

# Communist Voice



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## **Mass resistance to austerity grows**

Police brutality and the occupy movement  
No to the campaign against postal workers

## **Fukushima means no nukes**

Al Gore's 24 hours of climate reality,  
but free-market fantasy  
Continuing failure of capitalist climate summits

## **Leninism and the Arab spring**

Solidarity with the uprisings!  
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## **State-capitalism or socialism**

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

the revival of the revolutionary movement, the *CV* opposes the neo-liberal 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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# From initial resistance to class struggle: Austerity means robbing the workers to pay the rich — fight back!

Every day brings more bad news for workers. People are losing their jobs and their homes. Unemployment and underemployment persist; people are out of work for longer and longer, with little hope of finding something new. If they do find something new, it often pays a mere fraction of what they formerly received. And just at the time when they are most needed, social services of all types are being cut back and fees are being raised, while the different levels of government compete with the private sector in layoffs and wage cuts.

We are in the midst of a world economic depression. What's happening to us is happening to workers elsewhere, and often more severely than here. This issue of *Communist Voice* reports on some of these savage cutbacks. But every newscast, every newspaper brings news of more.

But every day also brings us the news of people who have had enough. They are standing up to say "no!". There are demonstrations and general strikes in one country after another against austerity budgets. In the face of murderous repression, the Arab Spring continues, motivated in part by the growing inequality and economic hopelessness brought by years of market-fundamentalist "reforms" in the Middle East and North Africa. Simmering discontent has even reached the streets of Israel, where weeks of protest saw hundreds of thousands of people calling for economic change. There were the civil explosions all across the Britain, triggered by yet another police murder of a black man, this time in London, but also reflecting pent-up outrage over year

after year of cutbacks and economic hopelessness. And the Occupy Wall Street movement has caught fire, spreading from Wall Street itself to cities all across the US, and even into Europe, Asia, Australia, and elsewhere.

Yet so far, the austerity continues. What is the reason for the continuing cutbacks and economic misery, and how can the people raise their voice more effectively?

The newspapers, politicians, and economic authorities tell us that the world has been living beyond its means, and there just isn't any money left for adequate wages, pensions, universal health programs, and decent public schools. If this were really true, then no protests or strikes could change it. We would just have to do our best in a world when the majority starve to ensure the survival of a privileged few.

But is it really true that there just aren't enough resources for good wages, pensions, health programs, and schools? If this were so, we would expect to see jobs for everyone, as countries desperately tried to produce the goods that wages and pensions are spent on, and to provide the personnel needed to maintain social services. There would be more and more jobs in the struggle to overcome shortages and provide better food, more houses, and more medical equipment, to renew failing infrastructure, and to train more teachers, doctors, nurses, and skilled workers, and so on. Instead we see vacant houses and offices, schools being torn down, and factories shutting down. Resources are being wasted and destroyed, while it is claimed that people

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must tighten their belts because of scarcity. In fact, we see that the capitalist economies are choking on too many resources, not too few. The capitalist world is stuck in yet another over-production crisis, with too many goods to sell and not enough buyers.

So it's not that the world doesn't have the necessary resources. It's that the capitalists, the ruling class, are monopolizing everything. In the US, the percentage of the total income of the country going to the top 1% of households has more than doubled over the last thirty years, and has reached 25% of total income; and in that period the income of CEOs has gone up more like seven times. The distribution of wealth is even more unequal than the distribution of income. The top 1% of families owns 40% of the country's total wealth, which is about twice as much as the bottom 90%. Indeed, the 400 richest Americans own more than the 150 million people in the bottom half of the country. And we've reached a limit: there's no way to keep concentrating more income at the top, without drastic cuts from what little remains for the mass of people.

Meanwhile the capitalists have no solution for the world depression. They had no solution for the business cycle in the years of the Great Depression of the 1930s; they had no solution in the years after World War II of "mixed capitalism"; and they still don't have any solution under neo-liberalism or market fundamentalism. Today their only idea is to shield the profits of the corporations and the income of the rich from being affected by the depression. The way they want to achieve this is through austerity for the people, and subsidies for the rich. Behind the sound bites, the real debate between Democrat and Republican is over how much further to cut the standard of living of the working class, 10%, 20%, 30% or more? The politicians are mulling it over, thinking "It was done in Greece and Ireland, why not do it here?" "We stomped on the auto workers in the 'Great Recession', why not stomp on the postal workers in the 'Invisible Recovery'?" "We have terrorized the teachers for years, so why not go after all the public sector workers?" The liberal Democrats shed crocodile tears over their victims, while the Republican Tea Party says the poor are just getting what they deserve. But their joint Congressional budgetary "super-committee" is just a callous death panel, deliberating on how many more millions will go hungry.

The resources do exist to satisfy the people's needs, but what stands in the way of relief for the masses is the control of these resources by the capitalists. So the demonstrators and strikers are right: there is no way out of the current misery except to oppose the austerity drive of the bourgeoisie.

Without this fight, all the measures taken in the name of dealing with the hard times will, in fact, be turned against the workers. Bail-outs will be used to cut wages; mortgage relief will mainly be used to give subsidies to the banks, not to help people keep their homes; financial reform will just be a fancy way of saving shareholders and paying off the speculators.

Indeed, no one can guarantee that this or that government measure will end the depression: the capitalist system is built on anarchy and unpredictability. The business cycle is a permanent feature of capitalism: boom and bust, with boom leading to bust, and bust, if things go right, being followed by boom. So activists should look to the goal of finding an alternative to capitalism. Meanwhile, we should fight, not for ways to magically cure capitalism, but to improve the militant organization of the work-

ing class and for immediate measures to protect the masses from the consequences of the spreading economic crash.

Moreover, the present world depression isn't just another business cycle. It is the crisis of market fundamentalism, combining economic disaster, environmental crisis, and continuing wars. One way or the other, there are going to be major changes in what the present economies, financial systems, and governments look like. The question is how far these changes are simply going to put more pressure on the working class, and preserve the spirit of market fundamentalism in a new form, or how far the working class will succeed in protecting itself and the environment.

The world depression is giving rise to mass struggles in one country after another. Let's support and strengthen this wave of resistance and help it take the path of class struggle! The needs of the present include:

**\* *A fight for immediate measures to aid distressed workers, the unemployed, youth, retirees, etc.*** It's a bourgeois fraud, engaged in both by both parties of big business, the Republicans and the Democrats, to say that subsidies for corporations are "jobs" bills. There should instead be programs to directly employ millions of workers and youth on needed projects. There should be an end to the increasingly severe punitive measures to penalize the poor, the unemployed, and the disadvantaged — from sadistic relief requirements to laws criminalizing being poor in public. Instead there would be an improvement and extension of public services and the social safety net, both of which have been shredded in the last few decades and are being savagely cut further now, at the time of utmost need. And there should be an end to attacks on immigrant workers, and a fight against the growing racism being manifested by the bourgeoisie.

**\* *The banking and financial system should be taken over and turned into a public service.*** If Wall Street has become "too big to fail", then it's too big to be in private hands. The financial system should not be bailed out; instead, the current institutions should be eliminated. True, the financial problems are basically just a symptom of the deeper problems of capitalism, with its overproduction crises and business cycles and increasing inequality. But countries are being strangled with austerity budgets in order to keep the financial institutions happy. So without breaking the power of the present financial system, few other reforms are possible.

**\* *The privatization of government should be reversed.*** Years of neo-liberal privatization has undermined public services and made government regulation into a joke. What is needed, however, is not a return to the old-style of regulatory agencies, but a new type of regulation where the workers have some say with respect to its administration. The capitalist governments will never give this to the people as a gift, no matter what laws are passed, and it is only possible to a limited extent under capitalism. But the fight over this is essential if public services are to be restored, mass relief accomplished, and any real environmental progress achieved.

**\* *Tax the rich and big business.*** Neither balanced budgets nor deficit spending are the panaceas which the various schools of bourgeois economics believe. The effect of the budget depends on what it is spent on, the nature of government programs, and the overall circumstances. But government does

have to tax, and it is the rich, who possess the wealth of the country, who should bear the burden of the taxes and fees.

**\* *There must be a serious environmental program.*** This cannot wait until the depression is over. Climate change has already begun and is wreaking damage around the world, and if something isn't done soon, we face truly catastrophic results. Yet some capitalists still deny that there is any real problem, while others, while talking about the environmental crisis, champion futile market measures to deal with it. Indeed some sham "green" capitalists are promoting nuclear power as supposedly clean energy, while others want to devastate a good deal of the countryside and the nation's water supplies via hydraulic "fracking" for natural gas. This issue of *Communist Voice* carries an article on the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and also a discussion of Al Gore's new campaign against climate denial, where he denounces others for closing their eyes to global warming, while himself looking away from the sorry results of the market-based policies which he claims are the solution. It will take bringing the class struggle into the environmental movement if there ever is going to be realistic and effective measures taken to deal with the environmental crisis.

**\* *The working class has to not only fight the capitalists, but to transform itself in the midst of this fight.*** Today American unions are mainly run by an overpaid set of pro-capitalist fat-cats, who fear worker militancy as much as the capitalists do. Also, there is no mass political organization that speaks for the workers, while the union bureaucrats run after pro-business politicians, mostly Democrats. The so-called "socialist" parties in Europe are no better, and have implemented austerity as much as the avowed capitalist ones; and the so-called "socialist" regimes of the present are simply state-capitalist frauds. The fight against austerity will never get lasting results while the working class is hamstrung by the very organizations that speak in its name.

**\* *Class-conscious activists should form networks at workplace, schools, and communities.*** This would be an important step towards strengthening the present movement. Activists need to come together to develop organizations that take their stand on the basis of the class struggle, and are independent of the pro-capitalist union bureaucrats, the Democratic Party politicians, and the old bankrupt reformist methods of struggle. This doesn't mean boycotting the present unions, but it does mean increasing the ability of workers to fight the capitalists in defiance of the sell-out union bureaucracy. This doesn't mean standing aside from the present mass struggles, but providing them with a firmer basis and deeper roots into all sections of the working masses.

**\* *While fighting for our immediate needs, we also need to revive the goal of the overthrow of capitalism.*** The reforms we win under capitalism, no matter how essential for our present well-being and for preserving the environment, are all band-aids so long as the main means of production and the environment itself — the natural resources, the factories and workplaces, the schools and research institutions, the accumulated knowledge of the past, the reserves of manufactured goods, etc. — are owned by a minority, the capitalist owners, and used for their profit. So in this issue of *Communist Voice* we continue our coverage of the

discussion about what socialism should be, and how it differs from state-capitalism. There's an article on what's happening today in Castroist Cuba today: while the US imperialist blockade of Cuba is brutal imperialism, the Cuban government itself does not base itself on the will of the working class and is currently implementing its own market-fundamentalist privatization drive, just as market fundamentalism is going bankrupt on a world scale. We also include material from the debate in the Ukraine about the nature of the old, failed Stalinist system in the Soviet Union: an article by a Ukrainian activist, critiquing one of the main local theorists on state-capitalism, and our comment on this article.

**\* *There needs to be a reexamination of revolutionary theory.*** Even the more intelligent establishment writers are admitting, every now and then, that the world depression shows that the Marxist critique of capitalism has a lot of truth to it. But they recoil before the idea of an alternative to capitalism, denouncing it as inevitably degenerating into Stalinism. Workers must look anew into the basic causes of the present crisis; and the different alternatives that have been set forward; and the strategy and tactics of the workers movement.

Here too the capitalists and their paid scribblers aren't the only obstacle. The revolutionary movement has to transform itself. We must sum up the experience of the last century; the lessons of the collapse of former socialist attempts into state-capitalism; etc. We at *Communist Voice* say that Marxism-Leninism is the revolutionary theory of working-class struggle, but only if it's reinvigorated by opposing "revisionism". The revisionists used the words of Marxism-Leninism, but turn them on their head in order to cover up for state-capitalism abroad, and for class collaboration with the capitalists here. In this issue of *Communist Voice* we have, for example, material on why the great movement in the Middle East and North Africa against tyranny has not been greeted with open arms by much of the left, which has instead recoiled from it. Too much of the left, such as the Trotskyists and Stalinists, has used Marxism as an apology for oppressive regimes, rather than an ideology of struggle against them. Meanwhile the anarchists, while claiming to be against all regimes, repressive or not, are just as mystified by the Arab Spring.

There are no quick solutions to the present world crisis, no easy message of cheer. The world depression is causing massive misery, and it's going to get worse. We don't put forward a panacea; we don't pretend that a simple technical cure will make the depression go away. Instead we point to the path of struggle, a path that workers will spontaneously be feeling their way towards as the crisis deepens. In the midst of the current pain, the working class, long suffering everywhere, will begin to rise again to fight for its own interests. The workers, here and around the world, need to develop a class-wide unity, to overcome old divisions caused by the different bourgeois trends that have gained mass influence, and to rise in support of their immediate needs. But to do this, the working class will have to revolutionize its own organizations, as well as fight the capitalists. The class struggle, which the capitalists had believed vanquished, is back. And in this struggle lies the hope for the future. □

## ***Join the October 22 march against police brutality!***

# **The fight against police brutality & the Occupy Wall Street movement: common struggle against the class rule of the rich**

(Leaflet of the Seattle Anti-Imperialist Committee)

The Seattle Anti-Imperialist Committee is not part of the October 22nd Coalition Against Police Brutality, but we certainly support its yearly marches. After all, from one generation to the next, police brutality is an everyday reality of American democracy that must be fought against. Moreover, this is for most part a hidden war in which the guard-dogs of capitalist order beat and kill sons and daughters of the working class, with African Americans, other national minorities, and immigrants singled out for special viciousness: if you're Black or Latino in New York City you're nine times more likely to be subjected to stop-and-frisk searches than if you're white; and nationally, if you're African American you're 3.8 times more likely to be killed by cops than if you're white.

The fight against police brutality and murders is therefore part of the class struggle. And like in all other working-class struggles, in order to unite their ranks to effectively wage it, the workers must pay particular attention to raising demands and coming to the aid of their most victimized and oppressed sisters and brothers. Intuitively understanding this, this is why so many young working people of all nationalities flocked to last fall and winter's protests demanding justice for the broad-daylight execution of Native American woodcarver John T. Williams by S.P.D. gunman Ian Birk. It's also why SAIC was so active in working to draw more workers and youth into that movement.

### **The police as instruments of political repression**

The everyday regime of police brutality is meant to keep the oppressed masses "in line" and intimidated. This is magnified when the masses of people begin to rise in struggle for their own interests. Then, the most basic role of the cops comes into the open for all to see: suppression of protests, strikes, rebellions, and the struggle for revolution. And this has been why the very class-conscious bourgeoisie has been for decades militarizing the police forces, supplying them with armored vehicles, helicopters, teargas launchers, flash grenades, rubber-bullet guns, etc., and training them in "crowd control." (As we saw during the "Battle of Seattle," crowd control really means attempted police-smashing of protests.) The ruling class knew that its decades of driving the masses of people economically downward while stripping them of hard-won political rights was at some point going to give rise to massive resistance, and that time is nearing.

### **Police and capitalist politicians hand-in-hand against the Occupy Wall Street movement**

The same business-owner's laws passed to drive the homeless out of sight and mind are now being used to tear down the tents of the Occupy Wall Street movement and drive it from sight. Well over one thousand protestors have been arrested nationally

for refusing to give up their camps in public spaces, as well as for such "terrible" crimes as marching on the Brooklyn Bridge.

Along with this, many people have been beaten or otherwise brutalized by the cops, especially on Wall Street itself. But these police attacks on the Occupy Wall Street movement have only helped spur the movement, and increased its popularity, including internationally.

This popularity reflects a mass realization that the rich have used the capitalist economic crisis to get richer by looting the national treasury, driving down the wages and conditions of the still-employed workers, and squeezing the poor. In this situation increasing numbers of people are angry, they want a way to fight back, they want class struggle. But those that many have looked to for leadership have betrayed their hopes.

The Democrats have shown themselves to be just as much the handmaidens of Wall Street as the Republicans. For example, Obama has given \$trillions to these financial parasites while attacking entitlements and doing nothing serious about unemployment, e.g., his new jobs bill is projected to only decrease unemployment by one-percent—over the course of several years. He's followed the same "color-blind" policies as the Republicans, which continue to worsen the conditions of African American and other national minorities. His education policy is no different than Bush's. His healthcare reform was a give-away to the insurance companies. He's driven still more migrant workers into the shadows while deporting a record one million people. He's carried even farther the Bush-Cheney policies of government secrecy, spying, and infringement on civil liberties. While we head for environmental catastrophe his environmental policy is "drill baby drill," mountain top removal for coal, and deadly nuclear power plants. He's continued imperialist aggression abroad, and is now responsible for twice as many U.S. war deaths in Afghanistan than Bush. (No one keeps count of the Afghans killed by the "gods" from overseas.)

The labor union officials, the supposed leaders of the workers, overwhelmingly told the workers to vote for Obama . . . while continuing their sell-out policy of saving or fattening the profits of the employers by forcing concessions on the workers. And they're now loyal helpers in Obama's campaign to make U.S. goods more competitive internationally by slashing wages and benefits. According to these labor traitors, the American workers should join in a suicidal competition with the workers of all countries over which contingent of the international working class is going to most starve itself: the race to the bottom.

But after the capitalist's politicians and news media were at first silent about Occupy Wall Street movement—and mayors across the country sent the police to break up encampments and mostly failed—OWS is now being flattered and cajoled by media pundits and politicians (usually Democrats) who want channel it into being a movement for mild reforms, or want to line up OWS behind various current Congressional bills, or want OWS organizers to get behind Obama (or Ron Paul) in 2012, etc. Nevertheless, OWS continues to target the center of U.S. finance

capital, Wall Street—a “street” that controls both corporate parties and dominates politics of the country, including through the mass media.

### **March on October 22!**

In response to National Public Radio’s trying to justify its initial silence about the Occupy Wall Street movement by saying it didn’t have any demands, protestors started making signs that said “We demand everything!” And that’s right, we should demand everything.

Corporate greed, racial discrimination and oppression, and police brutality and murders are among the many guaranteed

products of the capitalist system of production. But exploitation, injustice and oppression inevitably give rise to resistance struggles, with each of these struggles needing to be patiently built in its own right around its particular demands. Yet these seeming separate struggles are greatly strengthened when they fire each other up in united actions against the common class enemy. This is what will happen this Saturday at Westlake, and it will be another small step toward building a revolutionary movement that can win everything.

***Down with police brutality!***

Seattle Anti-Imperialist Committee ([www.seattleaic.org](http://www.seattleaic.org))

October 19, 2011



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## **Fight back against the anti-worker campaign!** ***USPS management declares war on postal workers, and also cuts postal service***

*(Detroit Workers’ Voice #101, September 4, 2011)*

Postal management recently sent two “White Papers” to Congress, urging them to change the law in order to squeeze postal workers. Management wants to eliminate 220,000 career jobs by 2015, slash health and retirement benefits, convert a lot of the labor force into temporary workers, and be free to violate union contracts. It also wants to stop delivering mail on Saturday, and to close thousands of post offices and hundreds of postal processing centers.

Only a few months ago, management and the APWU negotiated a contract with massive concessions. [See the following article for a discussion of this contract. – CV] Workers reluctantly approved it, being assured by the union leadership that at least it would preserve the “no layoff” clause for most present employees. Now management wants Congress to let them rip up the “no layoff” clauses and other guarantees from the contracts with all postal unions.

Postmaster General Donahoe and crew have shown they are backstabbing liars. They said that jobs will be saved if workers accepted concessions. But capitalist sharks that they are, obtaining concessions has encouraged them to cut jobs, the same way that sharks are encouraged by blood in the water.

Postal workers, we must resist this onslaught! There needs to be mass protests demanding justice for postal workers and the maintenance of postal service. There must be no illusion that management is working with us to preserve the post office. Nor are the politicians on our side. The only difference between the Tea Party and the Democrats is how far to squeeze us. We need to be prepared for struggle.

### **Mass layoffs and plant closings**

Management plans to get rid of many workers and to force others to become temporary workers. It boasts that it has

eliminated 212,000 career positions over the last 10 years, but it wants even deeper and faster cuts. It put forward these plans in its “Workforce Optimization” plan. Over the next four years, it intends to eliminate another 220,000 career positions: 100,000 by attrition, and 120,000 by lay-offs. The plan envisions that this will result in “a workforce by 2015 of 425,000, which includes approximately 30% lower cost, more flexible, non-career employees”.

This means not only eliminating jobs, but creating new categories of workers who do the same work for much less pay and without job security. It means converting many jobs to temporary (“non-career”) status. “Non-career” workers would presumably be either the old-type super-exploited casuals or the new PSEs (Postal Support Employees – i.e. workers who are paid so little they would need outside “support” to raise a family).

Management aims to accomplish this, not only with overwork, but also with extreme centralization. It is cutting the number of mail processing facilities from 508 to under 200. This is likely to harm service, as well as disrupt the lives of many postal workers.

### **Slashing health and retirement benefits**

The USPS’s other “White Paper” calls for slashing health and retirement benefits. Management wants to withdraw from the present federal health and retirement systems and establish its own bargain-basement system. Management promises that this would hardly affect the quality of present retirees’ health benefits, but it’s hard to take this promise seriously. Meanwhile, for present workers, management wants to move to cheaper and worse health plans, and to jack up the percent of health premiums paid by employees. New employees are to fare even worse. For example, presently PSEs don’t get any health care coverage at all

for their first year at the post office. They are treated as throw-aways, who can be replaced at will, so why bother paying for healing them?

Retirement benefits would also be cut. The post office wants to withdraw from CSRS (the Civil Service Retirement System) and FERS (the Federal Employees Retirement System) and rig up its own system. Present retirees, or those near retirement ("near" is left undefined), would supposedly see little change in benefits. Trust us, says postal management. But workers who are not near retirement age would see big benefit cuts. And new hires, even if they are career workers, would get no defined pension benefit at all. All they could do is contribute part of their wages to a 401K-type plan. But how could they do that when their wages won't be high enough to live on? New worker wages have already been slashed in the APWU contract, and similar cuts are expected for other crafts.

