a safeguard against bureaucratic abuses.

Throughout his life, Trotsky set forward many views that deprecated the role of party-building, but he was attracted to the idea of administration. His ideas often revolved around the thought that a better administrator would solve whatever the problem at hand.

This colored his ideas concerning the party. Party-building was viewed in the light of an administrator selecting good subordinates and ensuring that they follow one's own views. This conception can be seen in a passage where Tony Cliff, a major Trotskyist leader in his own right, seeks to explain why Trotsky put forward directly anti-party views prior to joining the Bolsheviks; Cliff points mainly to Trotsky not being involved in administration previously:

"Trotsky's wrong practice fed his wrong theory of the party. Having no cadres to deal with, he did not have to choose people of advanced views, weld them together into a tightly centralised organisation, build a machine, and if need be, wrestle with this machine."⁴¹

Cliff was trying to contrast party-building to Trotsky's practice prior to 1917, and he paints a picture mainly of administrative work. There is no conception here of the party as a living organism in its own right, which develops out of the views and experiences of the masses. It is the party which develops and selects its administrators, not the administrator which calls the party into existence.

And indeed, Cliff correctly depicted how Trotsky later sought to build up the Fourth International and its predecessors. It was very much a top-down apparatus, with Trotsky seeking to provide the slogans, tactics and organizational form for the local sections in each country. He "chose people of advanced views" and would seek to "weld them together into a tightly centralised organization", and he certainly "wrestled with this machine".

The preconditions of centralism

But revolutionary centralism can't be achieved simply by administrative action. Earlier in this article it was pointed out that the Fourth International was an object lesson for Lenin's view that attempts to establish discipline and centralism, if the necessary preconditions are absent, simply lead to "phrase-mongering and grimacing". Now it is time to examine these preconditions. Lenin described some of them as follows:

". . . how is the discipline of the revolutionary party of the proletariat maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, . . . Secondly, by its ability to link itself with, to keep in close touch with, and to a certain extent, if you like, to merge with the broadest masses of the toilers—primarily with the proletariat, *but also with the non-*

⁴⁰ "Three Possibilities with a Labor Party, July 23, 1938", *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution with introductory essays* by Joseph Hansen and George Novack, Pathfinder Press, p. 155.

⁴¹ Tony Cliff, Ch. 5 "An explanation of the break between Lenin and Trotsky," *Trotsky: Towards October 1879-1917*, p. 78.

proletarian toiling masses. Thirdly, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard . . . , provided that the broadest masses have been convinced *by their own experience* that they are correct. . . . these conditions cannot arise all at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.”⁴²

Trotsky saw the administrative side of centralism: the organizational rules, and the top administrative bodies, which have their place and their importance of course, and the process of intervening in local problems, which also has its place and its importance. But he didn't consider that centralism depends on more than this. Indeed, according to Lenin, it even depends on things external to the party. It requires a certain ferment among the masses, who become convinced by their own experience of the need for the party and the correctness of the revolutionary views. It requires the proletarian party to be linked with the workers, and even with non-proletarian toilers. It is facilitated by a correct theory, but this theory too requires more than just the work of the party.

But for Trotsky, the objective conditions for revolution and for immediately implementing strict centralism in a proletarian party had existed ever since the emergence of imperialism or monopoly capitalism, and they existed on a world scale. And moreover, he thought that he already had a finished revolutionary theory. Supposedly the Bolshevik revolution verified all his ideas, and there was no need to worry about the further development of theory in conjunction with the experience of the revolutionary movement. Indeed, wasn't his theory verified by the numerous predictions, hypotheticals, and imaginative descriptions in his books and articles? So all that was left was to administer an organization on the basis of this theory, and to blame bad individuals for the failure of this organization to thrive.

The statization of the trade unions

During the Soviet trade union controversy of 1920-21, Trotsky took the coercion and militarization used during War Communism to an extreme. He wanted to solve the problems in the railroad unions by subjecting them completely to administration by the state. He wanted the state to appoint all their officials; indeed, he advocated in general the statization of all the unions and the complete militarization of labor. Nor did Trotsky advocate this as an unfortunate temporary measure, but instead put it forward as the implementation of socialism. He theorized that the “militarization of labor . . . is the inevitable” organization of labor during “the period of transition from capitalism to socialism”. Trotsky was going to implement this through a policy of “shaking-up” the trade unions. Meeting opposition from within the party, including from communists in the trade unions, he

⁴² Lenin, *Ibid.*, p. 6-7, emphasis as in the original.

denounced opposition to his policy as the advocacy of “pure and simple trade unionism”, and he formed a faction on the trade union issue in preparation for the 10th Congress of the Russian Communist Party.⁴³

Trotsky's views were based on the idea that, following the proletarian revolution, there is a complete identity between the state and the will of the working class, and hence what remained was simply an administrative problem of organizing production. He even argued that, under these conditions, there was no distinction between voluntary and compulsory labor.⁴⁴ Any political or social obstacle to pure administration was to be cast aside.