### **Gutting collective bargaining rights**

In order to accomplish these things, postal management wants to disregard union contracts. To start with, it wants Congress to allow it to unilaterally cancel the "no layoff" clause that currently protects career workers with over six years of seniority.

Worker rights are already limited because powerful business interests control the country. Postal workers, for example, have no right to strike. Now postal management is joining the right-wing politicians around the country who want to stifle or eliminate any collective bargaining. Indeed, Republican Congressmen Darrell Issa (Ca.) and Dennis Ross (Fl.) have introduced a bill that would undermine postal union bargaining rights. Instead, new anti-worker government panels would be created with the power to shut down postal facilities and impose, year by year, yet more cuts in worker wages and benefits.

### **Cutting service: closing thousands of post offices**

Postal management is also going to slash postal service. It already plans to close 3,700 post offices, based on the income they bring in. This means that poor, minority, and rural communities will be hit hardest. The USPS is supposed to provide universal service, but that will be a thing of the past. Low-income and minority areas will be discriminated against.

Management also wants to eliminate Saturday delivery. This will cause a lot of inconvenience, and also slow mail delivery.

Moreover, postal workers are understaffed and overworked. So when management lays off workers and pushes the remaining ones even harder, this will hurt service as well as postal workers.

### **Robbing the workers in the name of a budget crisis**

Postal management says it has no choice, because it's lost \$20 billion dollars in the last four years. But there's actually plenty of money available to avert the immediate postal crisis without attacking the workers.

For years, the post office has been robbed by various government agencies. An estimated \$50-75 billion has been overpaid

into the federal retirement system over the years. And since Congress passed the Postal Reform Act of 2006, the post office has become the only government agency required to pre-fund future retiree benefits; indeed, it is supposed to take only 10 years to fund 75 years into the future. Since then, the total of the extra payments required by the 2006 law equals the postal deficit. Thus, if income generated by the post office was merely returned to it, the postal budget crisis would be over for the time being.

But will Congress allow the post office to get its own funds back? Don't count on it. Congress sees squeezing the workers as the answer to every budget problem. True, Bill S.1010 introduced by Democratic Senator Carper (DE) would provide access to much of the robbed funds. But it also allows management to cut back to five-day delivery, thus eliminating thousands of postal workers; and it would bias collective bargaining so that postal management could win all its anti-worker demands in the future. Well, HR 1351 in the House would simply return the robbed money. That would be better. But does anyone expect it to pass the Tea Party House? If it does, it is likely to heavily amended along the lines of either Issa's HR 2309 in the House or Carper's S1010 in the Senate.

This country produces enough to pay good wages to every worker, in the private or public sector. So why isn't there any money to pay fair wages or provide good services? Well, for one thing, inequality has grown from year to year, and now CEO's make hundreds of times what a worker makes. A bonus for a single CEO can equal the year's pay of several hundred workers. Where do you think that money comes from? The way the CEO's and billionaires keep increasing their incomes, is by squeezing the workers.

What's happening is that all across the country the capitalists have been cutting jobs, wages and benefits for private and public workers alike. Once they drive down the labor costs for one section of workers, they declare employers elsewhere are paying too much. So this is a class-wide battle between employers and workers. It's in the interests of all workers, public and private, to unite to defend their wages and benefits. Maintaining (and raising) compensation for one group of workers helps lift up all workers.

### **Fight the anti-worker crusade**

Postal workers, we can't rely on those who are oppressing us! We can't rely on postal management to do the right thing if only the stolen postal funds are returned. We can't rely on the politicians: the Tea Party hates us, while the Democrats are seeking bipartisan agreement with them. They are both parties of CEOs, not workers. We need to appeal to other workers and the public, and to show that we are willing to stand up for our own rights. We need mass action! For a start, there should be national and regional demonstrations against management and Congress!

For this to take place, we will have to rely on our own initiative, not the sellout union leaderships. Look at the APWU leadership! A few months ago they touted the recent contract as a way to save jobs. They gave up \$3.8 billion dollars in concessions to postal management. They told workers to trust that management would not take advantage of contract loopholes that permit workers to be "excessed" to jobs hundreds of miles



away. They said, don't worry about contract language that permits workers to be forced into 30-hour/week jobs. And don't worry about a starting a new system of glorified casuals (PSEs). No, they had a handshake deal with management, and this deal was supposed to save jobs. And the result? Now management is asking Congress to keep the concessions, but eliminate 20% of total jobs, and have a third of the remaining jobs converted to second-class or even casual status.

The NALC leadership isn't any better. For years they have cooperated with management in lengthening letter carrier routes and cutting down the number of jobs. Thus, in their recently issued "talking points" on the budget crisis, the NALC leadership brag that "The Postal Service and its unions successfully adapted to the recession, cutting more than 110,000 jobs."

What the union leaderships call fighting, is putting resources into electing pro-management politicians that betray us. It's a farce. Sometimes they first support a politician, and then later have to denounce the same politician as the devil, as when the NALC leadership supported the bitterly anti-worker Republican Darrell Issa last year. (See the list of endorsed candidates on p. 10 of the Sept./Oct. 2010 issue of the NALC's Postal Record.) This year workers are demonstrating, and quite rightly so, against Issa and his congressional bill, HR2309.

The Republicans are usually portrayed as anti-worker, which is true, but are the Democrats much better? Obama has frozen wages for federal workers and accepted the Republican line that trillions of dollars in social programs need to be slashed. He insisted that the auto workers see their wages and benefits slashed as a condition for the auto bailout. Is he likely to treat postal workers differently from auto workers? But the same union leaders who earlier this year told us to trust in management, are now telling us not to worry: Obama will

prevent any anti-worker bill from being passed.

We need serious resistance to management plans. Yes, we should take part in any demonstrations organized by the unions against various politicians, and try to give them a militant character. But we shouldn't restrict ourselves to lobbying politicians, but prepare for serious struggle. We can begin by forming networks of rank-and-file activists at the workplaces. This can help postal workers get together to meet and decide which types of mass actions can be developed. It can help ensure that workers ourselves decide what to do, and aren't held back by the failed policies of the present leaders of the postal unions.

We can reach out to other workers, showing how our fight is part of the struggle of all workers, private sector or public. If there are public hearings on closing facilities, we should use them to spread the real story about what is going on in the postal service. Distributing leaflets that tell the truth about management and the pro-capitalist politicians can play an important role in encouraging mass resistance. And workers from different workplaces and different crafts, career and non-career, veterans and new hires, should make links, and strive to coordinate their efforts.

In 1970, rank and file workers had to wage a wildcat strike to win basic negotiating rights and respectable wages and benefits. Today postal workers face a similar challenge. We need to again have a bold struggle at the workplaces and in the streets.

***Defend our jobs, wages and benefits!***

***Defend postal services – fight station closings  
and save six-day delivery!***

***Make the capitalists sacrifice, not the workers!***

***Public and private sector workers, unite!***

***Fight back against the anti-worker campaign!*** □

***Solidarity against the sellout of new workers!***

***No to wage cuts and 30-hour flex work schedules!***

**Vote NO on the APWU contract!**

*(Detroit Workers' Voice, #99, April 5, 2011)*

The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) is one of the four major unions of postal workers, the others being the National Postal Mailhandlers Union (NPMHU), the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), and the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA). The workers in all four unions are under attack. The contract denounced in the following leaflet was ratified, but this didn't satisfy postal management, which has asked Congress to allow it to set aside the provisions in all of its contacts with postal workers. The following leaflet is part of an extended campaign which the *Detroit Workers' Voice* has been waging both to unite postal workers of all crafts in defense of their common interests, and to seek the solidarity of other workers in defense of postal workers.

The APWU leadership has agreed to a disastrous tentative contract with postal management. If passed, **future** career postal workers' standard of living would be severely slashed, 20% and more of the clerk workforce would be abused **temporary** workers, and **present** career workers would be robbed by rising health care premiums and by being forced into flex positions that Postmaster Donahue envisions as 30 hours a week. Don't let management destroy our livelihood and pit present and future workers against each other! Vote this contract down!

**No layoff clause a misleading "victory"**

In order to sell this disaster, the APWU national leadership boasts that they retained the "no layoff" clause for present employees. Management is just going to rob us while keeping us!

Though good, the no-layoff clause won't protect anyone hired in the future. And this clause has not stopped management from eliminating 170,000 jobs in recent years. Nothing in this contract will stop the job loss by attrition, automation and increasing workloads that has led to massive excessing and overwork and has turned workers' lives upside down. APWU president Cliff Guffey brags that his contract will reverse some outsourcing and bring work back in, but this work may largely go to the new temporary workers (called PSE's). And tens of thousands of clerk, carrier and mailhandler jobs will be lost if 5-day operations goes into effect, an issue which Guffey, while touting the contract, has declared he will not fight.

### **Limits on excessing a fraud**

But what about the new contract's claim to limit excessing to within 50 miles of the workplace? The contract contains a loophole big enough for a U-Haul moving van to drive through. Under the agreement, management could say it has no positions available within 50 miles. Then the agreement permits excessing past 50 miles. But management always claims to have no positions in the area; it's their constant chorus! So this limitation is a fraud.

Besides, despite the alleged current national freeze on excessing there's still a lot of outrageous excessing, and management plans a huge number of closings and consolidations nationwide. In Detroit, excessing of window clerks and others continues as bid assignments go unfilled. But Guffey advises us to trust management not to take advantage of the excessing loophole! Really, Cliff! That's right up there with the tooth fairy!

### **Wages and COLA for current workers – eaten away by inflation**

Guffey considers the wage settlement fair. Let's see. Over four and a half years, wages increase 3.5%, but the first raise of 1% doesn't arrive for a year and a half, in Nov. 2012. Inflation will outstrip that puny 1% "gain", and maybe by a lot considering rising gas, food, and health care prices. The first COLA raise won't happen until Jan. 2013, or three years since the last COLA increase. There are some other tiny wage hikes and some COLA payments backloaded to the end of the contract. But they won't make up for all the losses before that.

### **Soaring health insurance payments**

Further, health insurance payment increases will insure that our wages are sucked dry. This contract would reduce the share management pays for workers' health insurance by 1% a year, raising the employee contribution from 19 to 24%. In itself that would increase many workers' health insurance costs several hundred dollars a year. But that doesn't count the rising costs of the health insurance itself. Based on recent trends, premiums are likely to rise at least 10% a year. If today the total premium cost was \$400 per pay period, it will rise over 60%, to \$644, over five years. Today the worker pays 19% of that \$400 each paycheck, or \$76. Five years down the road the workers would pay 24% of \$644, or \$155 each payday. So a postal worker's health

insurance costs could easily double over life of the contract. In this example, health care payments taken from wages would cost workers an extra \$2,054 a year five years from now. So what sellout Guffey calls a "slight" increase of just "several" dollars a year actually is a big rip-off of wages.

### **Wage cuts for future career workers**

A particularly horrible feature of the tentative agreement is it turns new career hires into second-class career employees. Their starting wages will be considerably lower than present career employees, cut by about \$8,000 a year at Level 3 to about \$5,000 a year at Level 5 or 6. New career workers would never reach the current top pay levels. These wage losses will also reduce pension benefits which depend on wage levels. New career employees would not be covered by the no-layoff clause, which applies only to those hired by November 2010. So the APWU leadership is accepting that there should be two unequal types of career employees. And in time, as the old workforce is replaced, the whole career workforce will suffer this much lower compensation. This atrocity is so bad that even former APWU president Bill Burrus, who produced many rotten contracts himself, is forced to admit this contract should be rejected.

### **Doubling the amount of abused temporary workers**

The contract would create a new form of third-tier temporary workers similar to present casuals. Essentially the use of what are presently called casuals could double to 20% and more of the workforce in mail processing and 10% in retail, maintenance and motor vehicles. These temporary workers would be renamed Postal Support Employees (PSEs). PSEs would be allowed to exceed 20%, as the contract provides that they will do whatever out-sourced work is brought back and that these PSEs would not be counted towards the 20% limit.

The PSEs would make very low wages, between \$12 to \$14/hr. depending of the job. They, like casuals now, would be hired for 360-day tours, with no work guaranteed beyond two hours on a scheduled day. They would be subject to layoff at any time and would be dependent on the "good will" of management to re-hire them each year. They could pay union dues, but could not grieve short hours or management's failure to rehire them. Postmaster Donahue drools over using this growing army of low-tier slaves, boasting about how whatever restrictions exist on how they are scheduled are ripped away. Donahue states: "**No more restrictions around window, no restrictions around schemes, no restrictions around the time of day.**" And he adds they could work in several jobs and facilities with different hours all in the same week.

But the union claims they have made great improvements compared to previous casuals. Let's see. They say that the PSEs would get health benefits. But they only qualify if they're rehired for a second year, giving management an incentive not to rehire them but just bring in a new bunch. They would get some annual leave, but limited to 2 1/2 weeks maximum and reduced if their hours are cut. They can contribute to TSP retirement, but get no

matching funds from management and no postal pension. PSE wages would be so low they couldn't put much into the TSP. PSEs could join the union, which is nice, except for the fact that the union is allowing them to be so abused.

These often-empty benefits can't hide the fact that overall, the tentative contract allows a huge increase in the number of employees who make low wages, have almost no benefits, and endure horrible schedules and no job stability.

### **“Flexible schedules”: goodbye 8-hour days, hello 30-hour weeks**

Working over eight hours a day strains a workers health, and should be voluntary and higher-paid. The new contract undermines this. By introducing “non-traditional” flexible schedules, the tentative contract means a number of clerks (50% in major facilities) who would normally have a basic schedule of five days at 8-hours a day would now be forced to work 10, 11, or 12 hours with no overtime pay based merely on working over 8 hours. Overtime would only kick in if the set hours for the weekly schedule were exceeded.

The contract says present full-time workers could be forced into these new “flexible schedule jobs” (Non-Traditional Full-Times, or NTFTs), only if they're not less than 40 hours a week. **But actually, present full-time workers could also be forced to accept sub-40 hour weeks in order to escape continuing excessing.** Postmaster Donahue outlined his plans for us: *“The flexible regular clerk came up, and the way it works is this. If you can be a 3 to 11 clerk working 5 days a week, and your new assignment gives you an opportunity to work in maybe one office for two days, another office for three days. As a clerk you may only be working 32 or 33 hours a week as part of your schedule.”* **You want to talk about wage cuts? Going from a 40-hour week to a 30-hour week is a 25% wage cut!!**

New career and PSE employees could be assigned to any NTFT position, even if it's less than 40 hours a week. They could also be forced into jobs with split shifts. Management can change any position into an NTFT position as soon as the job becomes open. And controversies over the new flexible schedules would not be subject to the local grievance procedure.

### **Vote no! Get organized for struggle!**

This contract is a disaster for new and present employees. Having a major section of the workforce extremely underpaid

and doing the same work as current career employees would fuel disunity among postal workers, making it harder to resist management attacks. New workers should have the same level of compensation as career present workers now have. A vote against the contract would reinforce solidarity among postal workers. Under the contract, all workers would suffer financially and flex schedules would destroy more and more workers' livelihoods. Workers across the country are starting to see through this sellout contract; and for example, the Northeast Massachusetts District local has strongly called for a No vote. **Vote “no” to protect all postal workers now and in the future!**

But how can our just demands be met if the USPS is losing money? Actually, there are billions of dollars a year available if the postal income created by our labor was not robbed by unjust government raids on the postal budget. The APWU leaders know this, but by accepting massive worker concessions, they make us suffer and help let the budget-robbers off the hook. The other immediate cause of the postal budget crisis is the overall economic crisis caused by Wall St. and big business. They got trillions in bail-out money for their crimes. Postal workers have already been made to pay dearly, with 170,000 lost jobs, massive excessing, overwork, etc., but now management and the union leaders want to gouge the workers again with a sellout contract. It's time for the workers to be bailed out, not the rich! Reject this contract and fight to have the postal budget balanced in a just way!

Voting “no” and defeating the contract doesn't settle matters, however. Mediation and arbitration follow. Left to their own, management, arbitrators and the national union leaders are not likely to improve our contract much. It will be up to the rank and file to turn up the heat on them. Rank-and-file activists should form their own networks. Circulate anti-concessions leaflets, hold meetings, discuss what forms of struggle can be organized. The more we organize and protest, the more pressure will be put on management and the arbitrators to return with a better contract. Given former APWU president Burrus' opposition to the contract, there may even be certain union officials who oppose it. But given their history of betrayal, the rank and file must keep the initiative in our own hands. Workers in Wisconsin rose up when under attack and attracted great public support. Postal workers need to do the same. And whatever the outcome of this struggle, the more the rank-and-file stands up, the better suited we will be for future battles.

**Vote NO! Prepare for struggle!**



# ***No to union-busting Emergency Financial Managers! Down with austerity budgets!***

## **Fight Governor Snyder's war on the workers and poor!**

*(Detroit Workers' Voice #98, March 23, 2011)*

Republican Governor Rick Snyder and the Republican-controlled state legislature are out to make workers and the poor pay for the state budget crisis. Snyder's state budget proposal includes huge tax cuts for business to be paid for by massive cuts in education and funding for cities, concessions from state workers and teachers, and a new tax on pension income. This will increase the budget crises of cities and schools. But Snyder doesn't care. Under a new Republican-backed law, Snyder can send Emergency Financial Managers (EFMs) to abolish the elected local government or school administration and impose the EFMs' dictate. The EFMs can then carry out further budget cuts. And they have the power to end union contracts.

Thus, Snyder follows in the footsteps of Wisconsin Gov. Walker, notorious for banning collective bargaining for public workers. Michigan workers are inspired by Wisconsin, too. That's because hundreds of thousands of workers and students there took to the streets in protest. Now Michigan workers, students, retirees and others being run over by the Snyder regime are starting to stir.

Across the country, Republican and Democratic politicians are helping the capitalists shift the burden of the economic crisis onto the masses. Workers, unionized or not, employed or jobless, public sector or private sector, we must stand together in a united class struggle against the capitalist austerity program!

### **Snyder's budget: steal from the needy, give to the greedy**

Snyder claims his budget is about everyone sharing the pain. But he does not include his capitalist buddies. Businesses get a tax cut of \$1.8 billion. Personal income taxes will soar to compensate for this. A large part of this will be taxing pensions. Meanwhile, the state Earned Income Tax Credit that provided tax credits to 800,000 poor people is eliminated. Those who can least afford it are ruined, middle-income pensioners will be pinched, while the business community hits the jackpot. And Snyder's already promising the manufacturing capitalists he's looking into reducing property taxes on them in the future.

Snyder's budget treats public education like a disease to be eradicated. School administrators estimate the budget cuts for K-12 education will be about \$700 per student. This will create a new wave of budget crises for already-strapped school districts. State universities don't escape punishment. They will suffer a 15% spending cut at minimum, and more if they don't meet certain conditions.

While Snyder slashes school aid to help his business friends, he blames the teachers and school workers for the budget problems. Using this capitalist logic, he demands teachers and other

school employees take concessions. Shamefully, Snyder pretends his cutbacks are assisting students. For example, Snyder says he is encouraging universities to keep tuition increases somewhat more limited. How? He's threatening even bigger cuts in state aid to schools that raise tuition too high. Of course, by cutting state aid, Snyder really creates more pressure on school administrators to raise tuitions. So how are the schools administrators to escape the dilemma? Snyder demands they decimate their workforces by outsourcing and wage and benefit cuts, something which the administrators have already done time and again. Snyder's not out to solve the money woes for either the universities or their students, but to scapegoat campus work staffs for crimes of his pro-capitalist budget.

State aid to cities and counties will be gutted as well. Detroit alone will lose \$178 million, and hundreds of other local governments will suffer as well. Just as in education, Snyder is intent on making local budget crises worse, providing local officials with another excuse to attack city and county workers.

State workers, of course, are also being targeted by Snyder. He is demanding \$180 million in concessions, which would drive down their compensation by about \$3,200 per employee.

### **Union-busting emergency financial dictators**

Having insured that the budget crises of schools and cities grow worse, Snyder and state Republicans just passed legislation allowing them to dissolve any local government or school board they deem has financial problems and replace them with their own hand-picked Emergency Financial Managers. Replaced officials could even be banned from running for office for six years. Local officials, Republican and Democratic alike, have already been cutting services and wringing concessions from workers. Elected officials aren't ruthless enough for Snyder though. So he threatens every town and school with outright dictators to do the job. The EFMs are given an array of powers to cut back public services. They can force local government bodies and schools to merge their operations so as to cut staff and services. The new law also bans lawsuits to challenge anything they do, though once the EFM leaves, local officials can be sued for what the EFM officials did. Republican anti-government rhetoric turns out to be unelected austerity budget czars.

A special target of the EFMs are unionized public employees. The new financial dictators have the power to terminate union contracts, essentially ending workers' rights to collective bargaining. This would give the EFMs a free hand to drive down the conditions of public workers. It will also pave the way for more layoffs and contracting out of services to low-wage private companies. Snyder the Liar says he's not union-busting, he's just helping communities and schools survive. Indeed. He's teaching

the working masses to survive without education or public services or unions!

### **Are the Democrats on the workers' side?**

Snyder is one of many Republican governors who are not only for austerity measures, but for banning collective bargaining rights. Democrats cry how horrible this is. But the truth is that the Democrats too are carrying out austerity measures wherever they rule. Obama agreed to keep Bush's massive tax breaks for the rich. He froze wages for federal workers, and proposed a ten year program to slash social programs, including recent cuts to home heating assistance, WIC food vouchers and student aid. New Democratic Governors in New York and California are demanding concessions and layoffs for public employees and slashing social services. In Wisconsin, the "pro-union" Democratic legislators agree with union-buster Republican Governor Walker's concession demands against public employees.

Well, what have Michigan Democrats done? Ex-governor Granholm cut state aid to education and cities. Snyder's Democratic opponent in the governor's election, Virg Bernero, cut union worker benefits as Mayor of Lansing and boasted in the election he'd do the same as governor. Democratic mayors in Detroit have wrung concessions out of city workers for decades, and have given big tax breaks to corporations and slashed services.

Do Democrats reject emergency financial managers? No. They denounce the new Republican EMF law. But Democrats like Granholm used the old EFM law (Public Act 72) to take over Pontiac, Benton Harbor, Ecorse and the Detroit schools. The old law granted EFMs many of the same powers as the new law. EFMs were allowed to dictate budgets, implement layoffs, worker concessions and service cuts, sell off city assets, and sideline elected officials. Snyder's law is worse, but there's no justice under the old EMF law either.

### **Republicans & Democrats unite to kill Detroit public schools**

The destruction of the Detroit public school system was largely carried out by Granholm using the old emergency measures. She placed the schools under EFM Robert Bobb. Previous school administrators were corrupt, but Bobb drove the school system into the ground. Bobb raised corruption to a new level, making \$425,000 a year, including funds from school privatization foundations. And he managed to balloon the school budget deficit from \$217 million to \$327 million. Nevertheless, the new Snyder administration was thrilled to see Bobb dismantle the public schools and approved a plan devised by Bobb to close half the public schools and drive class sizes to 60.

Recently, Bobb came up with a new Republican-friendly plan under which some of the schools slated to be closed would be converted into charter schools. Bobb's new plan proposes the option of eventually converting all Detroit schools to charter schools. The right-wing *Detroit News* editorial of March 14 says this is "a direction Gov. Rick Snyder is said to be leaning towards." Charter schools are run by private firms that often employ unqualified teachers, have no track record of improving

education, and are often worse than the schools they replace. But they rarely hire union teachers and turn education into a profit-making venture, so the Republicans love them. Obama and his Education Secretary Arne Duncan promote charter schools, too. The Bobb charter school plan is backed not only by Snyder, but by the head of the Detroit school board, Anthony Adams, who was Deputy Mayor under former Democratic mayor, Kwame Kilpatrick.

While a Bobb spokesperson claimed charters don't have to hire union teachers, union teachers contend their contract says otherwise. Snyder's new emergency financial measures rescue Bobb's plan by allowing the EFM to wipe out the union contracts, thus starting the process of ridding the schools of union employees altogether. Despite all the anti-Republican noise from the Democrats, they've worked hand-in-hand with them to dismantle the Detroit schools. And this bipartisan model will no doubt now be attempted in districts all over the state.

### **Two parties of the capitalists**

The failure of the Democrats to stand up to the Republicans is not just because they are political cowards. The truth is both parties are owned and operated by the capitalists. The Wall Street sharks and big corporations have created the economic crisis. And they want the masses to bear the burden of the crisis. They want taxes on business and the rich cut with the proceeds from massive slashes to public services. They want to make private and public workers suffer huge layoffs and assaults on their wages and benefits. This is exactly what both parties are doing. The root cause of the austerity measures by Republicans and Democrats is the capitalist class and capitalism itself.

### **Lessons for the workers' movement**

Clearly, we cannot rely on the Democrats to save us from the capitalist austerity drive. They claim to be saviors of the working class and downtrodden. But in real life, they assault the workers too. True, they have not gone as far as the Republicans. But everywhere they are pushing their own variety of austerity on the masses, and telling protesters to concede to Republican concession demands. The Democrats are screaming about Republican union busting, not because they want to see workers beat back austerity, but because they believe the present union leaderships will help them sell austerity measures to the workers.

The ties between the Democratic politicians and the mainstream union leaders doesn't show that the Democrats are pro-worker, but that the union bureaucrats collaborate with the capitalists to stab the workers in the back. In Wisconsin, the main union leaders' big demand was that they be allowed to negotiate an agreement to give in to Republican demands for economic concessions. Michigan workers have seen the UAW leadership offer concessions for 30 plus years to "save jobs" while auto jobs disappeared. The public sector union leaders have offered concessions time and again. But this has only whetted the appetite of the capitalists for more concessions. Indeed, the docile attitude of the union leaders has paved the way for the Republicans to try and eliminate the unions altogether.

The fight against capitalist austerity can only be carried out by the working masses themselves. Wisconsin showed the

potential power of mobilized workers. It inspired protest in many other states. Demonstrations have started in Michigan too. Every gain of the workers' movement has been a product of powerful mass actions. Workers and activists should strive to spread these protests and coordinate them so they can grow into a powerful class struggle.

Workers must not let the actions be diverted by pro-concessions Democrats and union leaders. Networks have begun to form among those who see the need to link the fight against union-busting to the fight against the austerity measures themselves. Such networks should be encouraged everywhere. The more the struggle develops, the more workers will consider

more militant forms of action. Some Wisconsin workers were contemplating a general strike. Whether or not such actions can be organized right now, worker-activist networks should encourage such ideas.

The capitalists have had their way far too long. It's time for the workers to stand up!

***Down with Snyder and his emergency budget dictators!***

***Fight the Republican union-busters!***

***No to the bipartisan austerity budget cuts!***

***Tax the corporations and the rich!***

***Build the class struggle!***

□

## ***No to anti-union laws and budget-cutting across the country!***

# **Solidarity with the fight of Wisconsin public workers!**

*(Detroit Workers' Voice #97, March 1, 2011)*

Workers in Wisconsin have been waging a massive protest against the efforts of the new Republican state administration to essentially abolish collective bargaining rights for unions in the public sector and impose major cuts in benefits and working conditions. Like any good dictator, Governor Walker wants to impose cutbacks and concessions by banning the opposition.

Workers everywhere, public and private sector alike, are being hammered with job cuts and slashing of their wages and benefits. What we need is class solidarity against these attacks. We call on all working people to stand in solidarity with the Wisconsin public workers and workers in other states who are facing similar attacks.

### **Wisconsin workers take to the streets**

Tens of thousands of Wisconsin public sector workers and their supporters have been marching and rallying in the capitol, Madison, day after day. On February 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> their numbers swelled to 70 to 100 thousand. The state capitol building has been occupied by the workers. Private sector workers have joined in, including workers in construction, steel, auto and other industries. In many cities and towns, Wisconsin teachers for a time refused to report to work. And sympathetic students have walked out of school in solidarity. At one point, the Milwaukee school system was shut down. Schools in Madison and surrounding areas were shut down for several days and this has happened in a number of other school districts across the state. Thousands of college students from Madison and other campuses have lent spirited support as well. Solidarity rallies have taken place across the country.

### **A bill to crush the workers**

The demonstrations are targeting a Republican bill that would

yet again reduce government spending for employee health care and pensions and force workers to foot the bill. It will also ban collective bargaining.

Governor Walker has made it clear that he wants the state and city governments to have a free hand to drive down the workers whenever they feel like it. Under the anti-union bill, public sector workers would no longer be able to bargain on pensions, health care or working conditions. Any demand for wages higher than the rate of inflation would have to be approved in a public referendum. And each year the unions would have to have membership votes for recertification. Clearly, Walker and his Republican cronies hope that banning the unions from doing anything will eventually lead to workers abandoning unions.

Meanwhile, Walker has threatened to call in the National Guard to suppress the protest. And in a prank call from someone impersonating Walker's billionaire backer, David Koch, Walker talked about sending provocateurs into the demonstrations to provide a pretext for attacking them.

While assaulting the workers, Walker is pretending to really be pro-worker. He says it's unfair for public workers to have better wages and benefits when other workers are being hit hard by the economic crisis. This is the old capitalist logic that what's "fair" is for *all* workers to be driven down to the lowest conditions. The truth is private and public workers both have long been suffering at the hands of profit-hungry corporations who have been slashing jobs, wages and benefits and the Wall Street sharks. But Walker exempts the capitalists from sacrifice. Instead, he rewards them, the real culprits, with a handsome tax cut of \$140 million.

By essentially making normal union activities illegal, Walker has taken the capitalist drive against the workers to a new level. But the protestors are not cowering. They have seen the Egyptian masses drive out the tyrant Hosni Mubarak. And placards in the demonstrations have slogans like "Walk like an Egyptian" and

denounce “Hosni Walker.”

## **Bipartisan austerity across the country**

The battle in Wisconsin is being repeated across the country. On one side are the capitalist parties, and on the other are the workers, the poor, students and others under assault. The capitalist parties want to make the workers pay for the economic and budget crises caused by the capitalists. An array of Republican governors and legislators are not only for austerity measures, but outright bans on collective bargaining for public workers in Indiana, Ohio, Tennessee and elsewhere.

The Democrats are also out to make the workers pay for the capitalist economic crisis. President Obama is leading the charge. First he agreed to Republican demands to keep Bush’s massive tax breaks for the rich. Now his recent budget proposal will cut a trillion dollars over ten years, largely in social programs, slashing the budgets for home heating assistance, food vouchers for the poor (WIC), grants for students, etc. Meanwhile Obama has imposed a two year wage freeze on federal workers. Democratic governors in New York, California and other states are cutting public sector jobs and demanding big cuts in worker benefits.

In Detroit, the public school system is being dismantled with Republicans and Democrats working hand-in-hand. Former Democratic governor Granholm placed Detroit schools under an emergency financial manager who devised a four-year plan to close half the schools and create class sizes of 60 students! New Republican governor Snyder is now implementing this. Meanwhile, he’s proposing a \$1.8 billion tax cut for big business.

Why is it that not only the Republicans, but the Democrats are running roughshod over the masses? Behind both parties lies the capitalist class. Whatever political party they prefer, all the capitalists share the drive to maximize profits. This is true whether we’re talking about the Koch brothers, the ultra-right wing billionaires who finance Republicans like Walker in Wisconsin, or the representatives of Wall Street who have been appointed by Obama to run the economy. In the face of the economic crisis, the capitalists of all stripes demand austerity for the masses, but yet more tax breaks and government bailouts for themselves.

## **A crisis rooted in capitalism**

The root cause of the economic crisis is capitalism itself. A capitalist economy is anarchic by nature. It’s production for profit where each capitalist tries to grab as much of the market as possible for themselves. Technological advances take place, but the drive for profit means that they don’t ease the burden on the workers, but increase it. Technology replaces human labor, driving unemployment. Meanwhile, the remaining workers are squeezed harder than ever, for the heavier the work burden, and the lower the wages and benefits, the higher the profit margin. Productive capacity rises along with growing exploitation of the workers, and eventually production outstrips the ability of the market to absorb it. So every capitalist boom creates the conditions for an eventual economic collapse. Capitalism cannot but give rise to crises.

Capitalism has fueled the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa, massive protests in Europe against austerity, and our struggles here. These struggles are not directly threatening capitalism. But they lead workers to think about that. Capitalism will not last forever. It can be overcome if the workers rise up, take power, and run the economy and social institutions for their own benefit.

Such a socialist vision might seem repudiated by what happened in the former Soviet Union, in China or Cuba, etc. But those societies were communist in name only. The revolutionary uprisings got rid of the old capitalists’ power, but a new type of state-capitalist order eventually developed. The workers didn’t run society. Instead, new class inequalities arose, with privileged officials and enterprise managers lording over the workers. In fact, though much of the economy was government run, the ruling officials more and more imitated the methods of market capitalism. These societies don’t discredit socialism, a society run by the workers, but the state-capitalism that took hold under a fake socialist banner.

## **Build the class struggle against austerity measures**

The capitalist austerity drive is drawing more and more workers into struggle. The outpouring of protest in Wisconsin is a sign of the anger brewing among workers everywhere. Thousands are now protesting in Indiana and Ohio against austerity budgets. Students are joining in with workers. We need to build up mass actions across the country. Strikes, walkouts, marches, rallies and other forms of protest are the order of the day.

We cannot rely on Democrats or Republicans. There are no saviors in the capitalist parties who will rescue workers from the austerity drive. As we have seen time and again, whichever capitalist party rules, the workers pay.

Neither can we rely on the present trade union leaderships. Year after year they lecture the workers to trust their fate mainly to the Democratic politicians. And instead of really fighting austerity, their main demand is they be allowed to negotiate away the gains of the workers’ past struggles.

The fight against austerity measures can only be done by the working masses themselves. This process has begun. The Wisconsin workers have inspired similar protests in other states. Let’s work to spread and coordinate the mass actions. What we need is a class struggle to beat back the capitalist offensive.

We need to develop organization among the rank-and-file workers and activists. It’s vital to establish networks among those who not only want to beat back union-busting, but also the austerity drive. The more such worker-activist groups spring up, the more the rank-and-file workers will have their own independent voice.

***Down with union busting!***

***No to the bipartisan austerity drive!***

***Social relief for the masses!***

***Tax the rich!***

***The class struggle is the way forward!***

□

# No more war in Afghanistan!

Adapted from a leaflet of the Seattle Anti-Imperialist Committee ([www.seattleaic.org](http://www.seattleaic.org)) calling on people to agitate for, and take part in, the demonstration on October 7 in Seattle against the Afghan war.

October 7 will mark the tenth anniversary of the war in Afghanistan. There will be protests in a number of cities throughout the U.S.

Ten years ago Bush used the 9-11 terrorist atrocity as the excuse for stepping up U.S. militarism in the name of a “war on terror.” In this, he was fully supported by the Democrats. Their first act was to invade weak Afghanistan on October 7, not just to exact bloody revenge on al Qaeda, but to also violently overthrow the Afghan government and replace it with their “own.” While they’d previously cared little about Afghanistan, now, deluded about their military power, they sought to dominate it as part of their geo-strategic maneuvering with Russia, China, Iran and others for domination in a region that includes oil-rich Central Asia. This was naked imperialism. And thus began a war between two reactionary forces: the Western imperialist invaders, and the fundamentalist forces of Taliban and Al Qaeda.

The U.S. and its allies militarily imposed a government of brutal Northern Alliance fundamentalists, warlords, drug lords, and other thieves upon the Afghan people. Even Washington now complains that it’s corrupt. But this doesn’t stop the perfumed politicians and generals from sending U.S. soldiers to fight and die for it anyway. Meanwhile, for the Afghan people these have been ten years of surviving the terrors of being bombed and strafed from the skies, seeing their sons being hauled off never to be seen again, and being subjected to sadistic torture, “trophy”-taking and other outrages at the hands of the U.S. and other occupiers. Tens of thousands of their fellow citizens have died at the hands of the foreign invaders as well as the fundamentalist Taliban, and the first half of this year was the deadliest six months for Afghan civilians since the war was launched!

Now, confronted with mounting opposition in Afghanistan and the United States, and huge budget deficits, Obama plans to prolong this imperialist criminality using fewer troops.

## Obama tries to put a good face on U.S. defeats

Bush left office with just over 32,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and Obama “surged” this to nearly 100,000 troops. The predictable result was that the deaths of innocent Afghans skyrocketed, as did the deaths of Taliban fighters and U.S. soldiers. (In fact, there have been 1,093 U.S. deaths in Afghanistan under Obama in less than three years vs. 575 under Bush in more than seven years.) But the Taliban only adapted its tactics by moving to other parts of the country as well as resorting to high-profile assassinations and bombings, including right in the capital, Kabul. More, after nearly ten years of fighting in one of the world’s poorest countries, the world’s most sophisticated and expensive killing machine just suffered its highest death toll yet in August.

Meanwhile, the just hatred of the everyday Afghans for the

foreign invaders has only increased, and they’ve again and again mounted protests against U.S.-NATO atrocities and occupation, often sacrificing their blood in doing so. Their opposition is so great that President Karzai himself repeatedly denounces U.S. night raids and other atrocities. Moreover, in the midst of this growing mass opposition nearly 25,000 soldiers have deserted the Afghan army in the past six months, which is more than double the desertions for the same period last year.

And if there’s anything that shows that the “mighty” U.S. government is being defeated it’s the present bargaining with the “mortal enemy” Taliban over what share of governmental power it will have in post-war Afghanistan.

So in the context of his failed escalation, on June 22 Obama told the lies “We are starting this draw-down from a position of strength” and “are meeting our goals” in announcing a glacial retreat from Afghanistan: 10,000 troops to be pulled out by the end of this year, 23,000 more by the end of next summer, and 31,000 more by the end of 2014 — which would still leave some 35,000 U.S. troops in the country. He also said that “the tide of war is receding,” something he should tell the families of the Afghans subsequently killed, as well as the families of the 66 U.S. soldiers killed in August. And Obama said that “the light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance,” when the only peace he sees would be a rotten, militarily-imposed grand alliance between the murderous Northern Alliance and Taliban to rule over the Afghan people.

This is a coldly calculated plan under which Afghanistan will remain a U.S. killing field, and still more sons and daughters of the American working class and poor will be sent to die so that the U.S. imperialists can somehow salvage a propaganda victory and save face. World bullies that they are, the imperialists dare not reveal weakness. Also, it can be recalled that the Soviet imperialists followed a 1986 Afghanistan “surge” with a two stage 1988-99 withdrawal meant to save face, while they continued to give major military and economic assistance to the regime they left behind (which is what the U.S.-NATO also plans to do). But in two-plus years that regime collapsed anyway. Obama and his advisers gamble with the lives and treasure of the working people of America and Afghanistan hoping that this time will be different.

## Solidarity with the Afghan people!

Secular and democratic Afghan activists have long said to western anti-war activists that the withdrawal of one enemy, the U.S.-NATO occupation forces, would make it easier for them to fight against their internal warlord and fundamentalist enemies: both government and Taliban. This is a hard struggle in a country where nearly 80% of the people are scattered in the countryside, where illiteracy is high and oppression brutal. (Additionally, the U.N. reports that seven million Afghans are currently experiencing food shortages due to drought, and that the number is likely to rise in the fall.) But there are some signs of hope, because the

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# The Fukushima disaster shows why we have to build the fight against all nukes

by Eric Gordon  
September 21, 2011

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While apologists for Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and nuclear power in general repeat: "This was an unprecedented natural disaster, no one could have predicted it, and no one can be held to account", the facts show otherwise.

Japan has a long history of huge quakes and tsunamis. This disaster was not only foreseeable, it was preventable, but the greedy TEPCO and General Electric, with the support of the Japanese government, placed the plant (and many others) in one of the most dangerous places on earth.

The wholly predictable twin natural disasters cut off outside power to the plant, shutting down the fuel cooling pumps. The damaged containment vessels lost water, and the fuel melted down in the very first hours or days of the disaster. Then as heat increased, reactions within the reactors led to a buildup of hydrogen which resulted in fire and explosions in the reactors.

In reactors 1 and 3 engineers vented hydrogen from the containment vessels into the buildings, which then exploded, destroying the buildings. More seriously, hydrogen buildup in reactor 2 wasn't vented in time, and the explosion occurred in the containment vessel itself, destroying it. With the three buildings trashed, the hundreds of tons of fuel stored in tanks on the roofs were scattered across the countryside.<sup>1</sup>

## Massive radiation release

Accurate estimates of radiation spewed into the environment are hard to come by, but based on measurements made on land, in the air and in the ocean, it's clear that it is significant. As a

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the quantities of spent fuel on site, see "How Much Spent Nuclear Fuel Does the Fukushima Daiichi Facility Hold?" <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=nuclear-fuel-fukushima>. Note that in addition to the spent fuel on top of the damaged buildings, there is also 1450 tons of spent fuel elsewhere on site.

result, this man-made disaster and its aftermath will reverberate for generations in sickness, cancer, mutations and death, and has already made swaths of Japan more or less permanently uninhabitable by humans. More than 80,000 nuclear refugees are living camps or shelters, or with relatives, having lost everything. Worse yet, children in the Fukushima Prefecture are suffering from fatigue, diarrhea and nosebleeds, common symptoms of radiation sickness. And even so, schoolteachers are being muzzled when they try to educate their students about the dangers they face in the dirt in their backyards.

Compare this unfolding disaster to the 1986 meltdown at Chernobyl in the Ukraine: Chernobyl contaminated 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land so that it is no longer useable by humans 25 years later.<sup>2</sup> The entire country of Japan is under 400,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and is only about 100 km wide at the point where the Fukushima plants are. Chernobyl isn't entirely predictive because wind and weather patterns are different there from those in Fukushima, and so the semi-permanent no-go zone in Japan may look quite different. Fukushima involves many times more new and spent fuel, so that the process of cooling and cleanup and entombing the reactors will be much more complex. And the Chernobyl sarcophagus is already decaying, only 25 years later. To date, TEPCO's main effort to control the situation has been to spray 5700 gallons of seawater an hour (135 thousand gallons a day, or roughly 17 million gallons total) onto the fuel. Much of this extremely radioactive water is either sloshing around in the plants, seeping into the ground water, vaporized as steam, or run off into the ocean.

TEPCO released estimates that the radiation released in just the **first week alone** is in the range of 770,000 terabecquerels, though of course they have a strong incentive to underestimate the numbers.<sup>3</sup> Radiation continues to spew forth, though, so the numbers today are likely several times higher. In August workers started reporting highly radioactive steam rising out of new cracks in the ground at the facility. Scientists guess that recent powerful aftershocks may have broken new pipes releasing water onto the fuel, but no one still knows. A full accounting of all of the radiation would include that released in the form of vaporized radioactive water, water seeped into the ground and the ocean, bits of spent fuel rods, and hot particles, which have been measured in significant quantities (in auto air filters, for example) on the west coast of the U.S. as well as in high concentrations in Tokyo.

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<sup>2</sup>For a map, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernobyl\\_Nuclear\\_Power\\_Plant\\_Exclusion\\_Zone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chernobyl_Nuclear_Power_Plant_Exclusion_Zone). See also <http://blog.thecheaproute.com/chernobyl-pripyat-town-ukraine/> and <http://blog.thecheaproute.com/exploring-chernobyl-with-google-maps/> for a better idea of the continuing human cost of the Chernobyl disaster.

<sup>3</sup>A becquerel is a measure of radiation emitted by a radioactive source, and one becquerel represents one nuclear decay per second. The figure for the first week at Fukushima is about one fifth the total radiation released by Chernobyl, or 3.7 million terabecquerels. A terabecquerel is one trillion becquerels.