Lenin famously opposed Trotsky's theses on the trade unions in a series of articles such as *Once Again on the Trade Unions, The Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin*. And after the 10th Congress, as the New Economic Policy developed, Trotsky dropped the demand for complete statization and pure administration. But he never conceded that he had been in error. He even retained a trace of the old “shake-up” slogan. In discussions with American Trotskyists, he raised that “The duty of our party is to seize every American worker and shake him ten times so he will understand what the situation is in the United States.”⁴⁵

Instead of recognizing an error, Trotsky denied that the dispute made any difference. In his autobiography, Trotsky wrote that his proposals were merely a technical matter to deal with the situation of scarcity; supposedly the whole debate over the nature of the state and the character of the trade unions was irrelevant.

⁴³ For Trotsky's statement about the militarization of labor as an inevitable transitional measure, see Tony Cliff, *Trotsky: The Sword of the Revolution 1917-1923*, p. 167. See p. 171 for Trotsky's demand for the union officials to be appointed. This demand is also made in Trotsky's theses for the Central Committee, and is cited by Lenin in “The Trade Unions, the Present Situation and Trotsky's Mistakes” (December 30, 1920), *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 41. For Trotsky's denouncing opponents as pure-and-simple trade unionists, see Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 72. For Trotsky's “shake-up” policy with respect to the trade unions, see Lenin, *Ibid.*, p. 75, 76.

Cliff discusses aspects of Trotsky's stand on pp. 171-82. He notes that “The underlying assumption [of Trotsky's stand] was that the workers could have no interest distinguishable from the Soviet state as a whole” (p. 180) and admits that Trotsky's policy was simply one of administrative measures. He repeats uncritically Trotsky's fatuous assertion that the discussion on the role of the trade unions was irrelevant. Isaac Deutscher also refers to Trotsky's demand for appointing trade union leaders; says that Trotsky “wanted the trade unions to be deprived of their autonomy and absorbed into the machinery of government”; and says that this plan meant that “the leaders of the unions would, as servants of the state, speak for the state to the workers rather than for the workers to the state”. Deutscher sums up Trotsky's view at this time as the “idea of complete state control over the working classes”. (*The Prophet Armed/Trotsky: 1879-1921*, pp. 502-3, 507-10, 516.)

⁴⁴ Cliff, *Ibid.*, pp. 167-9 quotes Trotsky on this.

⁴⁵ See “Completing the Program and Putting It to Work, June 7, 1938” in the pamphlet *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution, with introductory essays by Joseph Hansen and George Novack*, Pathfinder Press, p. 145.

He said:

“A discussion flared up in the party; it was actually beside the point. The party was considering the rate at which the trades-unions were to be converted into a part of the state mechanism, whereas the question at issue was really one of daily bread, of fuel, of raw material for the industries. The party was arguing feverishly about ‘the school of communism,’ whereas the thing that really mattered was the economic catastrophe hanging over the country. . . . During the debate at the congress, I gave warning that the resolution on trades-unions adopted by the majority would not live until the next congress, because the new economic orientation would demand a complete revision of the trades-union strategy. And it was only a few months later that Lenin formulated entirely new principles on the role and purpose of trades-unions, based on the new economic policy. I expressed my unreserved approval of his resolution.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at Autobiography, with an introduction by Joseph Hansen*, Pathfinder Press, p. 466.

The new orientation referred to by Trotsky was Lenin’s *The role and functions of the trade unions under the new economic policy*. However, this didn’t cast aside the principles Lenin had set forward in opposition to Trotsky’s trade union platform, as Trotsky brazenly claimed, but instead developed these principles further. In the trade union debate, Lenin had stressed that one couldn’t simply say that the Soviet state was a proletarian state, but had a “bureaucratic twist”, and he referred to a certain type of economic struggle that the trade unions would have to wage against bureaucratic distortions of the state.⁴⁷ Now Lenin developed this in more detail; among other things, he referred to “a certain conflict of interests” between the workers and state sector. This further showed the error of Trotsky’s earlier purely administrative approach to the trade unions. □

⁴⁷ *Collected Works*, vol. 32, pp. 24, 48, 100, etc.

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