The Japanese government ordered people to evacuate their homes in a 12 mile radius around the plant, and to stay inside or evacuate in an 19 mile zone (including the town of Minamisoma, population 71,000). Other communities have been evacuated beyond that zone, based on high radiation readings. The U.S. and British governments consider these zones to be too limited, and recommended their citizens stay at least 50 miles away (home to 2,000,000 residents). Fukushima City, a population of 290,000 (40 miles away from the plant), was for a time receiving .012 mSv/h, representing more than 50 times the normal background radiation. Accumulated radiation in Koriama (population 340,000) — about 35 miles from the plants— over the months since the earthquake, is up to 1.8 millisieverts, or about 12 times the normal background radiation.<sup>4</sup> Even in mid-August, at a distance of 4 kilometers from the plant, scientists detected 166 million becquerels of radioactive Iodine and 21 million becquerels of radioactive Cesium per square meter. The Iodine measurement is particularly significant because its half-life is 8 days, showing that the release of new radioactive material continues. Onsite measurements also taken in August reveal particular hot spots where readings are as high as 5 and 10 sieverts per hour. This is enough to kill someone within weeks after an hour's exposure, and is another indication of how far from "under control" the situation still is.<sup>5</sup>

Scientists studying the dose rates and predicting the effects on sea and land organisms from this new radiation in the region have found significant effects there too. As organisms most closely dependent on the ocean floor, flatfish like flounder and halibut, shellfish, crustaceans and seaweed have already received doses high enough to significantly increase their mortality. On land, birds, rodents and trees have received enough to reduce their reproductivity.

Japanese food and drinking supplies have been contaminated: radiation has been found in significant amounts in meat, vegetables, seafood, tea, milk, seaweed and water. But the Japanese government didn't take aggressive steps to keep these foods from the market because they thought it was more important to protect TEPCO from liability claims from farmers than to protect the public from contaminated food.

## **The pseudo-scientific International Nuclear Event Scale**

The big capitalist news organs placed a lot of importance on the International Nuclear Event Scale (INES), the seven-point scale for estimating the seriousness of a nuclear "event". Initially, the INES declared the Japan disaster a 5, and much was made of the fact that Chernobyl was a 7, "proving" that it was far worse. But it turned out that initial rating was a lie, as a commissioner of Japan's Nuclear Safety Commission famously admitted: they didn't rate Fukushima a 7 earlier because it "could have triggered a panicked reaction" if they had.

But more than this, the INES scale itself is highly subjective,

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<sup>4</sup>A sievert is a measure of radiation energy absorbed by a living body.

<sup>5</sup><http://news.discovery.com/earth/hot-spots-of-radiation-raise-risk-in-fukushima-110804.html>.

and is applied to suit the needs of the nuclear industry.<sup>6</sup> Its administrators claim the scale is logarithmic, yet first, it is inherently not a mathematical scale — several different things are being measured: breakdown of the redundancy of protection, loss of nuclear material, number of plant workers exposed, release of material to the environment, number of people offsite exposed, the lethality of the exposure, things which certainly cannot all be measured on the same mathematical scale.

Second, even though levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 do include a purely mathematical component — quantity of radiation released into the environment — this is still not applied scientifically. To illustrate: the earthquake magnitude scale is a true logarithmic scale, and as such there is no pre-defined top end. Each whole number — 6.0, 7.0, 8.0, 9.0 — represents ten times more energy released than the whole number below it. The main Fukushima quake was a magnitude 9.0, and of the thousands of aftershocks, several were magnitude 7.0, for example. A 9.0 quake is defined as 100 times more energy released than a 7.0 quake, and 10 times more energy than an 8.0 one. And theoretically, there is no end to this scale. A 10.0 quake would be 10 times the energy of the Fukushima 9.0 quake, and so on, though an earthquake that strong has never been measured.

However, with the pseudo-logarithmic INES scale, level 7 is defined as "release to the atmosphere of more than several tens of thousands of terabecquerels", and no event can be rated higher than this. But this greatly downplays the seriousness of the most serious nuclear disasters. For example, the Chernobyl disaster is estimated to have spewed 3.7 million terabecquerels of radiation, and on a true logarithmic scale it would have been rated a 9, rather than the 7 it was given. There has been no official estimate of the total radiation released by Fukushima, but by TEPCO's own estimate of 770,000 terabecquerels in the first week, it would already have rated a level 8 at that time, and is almost certainly at a 9 now (if the scale went that high).

Another distortion inherent in the INES scale is that it is limited to "events". Mayak is the site in Russia of two types of serious radioactive contamination. First is the Kyshtym disaster in 1957, in which an explosion resulted in the release of as much as 1.8 million terabecquerels (i.e., about half as much as Chernobyl). Later, Mayak was designated a permanent waste site, which has a routine policy of dumping radioactive liquid into the local river for the last several decades. Estimates are that the total of these two together has been 8.9 million terabecquerels, or almost two and a half times the release at Chernobyl — but since it has happened over a few decades, it isn't considered an "event".

## **TEPCO's malfeasance before, during and after**

Before this disaster, the Japanese nuclear regulatory agency regularly colluded with TEPCO in its habitual safety and regulation violations, including falsifying safety and maintenance documents. These weren't just meaningless violations of worthless regulations: in numerous incidents, these violations resulted

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<sup>6</sup>The definition of the 7 levels is contained in [http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/INES-2009\\_web.pdf](http://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/publications/PDF/INES-2009_web.pdf). The scale is described this way: "The aim in designing the scale was that the severity of an event would increase by about an order of magnitude for each increase in level on the scale (i.e. the scale is logarithmic)."

in burst pipes, radiation releases, worker injuries and deaths. Over the last 20 years at Fukushima, TEPCO rigged tests to hide cracks and radiation leaks in the reactor pressure vessels and pipes.

From the outset, TEPCO failed utterly to consider human safety or the reality of nature. No reasonable energy planning would site any nuclear plants in Japan, which is in the Ring of Fire earthquake zone, and in a region where big tsunamis are most frequent in the world.<sup>7</sup> In building the plant, TEPCO didn't even build multi-layered emergency backup systems. The backup generators for the cooling systems, required to perform the fundamental job of keeping the fuel cool in a power outage, were installed in the basement of the plants, so that once the waves breached the minimal tsunami wall it was inevitable they would be swamped and fail.

It took until April 21, five weeks after the start of the disaster, for TEPCO to announce a roadmap for initiating cleanup and protecting public safety, and even then they only did so at the direction of Japan's Prime Minister, Naoto Kan. This meant that until then they were making up the containment plans as they went along. And why was no plan written up beforehand? TEPCO management, like the BP despoilers of the Gulf of Mexico, wasn't required to have any real disaster plans. This left it helpless in the face of the double whammy of earthquake and tsunami.

In typical disregard for worker safety, TEPCO chronically ran the plant short of radiation badges for workers. Thus when the disaster struck, many of the workers had to carry on work without any idea how much radiation they were being exposed to. The company used the excuse that the badges in the plant were destroyed during the earthquake, but then why not quickly get new ones? They also sent workers to work in highly radioactive seawater in street shoes. The excuses for this ring hollow: supposedly the workers had worked there the day before when there was no water, and when they came back and saw the water, they ignored their off-the-chart badges assuming they were faulty.

More concerned about salvaging the reactors and maintaining a facade of control, TEPCO delayed dousing the exposed fuel in seawater until forced to by the government.<sup>8</sup> But once they started dumping seawater on the fuel, it took weeks to figure out that highly radioactive water was pouring out as fast as they were dumping it in. And even after they discovered plumes of radioactivity in the Pacific, TEPCO had no choice but to continue cooling the fuel the same way.<sup>9</sup> When they finally discovered

that the water was coming from cracks in the plants' containment, they attempted to seal those with concrete, polymer, sawdust and shredded newspaper, piling failure upon failure.

The point is that capitalism's willful blindness to the human and environmental costs of the *unnatural* environmental disasters it creates guided TEPCO's every move, dictated every misstep it took, and determined every piece of misinformation it delivered. The capitalist drive to maximize profits informed decisions it made decades ago: (1) to place the plants on the tsunami-prone coast; (2) to build the reactors as cheaply as possible, including doing minimal emergency planning; and ridiculously, (3) to store thousands of highly radioactive spent fuel rods *on the roof* of an active nuclear reactor! At every step, TEPCO's only concern has been to run the plant on the cheap to maximize profits. And of course these policies aren't limited to TEPCO or Japan or nuclear power. One look at the BP gulf oil disaster last summer shows the very same patterns and priorities, the priorities of capitalist organization of production: Profit, profit, uber alles!

### **Japanese government promotes nuclear power and protects TEPCO**

But TEPCO obviously isn't the only culprit here. The Japanese government continued to allow the company to operate its dozen plus plants, despite TEPCO's long history of violating the minimal government "nuclear safety" regulations. Further, the Japanese government's policy of promoting nuclear power as a significant source of the country's energy production, regardless of the environmental and human risks, is as much to blame.

The Japanese government has never treated TEPCO as the chronic criminal that it is. Instead, prior to this disaster, it levied small fines, handed out some slaps on the wrist, and allowed the company to keep operating the plants in the same criminal manner. Now, on top of this, it allows this criminal control of the cleanup operation!

### **Nuclear power is inherently too dangerous**

All the above shows that the risk inherent in nuclear power is too great when weighed against any supposed benefit. And the potential hazards that have been made real at Fukushima don't even take into account the problems endemic to normal, everyday operation of nuclear power – such as long term storage or reprocessing of spent fuel and radioactive waste. Considering just the hazards involved in normal operation of a nuke plant only sharpens the conclusion: Mining and refining nuclear fuel is a carbon-intensive operation; it leaves highly radioactive waste and poisons communities around the mines; building a plant which is immune to all natural events and human error is nearly impossible; and storing spent fuel safely for millennia is a challenge humans haven't even begun to tackle. One example of the dangers of uranium mining is the Church Rock uranium spill in 1979, in which millions of gallons of radioactive mine waste broke a dam and flowed into the nearby river, which Native

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<sup>7</sup>See <http://jenniferclaro.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/map-of-tectonic-plates-under-japan.jpg> for a detailed map of the tectonic lines under Japan.

<sup>8</sup>Even the pro-business pro-nuclear *Wall Street Journal* reports this damning point about TEPCO's anti-people priorities, although of course they say nothing about the roots of these priorities in the capitalist mode of production. See "Bid to 'Protect Assets' Slowed Reactor Fight" at [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704608504576207912642629904.html?mod=WSJ\\_hp\\_LEFTTopStories](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704608504576207912642629904.html?mod=WSJ_hp_LEFTTopStories)

<sup>9</sup>Early measurements in the ocean were above a million becquerels per liter, from Iodine 131, Cesium 137 and Cesium 134 each. This figure means that in every liter of seawater, there were a million Iodine 131 decays, a million Cesium 137 decays, and a million Cesium 134 (continued...)

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<sup>9</sup>(...continued)  
decays every second. Each decay produces destructive rays in the region of the decaying atom.

Americans used for watering their livestock.

And following close on the heels of Fukushima, reactors in Nebraska and New Mexico were threatened by record floods and record wildfires respectively – two more examples of natural forces which people can't control. Trying to harness nuclear reactions in the face of such natural forces makes nuclear power an unacceptably dangerous alternative. With all these considerations in mind, nuclear power is a no choice for energy generation, despite its boosters calling it “clean” and “green”.

### Obama and damage control for the nuke industry

Obama came into office pledging to license new nuclear reactors in the U.S., arguing that they provide “clean energy” needed to replace greenhouse-gas-producing oil, natural gas and coal. But this is a lie, because his commitments to expanding offshore drilling, expanding fracking, and opening yet more land to coal mining all show that he has no real enthusiasm for reducing greenhouse gasses. An objective analysis of nuclear energy indicates that, even regarding greenhouse gasses, it isn't clean: mining, refining, building the massive power plants with all their required redundancy, require far more fossil fuels than sources such as wind, water and solar. Touting “clean nukes” is just dressing up the rotting mess that is nuclear power. But Obama has held to his hard pro-uke line even as the worst disaster since Chernobyl (perhaps even worse than Chernobyl) has unfolded and nuclear fallout spreads over the northern hemisphere.

Immediately after the disaster, opposition to nuclear power in the U.S. was high – 64 percent opposed new plants, and 47 percent opposed them strongly. But this opposition may fade given the promotion of nuclear power and the pooh-poohing of renewable sources as a realistic alternative to greenhouse-gas-producing fossil fuels. Plus the opposition isn't consistently militant or well organized in the way it would need to be to effect policy. This leads Obama to believe he can still play the “green nukes” card without fear of too much exposure.

Obama has strong ties to three of the biggest nuclear power companies in the U.S. – General Electric (up to its elbows in the Fukushima disaster), Duke Energy and Exelon. CEOs of these companies hold positions in his administration and have pledged millions of dollars to the 2012 Democratic National Convention.<sup>10</sup> Thus in promoting the interests of industry (in this case nuclear) above and before the interests of the masses he's just doing what he's paid for. The U.S. nuclear industry has been campaigning for new subsidies and looser regulations. It is trying to rebrand itself as “green”, in an attempt to bring itself back from the near-dead state it's been in in this country since the series of disasters in past decades, and Obama is acting as its spokesperson.

Now, even as the officials have gradually admitted that Fukushima is far more serious than they initially let on, Obama is working to soften public opposition, assuring us that he is going to ask the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to review the safety of existing U.S. plants. Yet, this is nothing more than soothing

words. Is this the same NRC which candidate Obama said was “a moribund agency that needs to be revamped and has become captive of the industries that it regulates”? The same NRC which when asked how much confidence he had in it, Biden said “None, none, none”? This NRC is going to review the safety of existing nukes? Oh, good, we can all feel so much better about Obama Nukes!<sup>11</sup>

This Obama NRC is relicensing plants, such as the decrepit Oyster “Creak” Generating Station, without any serious review. This NRC is working overtime to weaken safety regulations so that old reactors can carry on despite faulty seals and cables, corroded and rusty pipes. Already, in an alarming number of U.S. reactors, corroded valves and rusted pipes, often buried in concrete and impossible to repair, are just given a pass. Because of the difficulty and expense of bringing the reactors up to the previous stronger standards, NRC finds it expedient to “pencil engineer”, or weaken the regulations. NRC staffers even complain that they're directed to relicense plants despite being in areas with high earthquake risk. Yet these are the same kind of failings which the Japanese regulators ignored in the Fukushima reactors. Even this minimal debate within the agency, and their “decisive” plan to study their previous study, led the VP of the Nuclear Energy Institute to cry: “I'd caution against reacting too much to the data”!! That is, we should listen to his opinion that the plants are safe instead of the data, which shows they're falling apart!

And it's not only the NRC. Look at the Environmental “Protection” Agency web site on nuclear energy: it's titled “Nuclear Energy | Clean Energy | US EPA” (in fact, the top of every page – nuclear, oil, coal – reads “Clean Energy”). One page features “RadTown USA”,<sup>12</sup> which you might expect to be a horror story of cancer and radiation sickness and mutations. But no, this page paints nuclear power in playskool-safe colors, in which “Radiation is natural and all around us. It can be man-made too. But it's nothing new. It is, quite simply, part of our lives.” Sure, radiation is all around us, in very tiny quantities, but this bland statement is like justifying the murder of millions through imperialist war by saying “Well, death is natural”.

Obama's EPA appears to be on a closed-door fast track to drastically raising “safe” levels of radiation by thousands and even tens of thousands of times.<sup>13</sup> Independent scientists agree that with each increase in exposure of a population, it is possible

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<sup>11</sup>The videos at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRxl2cVFTLwand> and <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0311/51576.html> show the then-candidates posturing against the NRC. Note that in the first video, Obama slips in that the NRC is among a “whole bunch of agencies that *over the last seven years* have been filled with cronies”, i.e., during the Bush years. But for a catalogue of the ways in which it is *still* “captive of the industries that it regulates” and *still* “filled with cronies”, see “U.S. Nuclear Regulators Weaken Safety Rules, Fail To Enforce Them: AP Investigation” at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/20/us-nuclear-regulators-safety-industry\\_n\\_880222.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/20/us-nuclear-regulators-safety-industry_n_880222.html).

<sup>12</sup><http://www.epa.gov/radtown/>.

<sup>13</sup>The organization Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility is working to bring to light the plan to raise these levels, and the cavalier attitude which the NRC bureaucrats are taking toward this push to relax these standards. See [http://www.peer.org/news/news\\_id.php?row\\_id=1325](http://www.peer.org/news/news_id.php?row_id=1325) for a press release on their efforts, and some links to EPA documents discussing the plan. See also <http://www.collapsenet.com/free-resources/collapsenet-public-access/item/723-fallout>.

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<sup>10</sup>For details of how he's owned by the nuke industry see <http://thenewpolitical.com/2011/04/05/us-clinging-to-nuclear-power-despite-japan-tragedy/>.

to predict with a high degree of accuracy the resulting increased mortality. In other words, each increase of “safe” levels trades life for profit.

Like at Fukushima Daiichi, the U.S. nuclear industry has the policy-by-necessity of storing spent fuel waste on site. This means that by now over 70,000 tons of spent fuel are stored in at least 77 sites around the U.S., with 2200 tons added each year, and all of it in “temporary” holding. This is highly radioactive material, which must be stored safely, protected from natural disaster. Wet storage has the problems pointed up by Fukushima – loss of coolant — while dry storage is experimental, and still subject to corrosion of the metal containers. In addition, on-site storage magnifies the problem that many nuke plants are located near population centers. Not that nukes would be safe if they were located in isolated areas, but the combination of both active fuel and decades of spent fuel makes the question of safety that much more critical. On the other hand, “permanent” storage requires a site which can be commandeered for the use – Yucca Mountain on traditional Shoshone Native American land, for example. And whatever method is used, the fuel must be kept contained and stable for tens or hundreds of thousands of years.

While other governments are at least talking about scaling back, shutting old reactors or placing a moratorium on new ones, and while Germany now generates one sixth of its energy with renewable sources, Obama insists that expanding U.S. nuclear energy beyond the current 20% of U.S. capacity remains a “vital” part of an overall “clean” energy plan. So “vital” that he’s called on Congress to triple Federal government loan guarantees for nuclear energy, to \$54 billion – meaning that the masses will be on the hook for plant bankruptcies and defaults, whether due to economic failures or nuclear disaster. This while the country is still reeling, and vital services like education and unemployment benefits are being cut left and right – due to the Feds guaranteeing the banks and financiers and auto-manufacturers to the tune of \$trillions. No amount of cash is too much to give to the billionaires, though.

## Nuke-onomics

Obama’s call for federal loan guarantees shows that nuclear energy isn’t viable without them. The extreme care that must be taken to reduce the risks inherent to mining, refining, use and disposal of radioactive fuel and byproducts, plus the redundancies and fail-safes which must be built into the reactors, make it an expensive form of energy. Despite this, the nuclear industry publishes documents purporting to prove that nuclear power is the cheapest form of energy. But to do so requires convoluted logic.

Take for example the World Nuclear Association, an advocacy group of the world nuclear industry (its members include TEPCO and nearly 200 others: energy producers, fuel mining companies, fuel processors, nuclear regulatory agencies, and pro-nuke think-tanks). Their “Economics of Nuclear Power” web page<sup>14</sup> starts by breaking down the cost of processing 1 kg of raw Uranium Dioxide into fuel rods: mining, enrichment and fabrication. But their calculation leaves out the costs of managing the spent fuel and other radioactive waste, except to say “There are other possible savings [!]. For example, if used fuel

is reprocessed and the recovered plutonium and uranium is used in mixed oxide (MOX) fuel, more energy can be extracted.” Then later in the page, they write that the costs are “rather less [!] if there is direct disposal [permanent storage] of used fuel rather than reprocessing”. So the costs are both less if fuel is reprocessed **and** less if it is disposed of in a permanent repository. No wonder nuclear energy is so cheap: each method is cheaper than the other!

The truth is that, on the one hand, reprocessing is very expensive and increases the overall energy costs. On the other, storage requires a permanent waste repository site, immune from all geologic events for tens or hundreds of thousands of years – many thousands of times longer than the life of these poison-producers. This is to them a cost savings, but to future society it’s a semi-permanent cost – long after they’re gone, the masses will be left to deal with their mess. In other words, one might with greater justification say instead that each method is more expensive than the other.

Returning to their document: “It is important to distinguish between the economics of nuclear plants already in operation and those at the planning stage. Once capital investment costs [a]re effectively ‘sunk’, existing plants operate at very low costs and are effectively ‘cash machines’.”

The TEPCO management considered their reactors cash machines, and the result was burst pipes, radiation releases, injury and death even before the March 11th earthquake. The General Electric management considered its Vermont Yankee reactor a cash machine, and the result was that it’s cooling tower collapsed due to lack of maintenance. These reactors can only be seen as “cash machines” because the owners disregard the critical need for maintenance. But nothing matters to these money grubbing crooks but “Cash!”

Further – and here is where the government guarantees are most important – the costs of even a medium-sized breakdown of the system, with radiation release, worker injuries, environmental contamination, are so high that without these guarantees, financiers wouldn’t invest in such a risky proposition. Only when the government commits the masses to shoulder the risk are nuke plants economically viable. That’s the real “cash machine” here.

## New plants versus old nukes

In an environment where regulatory agencies are rewriting their regulations to guarantee that decades-old decaying plants meet lowered standards, and where reactor owners have to falsify tests to make it appear that their decaying reactors meet these lower standards, some nuclear defenders have raised the call to replace them with newer, better-designed plants. First, new plants **might** be better designed, and they **might** be built with redundant systems to protect against disastrous failure. But there is little reason to think that they will be built as robustly as is claimed, since the regulatory agencies are running so fast to weaken standards.

Second, even if they were everything they’re claimed to be, this still requires the large-scale mining, refining, transport, and fabrication of new fuel rods, and the cooling and virtually permanent storage of spent fuel rods, and these factors still make the use of nuclear power unacceptably dangerous.

Engineering may have found some ways around already-encountered hazards. For example, newer reactors are designed

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<sup>14</sup>Available at <http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf02.html>.

so that the control rods automatically “fall” into the shutdown mode when power from the outside grid is lost, like happened at Fukushima. But even after the control rods are fully inserted, the fuel needs to be both contained and actively cooled – requiring significant energy – and this can’t be counted on, as we’ve seen at Fukushima. If the grid is down, energy can be provided by backup generators, but Fukushima shows that this too is not failsafe.

Newer-design pressurized water reactors count on maintaining the entire enclosed system at 150+ times atmospheric pressure to control the reaction. But of course, maintaining that pressure through a large earthquake, or even just through the normal wear and corrosion during the several-decade normal lifespan of a reactor, raises its own problems. It also raises the stakes when there is a breach of containment and loss of coolant like we’ve seen at Fukushima, because with those plants, super-heated super-pressurized water and steam spew into (or out of) the plant.

### **The attitude of the bourgeoisie of the developed world**

A section of the ruling classes of some nations is agnostic about energy sources, as long it’s cheap, and there isn’t too much trouble with it. On the other hand, the nuclear industry and its allies around the world are powerful and well-organized. They’ve been positioning themselves for years as the answer to global warming.

The mass opposition and protests sparked by Fukushima have had apparent victories in some countries: After some stonewalling, Japanese Prime Minister Kan has questioned whether private companies should be running nuclear plants, and talked about “eventually” phasing out nuclear power. In Taiwan and Switzerland, there has been official talk of at least not relicensing the oldest, least safe plants (“What?”, you say, “They were planning on relicensing old, unsafe plants?”), even perhaps not replacing any plants when they reach the end of their lifespans. There were indications that the Chinese government might place a moratorium on new plant approvals, but the finance capitalists seem to believe differently, expecting new plants in China and India to double world uranium production, ending the uranium market slump since the Fukushima disaster.<sup>15</sup>

In the last 10 years, the German bourgeoisie has had a two-sided approach. They’ve doubled their renewable energy production to one sixth of their total use (mainly wind and biomass).<sup>16</sup> But on the other hand they are still heavily dependent on coal and other fossil fuels, and nuclear, and before Fukushima planned to license their reactors beyond their planned lifespan. In the wake of Fukushima, even conservative Prime

Minister Merkel has had to bow to pressure, and now talks of replacing nukes entirely with renewable energy and getting serious about greenhouse gas reduction.

But other governments use economic- and carbon-blackmail against the masses to avoid ending their reliance on nuclear energy. For example the Swiss government emphasizes the supposed high cost of phasing it out, and threatens that it would lead to higher greenhouse gas emissions because well, we’ll have to burn more oil! Likewise, Obama repeats that “[Nuclear] has important potential for increasing our electricity without adding carbon dioxide to the atmosphere”.

These governments talk as if their hands are tied in setting a real green energy policy on this question, and yet they promote and subsidize nuclear power as a “green” alternative to oil. But if you don’t buy that, tough luck, you’ve got to decide between that and environmental disaster due to global warming. What about devising a truly green energy policy and enforcing it through regulatory agencies independent of the industries they’re regulating? Not a chance!

### **International mass opposition**

In Japan, both TEPCO and the government have been the targets of many protests against their handling of the disaster and calling for an end to nuclear power altogether. Demands include:

- an end to TEPCO secrecy and lies;
- \* a government takeover of the cleanup;
- a return to the significantly lower radiation exposure limits in place before the disaster – which the government has raised even for children;
- financial compensation and medical care for those sickened;
- the government taking over the cleanup; and
- the replacement of all nuclear power in Japan and everywhere with renewable, green forms of energy.

Japanese farmers have been protesting the contamination of the lands and crops, and their loss of livelihood as their contaminated crops rot in the field. Japan is a country in which mass protest is relatively rare, which makes the large and growing demonstrations – 20,000 in Tokyo and more around the country recently – all the more remarkable. Polls show almost 60 percent disapprove of the government’s handling of the disaster.

Fukushima has inspired protests around the world also. In India, there’s been a movement to stop the Jaitapur plant, slated to be the world’s largest when it is completed and also sited on a fault line, and this has been given steam by the Japanese disaster. Police shot into the crowd killing one protester and injuring several others, and authorities are pressing forward with the plant despite protests. Along the border between France and Germany demonstrators called for an end to all nuclear power around the world. Hundreds of thousands have protested at nuke plants around Germany. In Spain, protesters called for the replacement of their nuclear reactors with clean energy sources. In Taiwan, thousands called for the end to construction of a plant there, and opposed the extension of the three existing plants’ lifespans. In Switzerland tens of thousands protested the use of nuclear power. Here in the U.S., Fukushima has given strength to the smaller anti-nuclear movement as well, inspiring angry denunciations of the platitudes spouted by NRC flacks during a public hearing on Indian Point, also sited near an earthquake fault.

<sup>15</sup>For a discussion of the official plans of the Chinese government regarding nuclear power see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/16/china-suspends-approval-nuclear-plants>. For the analysis of “uranium futures” see <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-05-22/uranium-recovery-seen-as-atomic-plans-from-china-to-india-offset-fukushima.html>.

<sup>16</sup>Biomass subsidies have their own problems in that they often create incentive for farmers to convert to fuel production resulting in higher food prices. Depending on how they’re structured, biofuel subsidies can also increase tree cutting.

But to overcome the vested interests in nuclear power, it isn't enough to demand that bourgeois leaders "listen to us". The masses will have to wage a militant and determined struggle, building on these struggles already going on.

## Energy and anti-people environmentalism

Some environmentalists argue that nuclear power is a necessary evil to cut back on the worse evil of CO<sub>2</sub>-emitting carbon compounds. They argue that without nuclear energy, the technology doesn't exist (and maybe never will) to meet world energy needs without devastating the environment. In other words they buy the "green nukes" line.

Others reach another conclusion: we can't meet world energy needs today because we've exceeded a supposed "carrying capacity" of the earth. So, they argue, it is likely that a significant part of the population of the earth will have to die off. This amounts to a kind of genocide by neglect – sit back, let the disaster unfold, and soon enough we'll be back within the "carrying capacity". As though they're citing baseball statistics, they dispassionately observe that increased deaths are inevitable as everyone is forced to use less energy. From their tone, one certainly doesn't get the sense they imagine themselves among those "made redundant", and their class status as bourgeois intelligentsia suggests they're probably right.<sup>17</sup>

Others are quick to add that they'd do it by reducing the birthrate, rather than "increasing the deathrate", but this is a hundred-years solution and we don't have that kind of time. Second, such advocates are often quite vague about *how* they'd reduce the birthrate: By a worldwide, China-style, enforced one child policy? By some aggressive economic policy which makes it too expensive for the poor to have more than one child while allowing the rich to have as many children as they please – a kind of market mechanism for childbirth? By death panels, denying food or other means of subsistence to anyone who has lived past their "usefulness"?

So what instead?

**Enforceable and enforced energy regulations:** In the past, various governments have regulated lead in paint and gasoline, certain bio-accumulative chemicals in pesticides, chlorofluorocarbons in propellants and coolants, industry effluents into waterways and air, and they *could* write and enforce regulations and laws to phase out and eliminate nuclear, coal, oil and gas energy industries. These are the large-scale energy industries which are having some of the most destructive effects on the environment today. Yet, rather than strengthening and broadening existing regulations, governments have been busy gutting

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<sup>17</sup>Consider for example, Paul Chefuerka, a Canadian scientist and environmentalist. In "Population The Elephant in the Room" at <http://www.paulchefurka.ca/Population.html>, he writes "While humanity has apparently not yet reached the carrying capacity of a world *with* oil, we are already in **drastic overshoot** when you consider a world *without* oil. In fact our population today is at least five times what it was before oil came on the scene, and it is still growing. If this sustaining resource were to be exhausted, our population would have no option but to decline to the level supportable by the world's lowered carrying capacity." (his emphasis) In other words, without much apparent concern, he is arguing that 80 percent of the world's population will die off in the next few years, when he predicts oil will run out.

them. Obama is right that the regulatory agencies have been captured by the industries they're supposed to regulate, but he lies when he implies that this state only exists under the Republicans. And a significant section of the bourgeoisie is wedded to the idea that any serious regulation impinging on the right of industry to make maximum profit is terribly unjust.

But the current crises also run deeper and broader than those of the past. It is true that industrial pollutants have in the past threatened species and ecosystems, while major industrial accidents such as Bhopal and Chernobyl and other human atrocities such as the use of depleted uranium weapons, or even major wars, have trashed huge swaths of land, even semi-permanently, and so forth. But we're now in a new era when we've discovered that human activity is causing global warming, and we're at the start of a crisis which threatens inundation of low-lying cities and whole nations, world food supply, and massive ecosystem collapse. Whole swaths of farmland will likely become desert, fish populations already highly stressed by commercial fishing will die off due to warming water temperatures, and large numbers of species are going extinct, unable to adapt to the changes that have already happened to their habitats.

All of this means that any solution through regulation has to run deeper and broader as well. To bring about the necessary changes, regulation will have to consider all these questions and more, and will have to use different mechanisms, mechanisms which break free of the neo-liberal religion of market measures, and which reach farther than the old model: write a law, set up a regulatory agency, hire some inspectors. These new regulations will have to involve the masses of people in policing violators, and for that to happen, they'll have to be written so they don't cost jobs, but instead secure them and create more. Only the masses of workers have an undivided interest in the elimination of destructive, polluting technologies such as nuclear and fossil fuels, and it is the masses who demanded the last generation of regulations. They'll have to be the ones to take the lead in demanding new ones.

**A switch to truly renewable energy:** More than the feel-good nostrums of the ruling class, and their words without substance, the working class is going to have to demand a switch to renewable sources: wind, water, and solar being the main practical sources already in wide use. This has to include the demand to shut down all existing nuke plants and replace them with real green sources. There have been calculations suggesting that it would be possible to meet the world's projected need even several decades down the road, assuming only that efficiency continues to improve at the current rate on existing technologies. One study would use large-scale wind farms where there's sufficient wind, solar farms where there's sufficient sun, and hydroelectric to even out ups and downs in generation capacity.<sup>18</sup>

But studies and calculations aren't enough. To make an

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<sup>18</sup>For one technocratic, apolitical discussion see "A Plan to Power 100 Percent of the Planet with Renewables" at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=a-path-to-sustainable-energy-by-2030>. They're good as far as showing that it is possible to meet the world's energy needs in a reasonably green fashion, but they fall down when it comes to projecting a realistic path to achieving this program. They appear to believe that it is simply a matter of putting forth a good idea for policy-makers to take it up.

overall renewable energy policy will require careful study of what generating technologies are best to use where, and it will require massive cooperation on a world scale, something bourgeois nations are spectacularly bad at. But the masses can demand that “their” governments adopt new energy policies. And such demands will have to include open planning and democratic decision-making. And for *that* to happen, will require extended struggle led by the workers.

***An end to anarchic production:*** Today energy policy everywhere is decided not by what production technologies produce the least effects in terms of greenhouse gasses, or use the safest plants for the workers, or release the fewest pollutants into the environment. Instead, for the most part it is decided solely by what makes the most money for owners and shareholders. Worldwide, the ruling class is wed only to those energy policies which make them maximum profit, with nuclear devastation and global warming only figuring secondarily, if at all. Therefore the working class will have to take the lead, as it is only the working class which has nothing to lose and everything to gain by a switch to policies which preserve the environment. In the end, it is only by eliminating production – including energy production

– for profit and replacing it with production planned in a democratic way by the workers to meet their own needs – that is, by replacing capitalism with socialism – that we’ll overcome these environmental and human travesties.

As long as it exists, the ruling class will have to be dragged kicking and screaming from its wanton destruction of the environment. And that will take a force strong enough to overwhelm the ruling class and its established interests: the united class of workers. And the ruling class is well organized and practiced at lying, manipulating, murdering, anything, to get what it wants and keep what it has, and it is conscious of its common interests as a class, and has class solidarity against the workers. To effectively fight them will require a force not only strong enough numerically, but also strong in understanding its common interests as a class, and united in international class solidarity.

Battles to stop the building of individual nuclear power plants, or to demand the closure of existing ones, are a place to start building that consciousness and solidarity. These battles have to include building a trend which upholds a proletarian line within these movements, a line based on the conscious and objective interests of the workers and poor. □



# The narrow limits of Al Gore's "24 hours of climate reality"

September 14-15 saw Al Gore's 24 hours of internet presentations about the reality of climate warming. These presentations dramatized the effect climate change is having on countries and people around the world.

But when it comes to solutions, Gore is as stuck in the atmosphere of denial as the market-fanatic John Boehner and the other head-in-the-sand politicians referred to in the presentations. Gore still promotes the market-based measures that have helped lead to the present threat of global climate catastrophe. He still says that capitalist corporations will do the right thing for the environment out of the motivation to make higher profits. He's still silent about the many activists who are fighting militantly to protect the environment against those business interests that he praises. And he is silent on the urgent need for extensive environmental and economic planning and regulation.

The article below, which was written in July of this year, discusses Gore's stands in the weeks leading up to the 24 hours of reality. It brings out those truths about global warming which he closes his eyes to. It is not Adam Smith and the drive for higher profits that will save the environment, but the development of a working-class environmentalism that breaks with pro-business environmentalism and instead takes part in the class struggle.

## ***"24 hours of reality" about global warming, continuing fantasy about market-based measures***

## **Al Gore and the Climate Reality Project**

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Gore created a flurry of interest when he chided President Obama in *Rolling Stone* (June 2, 2011). This, it turns out, was a warmup for his new Climate Reality Project, which was announced on July 12. Gore speaks with passion about those who deny the ongoing environmental crisis, and he titled his article "Climate of denial: Can science and truth withstand the merchants of poison?". He says that climate change is not a matter of the future: no, it is here today. He even gently reproaches Obama for inaction.

But when it comes to what to do, he still clings to market methods, rather than regulation and planning. He makes a point of praising the supposed environmental concern of the vicious wage-cutting profiteer Walmart, but says nothing about the important role of militant activists for environmental justice. He demands action, but the action he demands is supporting big business, "reward(ing) those companies that are providing leadership", and providing more support to the very reprobate, Obama, who is sitting on his hands and letting the environment deteriorate.

Worse yet, Gore chides Obama only for inaction, not for advocating harmful policies like "cap and trade", which is a

proven failure at cutting carbon emissions. Gore hides the many ways the Obama administration has actively worked with big business in ravaging the environment, whether it is backing the fraud of "clean coal", encouraging the land-destroying practice of hydraulic "fracking" for natural gas, pooh-pooing the significance of the Fukushima nuclear disaster while letting American reactors evade safety standards, or helping BP minimize its liability for the Gulf oil spill.

Al Gore's Climate Reality Project is calling for 24 hours of reality on September 14-15. Its website declares: ***"What can change in a day? Everything. On September 14, the world will focus its attention on the truth about the climate crisis. For 24 hours, we will all live in reality."*** This change is to be accomplished by ***"a new multimedia presentation created by Al Gore and delivered once per hour for 24 hours, in every time zone around the globe."*** (<http://climaterealityproject.org/the-event/>) But how much reality can he put forward when he is still in a state of denial over the failed market measures which he advocates?

### **The environmental crisis is here**

As usual, Gore is at his best in pointing out the dangers of climate change. He points to the disasters of the past 12 months: last year is tied with 2005 as the hottest year since scientific heat measurement was begun; huge floods displaced 20 million people in Pakistan, and submerged an area of Australia larger than Germany and France combined; a level of flood that is only supposed to come once every thousand years struck Gore's home

town of Nashville, Tennessee; heat and drought was so hot in Russia that fires spread; ice continues to melt at an accelerated pace, threatening faster sea-level raises than previously predicted; etc.

Gore also denounces the way that a “climate of denial” has been created in the mass media to drown out the evidence of climate change and hide the scientific consensus on global warming being a reality. He admits that “the concerns of the wealthiest individuals and corporations routinely trump the concerns of average Americans and small business.”

So his article has some useful material. It may be of use in waking up some people to the ongoing climate crisis. That’s what the 24 hours of reality in September are supposed to do, and his presentation is likely to point to the real dangers that face us. But Gore’s agitation that people should wake up and smell the coffee is accompanied by sweet lullabies to put people back to sleep. For Gore may travel around the world far from his native Tennessee, but he has never left the state of denial, and he works hand in hand with the very business elite which include the “merchants of poison”. So, when it comes to solutions, Gore’s article is an example of the type of blindness that is widespread in the establishment environmentalist organizations. And we can expect that his presentation on September 14 will be in the same vein.

### Hand-in-hand with the merchants of poison

There is more than one type of climate denial. Gore admits the environmental crisis, but clings to the failed policies that have helped bring it on. It was Clinton and Gore, as president and vice-president, who insisted that the Kyoto Protocol be based on market measures. Instead of using the regulatory methods that had been used to fight a number of other environmental problems, Clinton and Gore championed market fundamentalism, or neo-liberalism. They sought to develop artificial markets in pollution, and then hoped that Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” would result in pollution being phased out. Today Gore may denounce the “merchants of poison”, but Clinton and Gore insisted on the “cap and trade” schemes which created the poison markets in which these merchants operate. The idea was that the more societal regulation was replaced by the self-serving decisions of the “merchants of poison” the better: poison markets would supposedly result in environmental improvement, as a result of individual companies making decisions based on what was most profitable, and regulations on them would continue to be loosened or dropped.

This was the so-called “cap and trade” scheme. It hasn’t worked. But Gore simply closes his eyes to this. Instead, he continues to advocate policies that would worsen the situation.

Gore’s idea is that we all should walk hand-in-hand with big business, which he imagines would act responsibly and help reduce carbon emissions. He goes out of his way to praise business whenever he can. But what’s happened? Most capitalists are pooh-poohing the problem, and Gore just hasn’t noticed it. Oh yes, he says, *some* companies do engage in “green-washing”. But for him, the fault lies just in ideologues and some of the richest companies (except for Walmart, of course, which he adores). All it takes, in his view, is for “individuals” to “demand change in the marketplace”, and the business community will

respond.

Gore’s most radical step in his books and articles is to advocate that there should be *both* a “cap and trade” system *and* a carbon tax. (See his latest book, *Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis*, Ch 15, “The True Cost of Carbon”.) The carbon tax is another market measure designed to replace environmental regulation. It is supposed to create financial incentives for businesses to reduce carbon emissions, just as cap and trade was supposed to have done. Actually, the weight of the carbon tax would fall on the people, while most of the business world, especially big business, would pass the tax on to consumers. Workers, independent truckers, small fishermen and others couldn’t pass the tax on, but the big energy companies certainly could. So it would have the harshest effects on those with the least power to determine whether goods are produced in an environmentally proper way, and the least effect on the big businesses with the most power. For example, workers might find that driving to work had become fabulously expensive, but the carbon tax would do nothing to provide them with any alternative to driving. Moreover, this tax would turn the slogan “make the polluters pay” into a denunciation of the mass of consumers, rather than of the corporate polluters. For this and other reasons, it’s likely to be the biggest fiasco ever — making environmentalism hated among substantial sections of the masses, while failing to accomplish environmental goals. (See [www.comunistvoice.org/42cCarbonTax.html](http://www.comunistvoice.org/42cCarbonTax.html) for a more thorough discussion of the carbon tax.)

True, in this article Gore doesn’t say anything directly about the carbon “tax”; instead he talks about setting a price on carbon. But it’s just different words to describe the same thing.

### Gore at his worst

So as usual, Gore is at his worst when it comes to solutions. His basic idea is to keep doing the things that haven’t worked — cap and trade; working hand-in-hand with the corporations and giving them subsidies; keeping government small and privatized; and hiding the extent of corporate crimes.

Gore is utterly committed to introducing market principles into everything. Indeed, Gore helped “reinvent government” under the Clinton administration: this meant privatizing government functions, removing regulations, providing incentives and subsidies for business, and letting the affected industries call the shots in the regulatory agencies. This plan, carried out by both Democrats and Republicans, has led to disaster. To be more precise, it has been disaster for the environment and the working class, but profitable to many businesspeople. It has meant marking time as far as global warming; ravaging the public schools through Bush’s No Child Left Behind and Obama’s Race to the Top; relying on private insurance in Obama’s health plan, and so on. But energy companies, educational companies, insurance companies, and upper-level administrative personnel have made out like bandits.

Gore sums up his approach near the end of his article. It comes down to this: “above all, don’t give up on the political system.” By this, he means, don’t give up on the Democrats and the Obama administration. So the alpha and omega of his proposals are to accept the pro-market politicians and search for big businesses to work with. If he chides Obama for inaction, he

takes it back by suggesting that if we all get behind him and push, Obama will do the right thing.

### From the Alliance for Climate Protection to the Climate Reality Project

So in his article Gore recommended that people join an organization, namely, the Alliance for Climate Protection ([www.climateprotect.org](http://www.climateprotect.org)), which he founded in 2006 and chairs, and whose name is now being changed to the Climate Reality Project. The ACP praises the European Union's version of cap and trade, the so-called Emission Trading Scheme, which is the heart of the Kyoto Protocol, which has failed badly. But why should Gore care that's he's advocating a policy that has failed? Indeed, it's notable that the ACP's website even praises some things, like the Copenhagen Climate Summit, that Gore himself calls a failure in his article in *Rolling Stone*. The extent of these failures can be seen in that, according to both the International Energy Agency and the top UN climate official, last year, 2010, saw, not a decrease, but **a record increase** in greenhouse gas emissions. (See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/may/31/emissions-rise-un-climate-chief>, and also <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/may/29/carbon-emissions-nuclearpower>.)

Indeed, the Alliance for Climate Protection hasn't even made the mild criticisms of unnamed corporations and special interests that Gore makes in his article. Why, right and left, government and industry, everyone should just go hand-in-hand. The ACP promotes such fantasy as having the "WE Campaign" unite pro-business liberals and hard-right conservatives, minorities and racists, together in defense of the environment. The ACP website says: "Some of the most popular WE Campaign advertisements include the 'Unlikely Alliances' campaign, which paired together such seemingly polar opposites as Nancy Pelosi and Newt Gingrich and Revs. Pat Robertson and Al Sharpton." (<http://www.climateprotect.org/our-work/>)

Gore has now decided to rechristen the ACP as the Climate Reality Project. But the website for the CRP has even less information than that of the Alliance for Climate Protection. Gore does denounce "fossil fuel interests", and that's about it.

In his article, Gore writes that "To make our elected leaders take action to solve the climate crisis, we must forcefully communicate the following message: 'I care a lot about global warming; I am paying very careful attention to the way you vote and what you say about it; if you are on the wrong side, I am not only going to vote against you, I will work hard to defeat you — regardless of party. If you are on the right side, I will work hard to elect you.'" But the ACP and the CRP haven't uttered a word about Obama's record, nor that of any other politician. They fawn on the rich and powerful, and search out ways to praise them. How this is going to create pressure to do anything in favor of the environment, is Gore's little secret.

### Bring the class struggle into the environmental movement

Gore to the contrary, the establishment leaders, the corrupt politicians, and the profiteering corporations, are not "our leaders". Workers should abandon Gore's pro-business politics as usual, and so should anyone with a real concern for the environment. Of course, workers should abandon, not politics, but pro-capitalist politics. They should seek to rebuild a better politics, based on struggle against the big corporations, a politics of class struggle. They should get organized — at the workplace, in the community, and in solidarity with workers around the world — to fight the capitalist rulers of this world. They should fight against the current world austerity drive of the bourgeoisie, and they should fight about the environment too. With regard to the environmental crisis, workers should push for the things Gore is silent about:

- \* comprehensive environmental regulation, which should enforce compulsory standards on big energy and, for that matter, big business as a whole;

- \* that environmental planning should include concern for the mass livelihood: it's a conservative trickle-down fraud to believe that "green jobs" will automatically provide prosperity — instead there must be programs directly guaranteeing people's basic needs;

- \* the need to bring the class struggle into the environmental movement, rather than searching for big corporations to praise;

- \* comprehensive economic planning and regulation, which is needed both for the sake of the environment and to be able to surmount the economic crisis;

- \* the need for planning be done in a new way; that the privatization of government functions should be reversed; that the industries being regulated should be pushed out of the government bodies regulating them; that regulations should be made transparent; and that workers should be brought, as far as possible, into the process of planning, and of enforcing the planning;

- \* the need to look towards the working class, not the business world, as the bastion of environmental concern.

Gore is silent about these things, because he's still a market fundamentalist politician, albeit one that claims to be against market fundamentalism. His recommendations show the narrow limits in which establishment environmentalism is caught, and the narrow limits of the left-right, community-big business cooperation on the environmental front which is so fashionably advocated in mainstream environmentalist circles today. Gore may preach against climate denial. And yes indeed, as far as climate change, the Republicans would have us go to our doom with our eyes shut, but Gore would have us go to our doom with our eyes half-open. To survive, one should instead open one's eyes all the way, and see not just the looming disasters, but the policies needed to avoid them. □

# The sorry results of the Cancun global warming summit, the failure of climate capitalism, and the prospects of major change

A few days ago, in early November 2011, it was announced that 2010 had seen a 6% jump in carbon emissions over the previous year, with about 564 million more metric tons of carbon than 2009. This was, in absolute terms, the largest annual increase in carbon emissions ever, and it was worse than the most pessimistic scenario put forward at the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit. It was a sign of the utter failure of the climate summits organized by capitalist governments to deal with global warming.

The market methods of dealing with carbon emissions, and the complete subservience of the capitalist governments to the energy corporations and other capitalist interests that make money off destroying the environment, have made a mockery of efforts at averting the looming climactic disaster. Climate capitalism, or neo-liberalism applied to environmental reform, has proved utterly bankrupt.

There is no reason to think that 2011 will turn out to be any better. The article below shows that the measures adopted by the Cancun climate summit of December 2010 followed the same path to disaster as the previous climate summits.

The 2011 UN climate summit will be held Nov. 28 - Dec. 9 in Durban, South Africa. All signs are that it will follow the same neo-liberal path as its predecessors, and the environmental crisis will deepen. There will be debate on what is to replace the Kyoto Protocol, whose first "commitment period" is set to expire at the end of 2012, but no challenge to reliance on market methods. But serious progress on global warming will require abandoning market fundamentalism and implementing serious environmental and economic planning and regulation. Moreover, it will require the influence of the working class on this planning and regulation to ensure that it accomplishes environmental goals, that capitalists aren't able to evade it, and that it is integrated with social programs to protect the well-being of the working masses, rather than serving mainly as another way to funnel subsidies to the capitalists.

All this goes against the logic of capitalism, so that it can only be accomplished in part while capitalism exists. Moreover, world capitalism is still insisting on market fundamentalism as the world sinks deeper and deeper into a world depression. So the struggle for relief from austerity and its deepening misery, and the struggle for measures to deal with the environmental crisis, both face the need to fight the neo-liberalism of the bourgeoisie. The same bourgeoisie that is cruelly sending a whole generation of working people into destitution and desperation in order to save the banks, is also ruining the environment. If there is to be a chance for serious progress in protecting the environment, the class and environmental struggles must be linked.

The following article is based on a presentation at the *Detroit Workers' Voice* Discussion Group meeting of Jan. 2, 2011.

This morning the Reuters news agency reported that record floods are swamping northeast Australia, Queensland state, forcing thousands of people from their homes. As rivers overflowed their banks, Gordon Banks, a senior forecaster in

Australia's Bureau of Meteorology, was quoted as saying that "We have not seen water that high in recorded history here." Indeed, water may cover the town of Rockhampton 30 feet deep. Now, no one can say whether any individual catastrophe of this type is due to global warming. But what we do know is that we can expect many more events of this type in the coming years, because while this flood isn't necessarily due to global warming, many others will be.

We are already in the era where climate change is not just a danger, but a reality. The question is whether anything effective will be done to keep down the extent of this change, because it hasn't yet reached the level of total disaster. In this regard, people are looking toward the various climate summits organized each year by the UN. A year ago there was the 2009 climate summit at Copenhagen, which had the task of deciding what to do as the Kyoto Protocol ran out. And the failure of this summit was a major shock to concerned people around the world: it failed to agree on any binding goals. We discussed this failure last year in *Communist Voice* (see "Lessons from the failure of the Copenhagen climate summit", [www.communistvoice.org/44cCopenhagen.html](http://www.communistvoice.org/44cCopenhagen.html)). And today we are discussing the Cancun climate summit of last month, which again failed to achieve anything definitive.

In a moment, we'll go into the major features of this summit. But it should be borne in mind that there is more to the story than just the details of the agreements, which are often complex. The summit reflects the views of the governing bourgeoisie about what is to be done. And what happened at Copenhagen a year ago, and Cancun last month, didn't particularly alarm the bourgeoisie. It happened because the bourgeoisie is presently in a complacent mood about the environment.

For now, the basic attitude of the bourgeoisie is that disasters come and go, and there's nothing special about global warming. "Adaptation" is its present slogan: it shrugs and says "we have to learn to live with global warming, as we have lived with other problems in the past. And especially we have to learn what business opportunities are presented by it."

Thus the real story of Cancun was written even before the first session opened on November 29. The influential British magazine *The Economist* reflects the views of the market-fundamentalist bourgeoisie. Its issue of Nov. 25, 2010 carried an article entitled "Adapting to climate change/Facing the consequences/Global action is not going to stop climate change. The world needs to look harder at how to live with it."

In this way, *The Economist* shrugged its shoulders at the failure of the Kyoto Protocol to bring down carbon emissions enough to halt global warming. It doesn't ask why this has happened and how to change it. Instead it says: "adapt!"

It admits that it doesn't look like the Copenhagen summit achieved its goal of restricting future warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit). Indeed, it says that it looks like what is happening is just the "business as usual" scenario -- that nothing much has been done. Indeed, it cites the International Energy Agency saying that world temperature will

increase by 3.5 °C (6.3 °F) by the end of the century. But it shrugs this off. If business as usual is 2 °C, or 3 °C, or 4 °C, or whatever, well, just adapt to it. It doesn't use exactly these words, but the spirit is "don't be a nervous nelly – we've heard predictions of disaster before -- it's never as bad as it is said to be."

Adaptation is the present codeword of the bourgeoisie for living with global warming. And it's true that we do have to prepare for the catastrophes, such as flooding in Australia, unusually cold winters in Europe (ironically, also expected as a result of global warming), and the flooding of entire small island nations that is expected. But *The Economist* isn't really worried about anything it considers major. Well, it says that perhaps "as much as two-thirds of the total [cost of the results of climate change] cannot be offset through investment in adaptation", and it does mention that there will be some "misery". But still, it thinks it is mainly just a question of "higher prices" and "lower growth". It is thinking that minor measures will suffice to save the world, or at least the richer countries, from any major misery. After all, making money is supposedly the key to everything, and *The Economist* opines that "The best starting point for adaptation is to be rich."

So it talks about whether the dikes and barriers against flood water are high enough in various parts of the world, and says that "the Dutch can view the prospect of a rising sea level with a certain equanimity, at least for their own land", and it thinks that probably "the Thames Barrier", with some supplementary measures, will protect London. And New York could "in principle" protect itself, *The Economist* thinks, except that it's not likely to spend the necessary money. The poor countries are in more trouble, but there's always minor tinkering with finance to save them. Are poor countries going to face crop failures? Why, says *The Economist*, let's have crop insurance! It writes: "Here, as elsewhere, there is a role for insurance to transfer and spread the risks. Marshall Burke of the University of California, Berkeley, a specialist in climate impacts, argues that the best agricultural-insurance options for developing countries will pay out not when crops fail (which reduces incentives for the farmer) but when specific climatic events occur, such as rainfall of less than a set level." So the ever-so-clever financial wizards, who brought us one financial bubble after another, believe that tinkering with how insurance is paid out will be a great adaptation to global warming.

So it's just business as usual for *The Economist*. And that's how it was at Cancun. The major debates were haggling between the US, Japan, China and other countries over how to avoid agreeing to anything definite, and trying to calm down those countries who were more worried about the threat of future disaster.

It's not the bourgeoisie isn't doing anything, mind you. While part of the bourgeoisie still ridicules the idea of global warming, even pointing to this year's cold European and North American winter as an alleged refutation (and forgetting that weather extremes, and not just overall warming, were always predicted as part of global warming), and another part campaigns on global warming (a la Al Gore), they have in large part come to a sort of agreement, an agreement on climate capitalism. Certain measures will be taken, but they will all be market measures.

At the time when the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, in 1997, the bourgeoisie was a bit more worried. And it was also coming

off of an apparent success in preventing the thinning of the global ozone layer due to emissions of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). It had turned this danger back, at least temporarily, through the adoption of an international agreement called the Montreal Protocol, which regulated total emissions of CFCs. This encouraged people to think that carbon emissions would be dealt with too.

But a fateful decision was made in the negotiations leading to the Kyoto Protocol, and Al Gore and Bill Clinton were central to it. This was that carbon emissions should be dealt with, not through overall regulation and planning, but through market measures. Artificial markets should be set up in carbon emissions, and companies could buy and sell the right to burn carbon-based fuels. Instead of banning harmful production processes and mandating cleanup, companies should be allowed to decide for themselves what to do. If they wanted to clean up, fine. Otherwise, they could buy a permit to pollute, and that would be fine, too. Or they could, instead of cleaning up their production, pay for someone else to clean up production elsewhere. That was supposed to be just as good as cleaning up their own carbon emission. This was the so-called "Clean Development Mechanism" by which companies bought "carbon offsets". You could continue to pollute by "offsetting" your pollution by funding someone else to clean up. And to prove that you had funded such a project all you had to do was hire your own specialist to testify to it.

These market measures were trumpeted as far superior to regulation and planning. You may hear that the various UN climate summits argued over the reductions countries are supposed to make in carbon dioxide emissions, and that certainly sounds like regulation and planning. But the reality is different: these overall goals were to be achieved through market measures. And what happened is that these measures don't work; they don't give a sufficient reduction in carbon emissions; and sometimes they even give incentives to pollute. I won't go into the details of how this works here, as we have discussed it elsewhere and I want to get to the particular features of Cancun. But the point is that the market measures haven't worked; thus the Kyoto Protocol has not worked. And yet the whole point of the agreements at Copenhagen and Cancun is to continue them. Among the bourgeoisie, there is no serious dissent from them, only haggling over which market measures. Even the dissenters at Cancun contrasted Copenhagen and Cancun to Kyoto, thus agreeing implicitly to the continuation of the reign of market measures.

So Cancun, just like Copenhagen, didn't reconsider the path of market measures. It instead debated how far to intensify or expand them. When you hear of so many billions of dollars pledged, so many ideas about how to allegedly save forests, it's all about using the same market measures that have failed in the past.

The basic issues that arose at Cancun were as follows:

- extending market measures with respect to forests, through the expansion of the so-called REDD+ program;
- money to poorer countries, allegedly to help them reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change, but really to bribe them to shut up;
- haggling among the more powerful countries over how small a reduction in carbon emissions they could make;
- and letting the World Bank and other neo-liberal financial institutions play a major role in all this.

Let's go into this one by one.

- If you follow the UN climate summits, you'll hear a lot about REDD, which stands for "Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation". That certainly sounds good. And geez, they went even further. By the time of Copenhagen, it had been rechristened as "REDD plus", to make it even better. The "plus" emphasizes that it is supposed to stand for "sustainable forest management", "conservation", and "increasing forest carbon stocks". In typical UN-speak, it sounds really good in generalities.

But in practice, it means allowing corporations or countries the right to offset their carbon emissions by funding REDD+ activities around the world. So on one hand, this means that whatever success is achieved in preserving forests, is offset by the continuation of carbon emissions elsewhere. Moreover, it doesn't look like much success will be achieved in preserving forests. For one thing, there is actually an incentive to clear-cut forests, so they can be replanted to get carbon offset credits through REDD+. As well, a living forest can be chopped down and replaced by a mono-culture tree plantation, where only one type of tree is planted. Such monoculture plantations are bad conservation practice; their proliferation helps destroy real forests; and they are designed for the convenience of logging companies. But that's OK, as far as REDD+: mono-culture plantations count as forests. Moreover, a complicated system of other incentives is set up, which is imposed on the local indigenous population and other working people in the forest, which puts everything in the hands of financiers and corporate CEOs.

Now, maybe some REDD+ projects may be successful to this or that extent, but on the whole the result is corporatization of the forests, the spread of fraud via carbon offsets, and the replacement of planning with haggling over who gets money. The theory of the carbon offset is doubtful to begin with: one can offset burning carbon fuels in one year, by planting trees which will supposedly take up the same amount of carbon, but over a lifetime. Moreover, if these trees wither and die, or are logged, legally and illegally, then maybe another offset can be obtained to plant the trees again. It becomes hard to distinguish some of these offsets from a Bernie Madoff-type fraud. It might be argued that most of this fraud is an abuse of the carbon offset idea. And better regulation of offsets might help a bit. But first of all, such regulation would go against the whole idea of market measures to begin with, which is avoid having government regulation. And secondly, such regulation wouldn't solve the uncoordinated and anarchic feature of REDD+ projects, nor the fact that they put control of the forests into the hands of those whose only responsibility is to make a profit.

There has been a good deal of protest about REDD+ from some environmental activists, and especially from indigenous groups. But this is the forest project that Cancun determined to continue and intensify, and that its boosters boast about. It is solidly based on neo-liberal dogma in theory, and on protecting the profits of the corporations in practice.

- This brings us to another feature of Cancun. It continues the promises of Copenhagen to provide funds to the developing countries to help with reducing carbon emissions or adapting to climate change. It promises up to \$100 billion a year by 2020. Again, this may sound good: money is to be provided to help

various countries, and the amount is supposed to get larger and larger. And maybe the money will actually be provided, eventually. But like imperialist foreign aid in general, it's not so good in operation. In foreign aid, the more powerful countries devastate the poor ones, impose one-sided treaties and trade agreements, and then give back some funds, with many strings attached. And that's the way Cancun will disperse environmental money; it's pretty much the same. The main reason why the bourgeoisie of the richer countries, so loath to agree to major reductions in carbon emissions, agrees to give money, is that it allows it to bribe the other countries into submission.

It's notable that there was a lot of protest at the Copenhagen summit, and leading up to it. Groups of countries disagreed with each other; poorer countries denounced the summit for wanting to go outside the UN framework into a more unilateral style of agreements; island nations denounced the summit for such a lax goal with respect to carbon emissions that some countries could expect to be flooded out of existence in several decades; many indigenous groups denounced REDD; NGOs, indigenous groups, and environmental activists took part in non-governmental actions; and up to 100,000 people were in the streets of Copenhagen on Dec. 12, 2008. The mass protest was one of the few good things to happen at Copenhagen. But what happened in Cancun? There were protests, but only of a few thousand activists.

In part, this was because governments were bought off. Only the Bolivian government refused to be part of the consensus agreement at the end. No doubt this is partly due to severe pressure on these countries. But it's hard not to believe that a role was played by various governments reaching for the money. This indeed had already begun at Copenhagen, with splits taking place among the dissenters as various governments gave in to the lure of money. For that matter, the dissenting governments were themselves divided on goals. The views of the stronger members of the developing world, such as China, India and Brazil, already major capitalist powers in their own right, differ from those of the small island states and the poorer countries.

Meanwhile, there's no promise to help relocate the people of the countries which may be flooded out completely, such as the Maldives and various other island nations. And there's no promise to provide enough aid to, say, keep Bangladesh viable, although it's likely to have millions upon millions of flooded-out peasants. Moreover, the bourgeoisie of the richer countries will call the shots on these funds, managing them and directing them towards various corporate interests. Indeed, the richer countries will insist on dribbling the funds out, so that they constantly have to be coaxed and wheedled to give the money. No, all that these promised funds mean is the lure of cash, which is hard to believe isn't to help corrupt the bourgeois governments of the poorer countries. That's why the various governments which pooh-poo climate change will, however, promise to contribute to the present proposals for a fund.

- Cancun was also notable for the haggling among the richer and more powerful countries, such as the US, Europe, Japan, and China, to avoid ambitious targets for carbon emissions, or even to avoid compulsory targets at all. I won't go into the details here. But the fact of this haggling exposes the bourgeois mantra that wealth and capitalist development is supposed to be the key to everything good. Supposedly the bourgeoisie isn't for wealth for

its sake, not for greed, not to keep the privileged exploiters on top, oh no, but because money-making supposedly means progress in everything. If Teng Hsiao-ping famously told the Chinese that to get rich is glorious, then today the western bourgeoisie says that to get rich is to have all virtues, and *The Economist* implies that to be rich is to be able to adapt to climate change.

But when it's a matter of actually doing something for the environment, then the wealthier countries act truly impoverished. It's been several decades of market fundamentalism and supposed glorious growth. And yet, not a single one of these countries has enough money, it seems, to be able to do anything serious. They all allege that serious measures would harm their economies, and that the slightest bump to their economies would be devastating.

- Indeed, the market mechanisms and supposed environmental funds give a major role to infamous neo-liberal financial institutions that are helping to devastate the world, such as the World Bank. The World Bank talks about environmentalism, while imposing austerity and environmental devastation around the world. One example is that last year it loaned the huge energy giant Eskom \$3.75 billion to build the world's fourth-largest coal-fired power plant at Medupi in South Africa. This plant would be a huge addition to South Africa's carbon emissions, and yet Eskom might apply for carbon credits for putting it into operation, on the pretext that its version of "clean coal" might produce somewhat less carbon dioxide than other coal plants. This is the type "environmentalism" which the World Bank, the IMF, and various neo-liberal financial institutions are imposing on the world.

So that is what was going on at Cancun. It's pretty disturbing, because as the last few years tick off when there is a chance to avoid really catastrophic climate change, nothing serious is being done. But one has to look below the surface. It's often the case, just before an upheaval, that the forces of the old and outdated rally themselves for a last desperate effort to maintain themselves. They often appear most triumphant and in control in the days just before major changes are to take place.

Copenhagen and Cancun show that market fundamentalism can't solve the environmental problems, just as the ongoing world depression shows that it can only lead to misery and hunger for the masses. Problems are piling up. Soon a change will be forced, either by the need for serious measures to avoid environmental catastrophe, or by the need to deal with the human toll imposed by environmental catastrophes. This will force a switch to something more drastic. It won't be possible to deal with tens of millions of environmental refugees by setting up a market in refugee-trading. It won't be possible to deal with major devastation of the environment and local collapses of agriculture or major shortages of water by market measures -- not without the deaths of tens and tens of millions of people.

This will sooner or later give rise to something more drastic than the carbon markets and the fraud-ridden carbon offsets. Direct track will have to be taken of resources, and of the assignments of resources. Regulation and planning will be a necessity.

But such a switch won't, by itself alone, solve the problem. Regulation and planning can be used on behalf of the bourgeoisie just as privatization can be. Indeed, for a few decades after World War II, the bourgeoisie itself promoted a sort of "mixed

economy", in which a certain amount of regulation, planning, and government enterprise served the needs of capitalist profits.

Thus there will be a struggle over how regulation is carried out, who benefits from it, and who has a say in the plans. It should be borne in mind that neo-liberalism isn't simply a lack of attention to necessary social projects; instead, market fundamentalism can involve the extension of privatization and market methods, and the provision of government subsidies to private companies, under the pretext of dealing with these projects, whether education, medical care, the environment, etc. Privatization and neo-liberalism don't necessarily mean the end of a government role in this or that sphere, but the provision of huge subsidies to business; they mean converting government agencies into direct tools of this or that capitalist, just as the FDA, the agency regulating pharmaceutical companies, is now financed in part by fees for approving drugs, so that it has a vested interest in approving dangerous drugs; they mean breaking down worker protections of all types so that no one but businesspeople have any say in anything; they mean corporatizing everything. Thus the news that the government has allocated billions of dollars to various environmental programs won't necessarily mean that the disastrous days of neo-liberalism are over in general, nor that market methods have been abandoned in the field of environmental policy.

Indeed, even after events force an end to direct market fundamentalism, neo-liberalism will leave a legacy in particularly oppressive ways of the government dealing with the masses, and particularly ineffective ways of dealing with environmental protection and major climate change. We can therefore expect struggles over how regulation is carried out; over whether ensuring mass livelihood is a part of regulation; and over whether regulations are done behind the back of the people or not. Capitalism with regulation is still capitalism; and it will be some time before the masses come to socialist conclusions, to say nothing of achieving the organization and level of struggle needed to overthrow the capitalist ruling classes. So we can expect a turbulent period where, if environmental regulations are to be of any serious value, workers will have to constantly fight to ensure that they are soundly based, and are not utterly corrupted by the influence of a myriad of capitalist interests.

In this regard, let's look at the protests at Cancun. As I mentioned, there wasn't very much, compared to what happened at Copenhagen, but what did take was important. And we should pay attention to what it stood for.

The major protests revolved around the Bolivian government, and around various groups with a similar standpoint. The preparation for this was the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in April last year at Cochabamba, Bolivia. This conference set forward a "people's agreement" which denounced the present do-nothing attitude of the Copenhagen Conference and the major powers, and blamed this on capitalism. This was echoed by the President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, in his "Letter to the indigenous peoples of the world" on November 16. The statement (and the letter) pointed to the disaster that global warming, even at the 2°C level envisioned at Copenhagen, would give rise to. It denounced market mechanisms such as carbon trading; it denounced REDD; and the dictation by a group of leaders in the more powerful countries. And it demanded sharper carbon emission reductions;

concern for biodiversity; the right of people to have their needs satisfied; that developed countries should be responsible to take care of the wave of environmental migrants to come; attention to the values of the indigenous peoples; more aid from the richer countries, etc.

But it's notable that it didn't put forward any way to achieve this. Yes, it denounced capitalism and market measures for the environmental problems, but it also demanded adherence to the Kyoto Protocol, which was a climate capitalist protocol which implemented market measures. It denounced capitalism, but it itself had no idea either of socialism or what would lead to it. And this is also seen in the actions of the Bolivian government itself, which denounces capitalism while implementing so-called "Andean capitalism".

Boiled down to its concrete measures, the program of the "people's agreement" amounted to demands on the developed and richer countries to provide more aid and in a more multilateral way. The denunciation of capitalism was an appeal to the masses who suffer from the capitalist interests, and it is indeed important to constantly expose the capitalist interests devastating the environment. But the appeal regarded capitalism simply as bad policies, and put forward no picture of the basic economic and class changes needed to go beyond capitalism. It correctly linked demands for the people's welfare with environmental demands. But it had no idea concerning the need for comprehensive economic planning, nor about the struggle that will take place over the nature of regulation, nor about how capitalism will seek to continue after the downfall of neo-liberalism, nor about the needed class organization of the masses.

At present, there is a climate justice movement, of which the Cochabamba conference was part, that denounces certain of the market measures, or even "market measures" in general. But it doesn't yet have a class perspective. It doesn't even realize that the carbon tax, and not just carbon trading, is also a market measure. The development of the climate justice movement is important, but it is still only a step in the right direction.

We need to develop a working-class wing of the environmental movement. It must expose the climate capitalism, denounce the failure of the market measures, and expose corporatization at every turn. It must push for effective measures, rather than bourgeois complacency. It must demand that guaranteeing the masses' livelihood must be an integral part of environmental planning. And it must bring out the class nature of the various governments, both of the rich and of the poor countries.

A working-class environment movement should seek to link up with those other serious environmentalists, in the climate justice movement, indigenous movement, and elsewhere, who are opposed to this or that extent to the market measures promoted by establishment environmentalism. But it should do so from a class perspective. This is important not only to fight for serious measures, but to continue, after serious environmental regulation begins, the fight over what type of measures are taken. The class struggle doesn't end at the door of the environmental movement; on the contrary, the class struggle must become a focus of the environmental movement, or else there will be no serious environmental reform. □

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## ***No more war in Afghanistan!***

Continued from page 16

masses of Afghans are fed up with the U.S.-installed corruptocrats as well as the Taliban—which ruled over them for seven years and now inflicts “collateral damage” on them daily. Instead of being treated like dogs by the Karzai mafia and Taliban they want progress . . . and they look to the anti-war movements in the West to help rid them of the U.S.-NATO occupiers. It's our duty to come to their assistance.

### **Fight the enemy at home**

For ten years war contractors of all kinds have fattened their profits as the entire ruling class lusted for the wealth that expanding its empire would give it. But some 1670 mainly working-class sons and daughters have died for this rotten cause in Afghanistan, with many more thousands physically or emotionally maimed for life. Meanwhile, in the name of budget crisis, the politicians of both parties are viciously fleecing the workers and poor — with national minorities, women, the elderly and youth specially targeted, while they hand \$trillions to the financial swindlers and Pentagon. Global warming accelerates, but the politicians of both parties do worse than nothing, e.g., they fight for more extraction of fossil fuels and more nukes. And to defend themselves from mass rebellion against these outrages,

Obama has stepped up Bush's government secrecy, and the building of an American police state upon which \$80 billion was spent for spying just last year.

But this bipartisan program of war, impoverishing the people, and political reaction is causing mass anger, with increasing numbers of people learning the great lesson that both the Republicans or Democrats fight for the interests of the capitalist class, the rich, at home and abroad. History will not move forward as a result of voting for either party. The motor of history is mass struggle -- protests, street demonstrations, strikes, and rebellions -- and the building of political organization that really stands on the side of the class struggle! Mass struggle and the building of militant organization are the weapons that brought the progressive changes of the 1930s and 1960s in the U.S. And the Arab spring uprisings that have now toppled three long-entrenched tyrants are again showing the power of mass action.

After ten years of bloody wars we say that the American working class has more in common with the workers and farmers of Afghanistan than it does with the bankers, CEOs, politicians, and generals who rule this country. Let us express solidarity with our Afghan, Pakistani, and other sisters and brothers living under the guns and drone attacks of our ruling class by demonstrating October 7. Let us target imperialism as the common enemy of workers and oppressed people everywhere.

***U.S. imperialists, get out of Afghanistan now!*** □



# Solidarity with the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East

(From *Detroit Workers' Voice* #100, April 28, 2011)

North Africa and the Middle East are aflame. Mass demonstrations drove Ben Ali out of Tunisia and Mubarak from the presidency of Egypt. Protest continues in Syria despite increasingly bloody repression. Every day brings new accounts of demonstrations and protests; each day the upsurge spreads to another country: Iraq, Aden, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, Oman, etc.

No struggle has only victories. In Bahrain, the Gulf Cooperation Council of reactionary oil governments of the Persian Gulf sent in troops in order to suppress the demonstrations. In Libya, Qaddafi's dictatorship has fought back with heavy weapons and foreign mercenaries, and inflicted bloody setbacks on the movement. And the US and European imperialist powers are carrying out an air campaign against Qaddafi's air force, tanks and artillery, and they will use this intervention in an attempt to become the arbiters of the outcome in Libya. This military situation is a major obstacle to the Libyan movement. But the old Middle East is dying. It will never be the same.

## Against tyranny and free-market misery

The most notable feature is that the people are rising in anger against tyranny. The people are demanding real elections. They are against the emergency laws that last for decades on end, the banning of unions and strikes, the imprisonment of activists, and the repression by police, military, and security forces. And they are also against the corruption of the regimes, in which oil money and other revenues went to benefit a handful of cronies of the ruling regime.

But it's not just a movement against political tyranny and corruption. It's a movement against poverty, unemployment, low wages, and economic hopelessness. In some countries, unemployment rates have reached 30% or so. Millions of youth have graduated from school only to find no jobs available. And food prices have jumped, recently reaching another record level, thus compounding the misery.

This misery has been intensified by free-market reforms. Country after country, from Egypt and Iraq to Libya and Tunisia, have refashioned their economies according to the World Bank, the IMF and the free-market economists. This has resulted in vast inequality, the lowering of wages, and the destruction of government services.

Here in the US, the TV and newspapers present the problem as bad governments whose misrule have blocked the benefits of pro-business reforms. The truth is the opposite. It's these bad governments who were the motor of pro-business reforms, and it is these free-market reforms which have devastated the people. Some of the regimes which are now tottering were poster children for neo-liberal reforms. The last IMF report on Tunisia in 2010 strongly praised Ben Ali's regime for its economic

policies.<sup>1</sup> And just days before the uprising in Libya, the IMF lauded Qaddafi's regime for "enhancing the role of the private sector".<sup>2</sup>

Last year saw mass demonstrations against austerity and free-market reforms in various countries in Europe. This year we are seeing the Middle Eastern upsurge. At base, it too is an expression of growing anger at the poverty caused by pro-business market reforms.

## US imperialism backs tyrants for decades on end

Obama, and Bush before him, posed as champions of freedom. But the US government backed most of these regimes now under attack. Egypt, for example, received more US foreign aid (mostly military aid) than any other country except Israel. The US government knew that Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia were tyrants. But it backed them anyway. Indeed, it backed them because they were tyrants: this was an example of US imperialism in action.

This is no secret. If one listens to the TV commentators, the talking heads worry about how the insurgent peoples will vote. They often suggest that, for this or that country, it might be better to have a regime that follows US policy prescriptions than one which is elected.

## Egypt and the working class

If it were up to the businesspeople of the world, there wouldn't be uprisings against dictatorships. Not in Egypt, where Mubarak's regime was a lynch-pin of US foreign policy. Not in Yemen, when Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime has been a major ally of the US's supposed war on terrorism. Not even in Libya, where Qaddafi had settled his differences with Western governments and adopted pro-business policies.

So where did this upsurge come from? The media often makes it sound as if Egypt was quiet until recently. Actually, in the last several years, workers and students carried out several thousand protests and strikes, including some strikes at major factories. This took place despite repression and difficulties, and it laid the basis for the current upsurge.

There is talk of how important the internet is in these upsurges. It's asked, "was this a cell phone and twitter revolution?" But, while activists made good use of the internet, this was simply one of their tools, not the source of the uprising.

Since the fall of Mubarak in Egypt, the workers have

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<sup>1</sup>September 2010. *IMF Country Report No. 10/282*.

<sup>2</sup>"IMF Executive Board Concludes 2010 Article IV Consultation with the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya", *Public Information Notice (PIN) No. 11/23*, February 15, 2011.

continued to organize. Strikes have spread throughout the economy. The old labor federation was just a tool of the regime to prevent strikes and protests, and efforts are being made to forge new labor organizations.

## **The future of the uprising in Egypt and Tunisia**

As far as the Obama administration is concerned, the overthrow of Mubarak should have been the end of the struggle in Egypt. There should simply be minor changes in the Egyptian constitution to allow fairer presidential elections. But the same system of slightly-camouflaged army supremacy and market reforms should continue.

But the Egyptian demonstrators have declared that they are not satisfied with the army taking power. They want an end to the emergency law; the release of all arrested demonstrators; tearing up the repressive constitution, not revising it; the end to the wave of economic privatization; etc. In contrast, the army leadership has repeatedly demanded that the strikes end, while the workers have repeatedly gone on striking. And a series of confrontations have taken place between the demonstrators and the army over various demands.

So far, the army has been forced to make one concession after another, including the dismissal of various Mubarak-era officials and a promise to disband the hated state security policy. Most recently, the army has been forced to dissolve Mubarak's National Democratic Party, and to start criminal investigations of Mubarak and various of his NDP cronies.

Something similar is happening in Tunisia. When the tyrant Ben Ali fled Tunisia, this wasn't the end of the struggle, but a new phase in it. The Tunisian government tried to continue with most of Ben Ali's old officials and all his institutions. There have been demonstrations against this; there have been fights between the police and demonstrators; there is still a struggle to determine what Tunisia is going to be like.

## **The working class is the main force for freedom**

In these struggles, at first everyone seems to be united against the tyranny of the old regime. The workers are angry both at their repression and at their impoverishment. But even some capitalists are mad, because the favored capitalists get most of the benefits of market reforms. In the Egyptian events, even one of the richest capitalists in the country demanded that Mubarak get out. The real forces in the uprising were the workers and youth, but there were splits in the regime and among the capitalists.

But when the tyrant falls, then the different class interests appear more clearly. The workers want real political liberties and an end to market reforms, but the capitalists want more pro-business policies, and they want to keep the laws that restrict worker protest.

Among the workers, too, there will be divisions. The workers' and left-wing movements in North Africa and the Middle East are in crisis, just as the left-wing movement is elsewhere. There isn't agreement on how to fight the growing impoverishment. But liberation from harsh political repression will encourage, not just better unions, but workers' political organization. It will open the way to the class struggle.

So the present upsurge is but the first step in a long struggle

for freedom and economic liberation. Whatever the immediate policies of the new regimes that replace the old tyrannies, the present upsurge will eventually lead to struggle against economic oppression; against the hegemony of foreign imperialism and multinational corporations; and for the increasing organization of the working class.

## **False friends of the people**

Many forces who claim to speak in the name of the working class will be discredited. For example, the so-called "Socialist International" (SI) was on the wrong side of this upsurge. Mubarak's party was a member of this International, and so was that of the tyrant Ben Ali in Tunisia. It was only as these regimes fell that the SI hastily expelled them.

Is this because there's something wrong with "socialism"? No, the idea of replacing capitalism with a better system is an important goal. But only those who support the class struggle are real socialists.

The "Socialist" International long ago denounced Marxism and moved from supporting to opposing the class struggle. Its members are proud to join capitalist governments. One of its members, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, is the Managing Director of the arch-imperialist and free-market IMF; he may run for President of France in 2012.

When Europeans demonstrated against austerity last year, likely as not they were demonstrating against "socialist" governments, such as in Spain and Greece. This year, in the "Arab spring", the masses again find themselves at war with allies of the Socialist International.

## **The struggle in Libya and the intervention**

In Libya, Qaddafi speaks in the name of "anti-imperialism" and "socialism", but his regime has been engaged in neo-liberal restructuring. For some years now, it has been the friend of oil companies and the major Western powers. And long before that, the regime had outlawed political parties, banned trade unions independent of the government-controlled one, and established a police-state.

Qaddafi himself recognizes the similarity between his government and other repressive, pro-business governments. In January he expressed regret that Ben Ali was forced to flee Tunisia. He threatened the Tunisian people that, if they persisted in doing without their dictator, they faced "chaos with no end in sight".<sup>3</sup>

But unlike what happened in Tunisia, Qaddafi survived the mass upsurge that freed a large part of Libya, including Benghazi, the second largest city, and Misrata, the third largest city. Demonstrations in the capital, Tripoli, were met with gunfire, and the Libyan army took back one city after another. The regime was using heavy weapons -- tanks, artillery, shelling from naval vessels -- to overwhelm an opposition which had more enthusiasm than military training.

But UN Resolution 1973 was passed, authorizing outside military action to stop Gaddafi's massacres. The US, NATO, and

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<sup>3</sup>*Al Jazeera*, Jan. 17, 2011.

various Middle Eastern governments are intervening in an attempt to stop the full power of the Libyan army from bearing down on the popular movement. So just as the US and the European Union eventually abandoned Mubarak, they have now abandoned Qaddafi.

But the US, the EU, and the Arab League aren't on the side of the Libyan people. The US and European imperialist powers mainly want stability in Libya, and a steady flow of oil. They especially want the Arab and African peoples to forget their long history of brutal crimes against the people of this region. And the Arab League is composed mainly of oppressive regimes, and they want to stay in power. All these outside powers oppose Qaddafi's massacres, not out of love of freedom, but out of fear that a bloody outcome will set the region on fire. They want Libya to continue pro-market policies and pro-imperialist alliances. They and the Qaddafi regime are both reactionaries, but this fight between two reactionaries has eased the military situation for the popular uprising and stopped it from being drowned in blood.

Meanwhile the Libyan movement does not have a social program. It is composed of different class and political forces which share mainly a hatred for the years of political slavery. And the military struggle with Qaddafi is forcing the rebellion to have relations with any force that will help it. Despite all this, the victory of the uprising would open the way for the Libyan people to start to develop their own political life, while its defeat would encourage every oppressive government in the region to use harsher and harsher force against the people.

### **Solidarity with the democratic uprisings**

The heroism and initiative of the people of North Africa and the Middle East has inspired working people throughout the world. It has had its reflection in the US as well. Demonstrators

in Wisconsin against the union-busting attempts of Governor Walker have held signs saying "walk like an Egyptian". And some demonstrators in Egypt have expressed solidarity with the workers in Wisconsin. One held a banner reading "One world. One pain."

The US and other imperialist powers supported these reactionary regimes for decades; the world financial agencies loved them; and they all still cling to the reactionary Saudi monarchy. When tyrants fall, the imperialist powers want to restrict the struggle to getting rid of one tyrant, while preserving the same basic system of brutal exploitation. We must support the struggle of the working people for real freedoms and to dismantle the repressive apparatus of emergency laws and police. We must also support their struggle to obtain economic relief and to fight back against the multinational corporations and other exploiters.

Some people advocate that we must support Qaddafi because he has squabbled at one time with the US and Europe. They call this "anti-imperialism". They overlook Qaddafi's ties with world imperialism and the oil companies. They close their eyes to his suppression of the political rights of the Libyan people. The reality is that real anti-imperialism requires support of the working people in Libya, not their oppressors. We must oppose both Qaddafi and the plans of the US/NATO/Arab League to dictate Libyan affairs, and stand by the people of Libya instead.

We should not only support the working people of the Middle East and North Africa, but learn from them. We should be inspired to cast aside no-struggle union bureaucrats, just as Egyptian and Tunisian workers threw aside the do-nothing standpoint of the pro-regime unions there. Just as the insurgent masses have risen up and shaken regimes which seemed permanent, so we must rise in struggle, realizing that the American bourgeoisie isn't all-powerful, and it can be fought too. □

# **Hail the rebellions of the Arab Spring!**

Editorial of the Spring-Summer 2011 issue of *Struggle*,  
an anti-establishment literary journal oriented to the working-class struggle

by Tim Hall

The Arab Spring has amazed and inspired the oppressed people of the world. And it has struck fear into the big imperialist powers. These are the regimes that world imperialism has relied on, along with Israeli zionism, to keep the Arab masses down. Now the uprisings of the Arab working people have overthrown two local tyrants, Ben Ali of Tunisia and Mubarak of Egypt, and are tenaciously battling Saleh of Yemen, Ghadafi of Libya, Assad of Syria and the monarchist princes of Bahrain.

The victories in Tunisia and Egypt were only partial and the Arab rebellions have run up against powerful obstacles. World imperialism, led by Obama and the U.S., seized the moment when Ghadafi had almost crushed the Libyan protests to stick its greedy hand into the fray. Assad is butchering the Syrian people, civil war looms in Yemen, and Obama's friends the zionists are

shooting down Palestinians asserting their right to return at the borders of Israel. Indeed, the sanctimonious Obama even kisses the blood-drenched hand of the Bahrain monarchy as it prosecutes medical personnel for treating the protesters it has shot.

But the ordinary Arab masses, showing incredible courage, continue to fight.

The destruction of even part of the apparatus of the tyrannies that have ruled the Middle East is an important ethical and democratic advance. Only yesterday Egyptian workers could be instantly disappeared, tortured and murdered; in one sense this is their civil rights movement. But not only that. Just as, in the U.S., the civil rights movement and the Black rebellions cleared away some of the racist restrictions and oppression of the Black masses and led to a growth of workers' struggle in the auto plants of Detroit and among postal and other workers around the country,

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*Struggle* is an anti-establishment, revolutionary literary journal oriented to the working-class struggle. It reaches out to “disgruntled” workers, dissatisfied youth and all the oppressed and abused and supports their fight against the rich capitalist rulers of the U.S. and the planet. It is open to a variety of artistic and literary forms and anti-establishment views. We welcome works with artistic power which rebel against some element of the capitalist power structure or against the entire system itself.

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**Fiction:** A dream deferred

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HAITI: one year later

The child in the gutter is likely dead

My country does to thee

Wake up

and many more [by many other authors]

*Struggle’s* editor is Tim Hall, an activist and Marxist-Leninist since the 1960's. *Struggle* is a non-profit magazine, produced and distributed by the voluntary labor of a very few people. *Struggle* welcomes poems, songs, short stories, short plays, line drawings. Manuscripts will be returned if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. It pays its contributors in copies.

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so too in Tunisia and Egypt the defeat of the tyrannies has cleared some ground for the advance of the workers’ movement and for a flowering of political activism by the people. Since the 60s the Black workers in the U.S. have faced daunting setbacks, and the Arab workers, too, will face a difficult road, but the Arab Spring is creating some dramatic openings.

Mass battles against police and thugs and widespread strikes brought Mubarak down. And the downfall of his tyranny — though the army remains — has led to a ferment of ideas there, as the masses, now able to express themselves more openly, search for the way forward. Class issues will come more to the

fore in the struggle over what is to come next. Socialist groups are openly producing and distributing literature. A new union federation in Egypt is not only trying to unite the workers more closely but is advancing ideas of eliminating capitalism and replacing it with workers’ rule, that is, with socialism.

The struggles of the Egyptian and other Arab peoples has inspired struggle in many countries, sending sparks of encouragement to Greece, Spain, even to Wisconsin. They have also shown how bitter a struggle the workers must prepare for. Let us learn from these struggles and fan those sparks ! □

# Leninism and the Arab Spring

by Joseph Green

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The Arab Spring is shaking the Middle East and North Africa, but the euphoria of quick victories is fading. Some regimes are resisting change with bloody repression, while where old tyrants have fallen -- Mubarak in Egypt, Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Qaddafi in Libya -- there is a struggle over what is to come next. There is the fear that many old regimes will survive, but also the fear that market-fundamentalist regimes, or Islamist ones, or pro-imperialist ones, may replace the ones that fall.

This isn't simply some unusual problem that has arisen in the Arab world. No, this is typical of what's happened in the liberalizations of the past few decades. Generally speaking, the resulting regimes have hardly been much of a prize. Whether it was the collapse of the state-capitalist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the fall of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines to the "people's power" revolution of Corazon Aquino, or the replacement of the one-party PRI dictatorship in Mexico by the conservative PAN presidencies, the results have been disappointing. Some regimes retain most of the authoritarianism of the past; others are market-fundamentalists; and the enrichment of new bourgeois factions is universal.

Yet despite the pain, something important has changed. There was no way forward except through the removal of the old regimes. This paves the way for new struggle, struggles that will more clearly be based on the issue of class exploitation. The question before the working masses isn't whether to fight for democratic rights, but how to get organized as an independent class force in the midst of the struggle against political tyranny.

Marxism sheds light on these questions. For example, in 1905, Lenin wrote one of his major works, *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*. He stressed that democratic uprisings, even though they do not eliminate capitalist exploitation, are of vital importance to the working class. And he highlighted the class struggle that takes place inside the democratic movement, thus following the tactics set forward by Marx and Engels throughout the latter half of the 19th century and adapting them to the conditions of the Russian revolutionary movement.

It's been over a century since Lenin wrote *Two Tactics*, and

the economic and social conditions have changed all over the world. But the basic principles he set forward are still valid. They show the special role of the working class in the democratic movement while puncturing the illusion that these democratic movements would reach prosperity and socialism if only it weren't for this or that individual betrayal. The working class still has to be the most fervent fighter for democratic liberties, but it also has to develop its own independent class movement whose aims go well beyond the immediate democratic goals.

## The features of the Arab Spring

Today the "Arab Spring" is the latest of the democratic movements. The masses in one country after another have risen up to challenge old tyrannies. For decades, the regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, no matter whether they were servile client states of outside imperialism or sought to become regional power-brokers in their own right, have mainly been police states or authoritarian tyrannies. The wave of revolutions of decades past that overthrew the old colonialism and some of the local monarchies had seen an massive upsurge in the activity of the working masses, but the regimes that eventually came to power had proceeded to clamp down on the revolutionary working-class movement, the rights of various national and religious minorities, and all signs of independent political life among the masses.

The Arab Spring has challenged this. It is a movement of people who have had enough. Demonstrators have come out in the street in the face of police, troops, snipers, and mass arrests and round-ups. The democratic movement has shaken regimes which, backed up by overwhelming force, seemed untouchable only yesterday. Which regimes will survive still isn't clear. But it's clear that a new day is dawning in the Arab world.

The insurgent people have been motivated not only by hatred for political tyranny, but by the increasing poverty and inequality in the region. This economic misery has been aggravated by the market-fundamentalist or neo-liberal reforms of the last period. The waves of privatization and cutbacks have sharpened inequality, pushed down wages, and left a large section of the youth and workers unemployed and hopeless. On top of that, the recent sharp increases in food prices has brought economic distress to a boiling point.

Nevertheless, a particular feature of the present movement is that it hasn't been directed at the bourgeoisie as a class. The working class in the Arab world, as elsewhere throughout the world, faces disorganization and an ideological crisis. This is true even in Egypt, where years of courageous strikes and workplace actions, undertaken despite government bans, paved the way for the overthrow of the tyrant Mubarak. The strike wave that has followed his downfall has drawn more workers into action and is one of the most promising developments in the current situation, but it is still only a start in strengthening working-class influence on the movement. Meanwhile, throughout the Arab Spring, sections of the bourgeoisie have taken part in the movement; indeed, a certain part of the movement even advocates more

market fundamentalism as the way out for these countries, even though it is pro-market policies that have deepened the region's economic misery.

Meanwhile, despite the collapse of the old colonial empires, world imperialism has continued to oppress the Arab masses. The imperialists of East and West have propped up the dictatorships and monarchies, and they have also helped entice the local Arab bourgeoisie deeper and deeper into market fundamentalism. US imperialism still backs Israeli denial of the national rights of the Palestinian people, threatens and wages one war and military intervention after another, sends drones to carry out assassinations, and allies closely with the most reactionary Arab forces, such as the Saudi monarchy.

Yet it is a particular feature of the present movement that, even when it puts forward demands in favor of the Palestinian people, it isn't generally aimed at imperialism. Instead there are many illusions in Western imperialism especially, and influential elements in the movement advocate friendship and alliance with the big powers, and trust in the UN. This is true not just in Libya, but throughout the region. Demands may be raised against certain policies of imperialism, but the Arab Spring has not been an anti-imperialist movement.

What does this add up to? Despite mass participation and the bitterness engendered by the bloodshed, the present uprisings are not profound social revolutions, but are struggles over liberalization. And what has happened in country after country elsewhere is that some political rights are gained in liberalizations, but economic inequality has increased. Parts of the democratic movement in those countries had hoped for more profound results: in Eastern Europe, for their own idea of socialism; in Mexico, for progressive changes, and the uprooting of the entire old repressive apparatus, not for the conservatism and pro-business policies of the resulting PAN (National Action Party) presidencies; and so forth. But again and again the overall result was merely liberalization, and this is the present perspective in the Arab world as well. Indeed, it is quite possible that new governments arising out of the currents struggles may even seek strengthened neo-liberal measures.

That said, the overthrow of Arab and North African tyrannies is still an advance. Moreover, this mass uprising takes place at the start of what is likely to be a long period of world economic depression and growing environmental crisis. Whatever the movement starts at, is not necessarily what it will end as. This depends on whether the working class is able to ensure that the Arab Spring doesn't simply replace some personalities, but actually brings substantial political freedoms, and whether the working class is able to use the situation to develop its own independent class movement. This would be a radical change in the politics of the region. And, as we shall see, it is Marxist tactics that would facilitate achieving this.

## The situation at the time *Two Tactics* was written

In the opening years of the nineteenth century, the tsarist monarchy in Russia was in crisis. The masses were stirring against the semi-feudal autocratic system in Russia, while even the exploiting classes were uneasy and quarreling among themselves. 1905 would see an attempt at democratic revolution that would shake the tsarist tyranny in Russia and contribute to

the ferment among working people elsewhere, especially in Asia.

Moreover, the 1905 revolution wasn't simply aimed at the denial of political rights under tsardom. The working class had given rise to communist organization, and it fought against its lack of economic rights as well as political ones. Meanwhile the majority of the population were peasants, who were oppressed by the feudal landlords who dominated the countryside. Peasant anger was boiling over, and the struggle in the countryside for land would add weight to the working-class struggle in the cities.

Thus the possibility existed that the outcome of the democratic struggle would be a profound social revolution. This depended in large part on what happened in the countryside. Tsardom survived the 1905 revolution, although it would eventually fall to revolution in February 1917. In an attempt to prevent future peasant uprisings, the tsarist autocracy tried its own method of transforming the countryside. The Tsar's hangman, Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin, combined bloody repression with an attempt to gradually transform the semi-feudal conditions in the countryside: his policy was to bourgeoisify the landlords and enlarge the peasant bourgeoisie.

The Stolypin policy didn't succeed, and the peasants rose up in even larger numbers in 1917 than in 1905. But it wasn't inevitable that the Stolypin policy would fail. Lenin pointed out that the success of the Stolypin method of eliminating feudalism "would involve long years of violent suppression and extermination of a mass of peasants who refuse to starve to death and be expelled from their villages. History has known examples of the *success* of such a policy. It would be empty and foolish democratic phrase-mongering for us to say that the success of such a policy in Russia is 'impossible'. It is possible! But our business is to make the people see clearly at what a price such a success is won, and to fight with all our strength for another, shorter and more rapid road of capitalist agrarian development *through* a peasant revolution. A peasant revolution under the leadership of the proletariat in a capitalist country is difficult, very difficult, but it is possible, and we must fight for it."<sup>1</sup>

So, Lenin said, a Stolypin-style transformation of the countryside would eliminate the social basis for a profound democratic revolution in Russia. In this case, "Marxists who are honest with themselves" would put aside their hopes for the democratic revolution in the countryside, and "say to the masses: '... The workers call you now to join in the social revolution of the proletariat, for *after* the "solution" of the agrarian question in the Stolypin spirit *there can be no other* revolution capable of making a serious change in the economic conditions of life of the peasant masses.'<sup>2</sup>

*Two Tactics* was written on the eve of the 1905 revolution. Since the possibility existed that the peasants would rise up in revolution, it discusses what the tactics of the working class in such a situation would be; it sets forward the goal of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasants; and it even refers to the circumstances under which a democratic revolution might soon be followed by a socialist one.

But the situation in the Arab Spring is different. The

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<sup>1</sup>Lenin, *On the Beaten Track!*, April 16 (29), 1908, *Collected Works*, vol. 15, pp. 40-47, emphasis as in the original.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

countries involved already have, generally speaking, capitalist economies, and the local exploiting classes have been bourgeoisified. True, there may be significant pre-capitalist survivals, as well as one-sided economies. There are also special conditions in the countryside that must be paid attention to. But the conditions for a general peasant uprising for the redistribution of the land have faded. These are major economic differences with 1905 Russia. They undermine the basis for a profound democratic revolution, and suggest that the next profound social-economic revolution can only be the socialist revolution.

Yet at the same time, the socialist revolution is not imminent in these countries. The disorganization of the working class; the one-sided economic development; the pressure of neighboring reactionary regimes and of world imperialism; the temporary tarnishing of the idea of socialism as a result of it being used as a banner by oppressive regimes in the region and around the world; the confusion over what socialism is even among the most radical parties; and other factors all speak against an immediate socialist uprising. Instead there is going to have to be a series of intermediary struggles in which the working class gets organized, wins allies among the rest of the downtrodden population, and develops the ability to take advantage of revolutionary situations.

Does this mean that the working class should just surrender the democratic movement to the bourgeoisie because a revolutionary-democratic outcome is unlikely, while socialist revolution isn't close? Not at all! The basic tactics and Marxist class analysis set forward by *Two Tactics* still hold, although some of the perspectives concerning the democratic struggle have to be modified.

## Democracy gives rise to a new class struggle

So let's look at how Marxism analyzes the democratic struggle. To begin with, Marxism doesn't see democracy as the economic liberation of the working masses. Instead, it holds that democracy creates a situation which facilitates a direct class struggle between the workers and the capitalists. The more democratic the system, the more this struggle against the capitalists appears, not as the struggle against some clique of privileged elements, but as one against an economic class.

In Egypt, the fall of Mubarak has not resolved the problem of poverty, but instead has led to a broader and wider strike movement. It has also led to the development of a new trade union federation as well as an attempt to spread radical politics among the masses. The military government has repeatedly demanded that strikes end, while liberal figures in the democratic movement have worried about the leftward movement of working-class activists. So already, while the movement to achieve democratic rights has only made its first steps in Egypt, it has brought forward class issues. How far the Egyptian masses actually achieve rights, and how far the military, or the conservative, business-oriented leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, is able to clamp down on things, will depend largely on how widely the working-class movement spreads.

From the point of view of pure-and-simple liberalization, the working-class movement is an abuse of freedom: once the tyrant is overthrown, the liberal trend sees the mass strike movement and militant working-class action as destructive, disruptive, and utopian. From the point of view of bourgeois liberalism,

democracy should blunt class differences; from the point of view of Marxism, "the democratic revolution ... clears the ground for a new class struggle." (2.15)<sup>3</sup>

## The class nature of democracy under capitalism

This renewed class struggle stems from the class nature of democratic movements. We see, in the Arab Spring, not just working people, but the Facebook activist Wael Ghoneim, who is a Google engineer and manager; imperialist bureaucrats (like Mohammad ElBaradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Commission); and even one of the richest capitalists in Egypt, Naguib Sawiris, chairman of Orascom Telecom Holding SAW, who has founded the Free Egyptians Party. Some of these figures are, of course, simply looking to join the winning side. And the imperialist powers feign sympathy for the Arab Spring in order to retain influence in the movement and keep it within bounds. This might make it seem as if it is merely a matter of treachery or an accident that the bourgeoisie has connections with the movement. But there is more to it than this.

Marxism distinguishes between bourgeois-democratic movements, whose aims don't go beyond the bounds of what is achievable under capitalism, and the socialist movement, which aims to eliminate capitalist exploitation and build a new, non-exploiting economic system. Moreover, Marxism shows that democratic changes, while they may strike down certain sections of the exploiters, may strengthen the rule of the bourgeoisie as a class. So Lenin endorsed the words of the Third Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party that "under the present social and economic order this democratic revolution will not weaken, but strengthen the rule of the bourgeoisie, which will inevitably try, stopping at nothing, to take away from the Russian proletariat as many of the gains of the revolutionary period as possible". (1.10)

The big bourgeoisie seeks to keep democratic changes as restricted as possible. Nevertheless, even when the democratic revolution takes up radical aims, this doesn't mean that it has gone beyond capitalism. Lenin, writing about the most radical peasant demands, said: "the democratic revolution is a bourgeois revolution. The slogan of a Black Redistribution [confiscation of the landlords' land, which would then be redistributed to the peasantry—JG], or 'land and liberty'—this most widespread slogan of the peasant masses, downtrodden and ignorant, yet passionately yearning for light and happiness—is a bourgeois slogan." (13.123) "Black redistribution" would sweep away landlordism in a thorough and revolutionary fashion, but it would not be a socialist transformation: instead, it would dramatically accelerate the growth of capitalist relations in the countryside.

How could this be true in the Arab Spring? Wouldn't the overthrow of tyranny, and of those big capitalists and landlords who have worked with the tyrants and profited from their rule, weaken the bourgeoisie? But while the police-state governments ruled hand-in-hand with certain privileged capitalists, were their political representatives, and showered a rain of gold on them, they held back other capitalists and the mass of small producers.

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<sup>3</sup>Numbers in parentheses are page references to the Chinese pamphlet edition of *Two Tactics*. 2.15 means chapter 2, page 15.

The overthrow of the police states might produce regimes backed by a broader mass of capitalists, small producers, and professionals than backed the tyrants. It might represent more of the bourgeoisie as a class, rather than as a small clique. These new regimes will, moreover, seek to stabilize countries which had been turned into powder kegs, ripe for explosions, by the narrow social basis of the police states. What the big bourgeoisie and the outside imperialists are aiming at is more broadly-based bourgeois regimes.

## Democracy and the working class

Why, then, should the working class care about merely democratic movements, if all they can bring about is bourgeois-democracy? Lenin explained it as follows:

“The democratic revolution in Russia is a bourgeois revolution by reason of its social and economic content. ... In general, all political liberties that are founded on present-day, i.e. capitalist, relations of production are bourgeois liberties. The demand for liberty expresses primarily the interests of the bourgeoisie. ... Its supporters have everywhere used the liberty they acquired like masters, reducing it to moderate and meticulous bourgeois doses, combining it with the most subtle methods of suppressing the revolutionary proletariat in peaceful times and with brutally cruel methods in stormy times.

“But only the rebel Narodniks [Populists], the anarchists and the ‘Economists’ could deduce from this that the struggle for liberty should be rejected or disparaged. ... The proletariat always realized instinctively that it needed political liberty, needed it more than anyone else, despite the fact that its immediate effect would be to strengthen and to organize the bourgeoisie. *The proletariat expects to find its salvation not by avoiding the class struggle but by developing it, by widening it, increasing its consciousness, its organization and determination.*” (3.122, emphasis added)

Indeed, Lenin stressed that “*in a certain sense*, a bourgeois revolution is *more advantageous* to the proletariat than to the bourgeoisie. This thesis is unquestionably correct in the following sense: it is to the advantage of the bourgeoisie to rely on certain remnants of the past as against the proletariat, for instance, on the monarchy, the standing army, etc. ... On the other hand, it is more advantageous for the working class if the necessary changes in the direction of bourgeois democracy take place by way of revolution and not by way of reform; for the way of reform is the way of delay, of procrastination, of the painfully slow decomposition of the putrid parts of the national organism. It is the proletariat and peasantry that suffer first of all and most of all from their putrefaction.” (6.44-5, emphasis as in the original)

The Arab Spring is unlikely to bring social revolutions, but the basic idea Lenin expressed remains true. It is in the interest of the working masses to destroy as much of the old apparatus of repression as possible. They need, not just a change in ruler from Mubarak to another tyrant, but a destruction of the repression that has banned worker organizations, a sweeping away of the apparatus of bigotry that has fanned sectarian warfare between different religious factions and ethnic groups, and an extension of basic social services so that the masses can survive without

desperation. It is more important for them than for the bourgeoisie, because the big bourgeoisie will always be satisfied by large profits and the maintenance of “order”, while the working class needs to organize for the class struggle.

## Creating an independent working-class movement

Why, then, is it important to distinguish between bourgeois-democratic and socialist movements, if both should be supported? It’s in order to be able to champion the specifically working-class tasks needed in the period of the democratic movement. It’s the working masses who are always asked to risk life and limb in these struggles. But that’s not enough. The working class has to put forward its own aims in these movements. And to do this, it has to recognize that its aims go beyond those of the bourgeois democrats and the pure-and-simple liberalizers.

One of the most important questions in the Arab Spring is whether the working class will develop its own independent organization. In Egypt, for example, the strikes of the last few years played a major role in undermining the regime. But this doesn’t mean that the working class was well organized, or that it had clarity on its class tasks. How far the present strike wave and political ferment among the workers spreads and gives rise to militant organization, political as well as economic, and how far class consciousness spreads among the workers, will be one of the main factors determining the fate of the Egyptian struggle.

If there is to be a chance for such an extension of working-class organization, the workers have to go beyond simply being militant participants in the general movement: in addition to fervently striving for democracy, they have to put forward their own demands, and recognize the different class sections of the movement. There should be demands to push the democratization as far as possible and eliminate as much of the old government tutelage over political life as possible, rather than simply accepting moderate liberalization. But there should also be demands for broad social measures, guarantees of mass livelihood, and freedom for the class struggle. And above all, the workers need to strive to develop their own independent class movement, rather than simply merging with the general movement. To do so, they have to recognize that, even when the democratic movement is militant and people are heroically fighting against police states, the democratic movement is still not a socialist one. Even when social demands are taken up in the democratic movement, this does not make it socialist, nor will it mean that a socialist revolution is imminent in these countries. Instead, the fight to develop a truly independent working-class movement is a specifically working-class task; it is, in a certain sense, an immediate socialist task, for such a working-class movement can only develop if it is inspired by the goals of the class struggle and the ultimate replacement of capitalism.

Lenin stressed that the outcome of the democratic revolution in Russia “depends on whether the working class will play the part of a subsidiary to the bourgeoisie, a subsidiary that is powerful in the force of its onslaught against the autocracy but impotent politically, or whether it will play the part of leader of the peoples’ revolution.” (Preface.4) In the Arab Spring, where radical social change is unlikely and the working class will, at



best, only be able to achieve leadership of the struggle sporadically, it's still the case that the outcome depends on how far the working class develops its own initiative and class stand. It will take time and effort and many attempts to build up working-class parties that really stand for the class struggle. It will take time and effort to overcome the various divisions in the working class, as well as to spread a revolutionary perspective among the workers and its organizations. Yet however modest these goals may seem, they are what would radically transform the current situation.

The development of such a working-class movement is not something that will be taken up by the democratic movement as a whole. It's not just that the present military rulers of Egypt, representing the old repressive apparatus, have issued repeated and futile bans against strikes and worker organizing. But as well, various sections of the Egyptian liberalization movement are expressing doubts and misgivings about working-class action. It is not an accident that this division within the democratic movement is taking place. It is a basic feature of what can be expected in a democratic movement. The recognition of the bourgeois-democratic, rather than the socialist, nature of the present uprisings would prevent activists being taken by surprise by such divisions in the movement, and encourage recognition of the need to build mass organization that can stand up against the bourgeois wing of the democratic movement.

### **The bourgeoisie recoils from the democratic struggle**

Indeed, Lenin stressed that one of the major tasks facing the working class in the democratic revolution is to fight against the vacillations, half-heartedness and treacheries of the bourgeois sections of the movement. He argued against the Mensheviks and their policy of holding back the working class, for fear of alienating the bourgeoisie, from seeking leadership of the democratic movement. Chapter 12 of *Two Tactics* is entitled "Will the sweep of the revolutionary movement be diminished if the bourgeoisie recoils from it?" Lenin answered no, on the contrary, the sweep of the revolution will deepen as it spreads among wider and wider sections of the working people, who will be carrying out those actions that cause the bourgeoisie to recoil; he wrote that "the Russian revolution ... will really assume the widest revolutionary sweep possible in the epoch of bourgeois-democratic revolution, only when the bourgeoisie recoils from it and when the masses of the peasantry come out as active revolutionaries side by side with the proletariat." (12.109) . He wrote that "every resolute and consistent democratic demand of the proletariat always and everywhere in the world causes the bourgeoisie to recoil" (12.103) and "the bourgeoisie, in the mass, will inevitably turn towards counterrevolution, towards the autocracy, against the revolution and against the people, immediately its narrow, selfish interests are met ...." (12.106)

In Egypt, the bourgeois sections of the movement are already recoiling from the strike wave and other actions that they regard as excesses of the working masses. Thus even under conditions of the present democratic movement, the deepening of the struggle goes along with alienating the bourgeoisie.

It is often claimed that recognizing the bourgeois-democratic,

rather than socialist, nature of a struggle means trailing behind the bourgeoisie. And certainly the Mensheviks trailed the bourgeoisie in the Russian revolution of 1905, and there is no lack today of political forces which trail the bourgeoisie -- either glorifying the police states or backing the bourgeois section of the opposition. But the Leninist policy for the democratic movement shows that it is possible, even when the socialist revolution is not imminent, for the working class to have an independent class stand. And that's crucial. If revolutionaries closed their eyes to the actual conditions of the present struggle, their opposition to reformist policy would be hit-and-miss guesswork or simply impotent play-acting.

### **Different sections of bourgeois democracy**

Lenin pointed out that in analyzing the forces of bourgeois democracy, it was important to distinguish between its different class sections. He wrote that "There is bourgeois democracy and bourgeois democracy. The Monarchist-Zemstvo-ist, who favors an upper chamber, and who 'asks' for universal suffrage while secretly, on the sly, striking a bargain with tsarism for a curtailed constitution, is also a bourgeois-democrat. And the peasant who is fighting, arms in hand, against the landlords and the government officials and with a 'naive republicanism' proposes to 'to kick out the tsar' is also a bourgeois-democrat." (6.47) And he ridiculed those who fail "to draw a distinction between republican-revolutionary and monarchist-liberal bourgeois democracy, to say nothing of the distinction between inconsistent bourgeois democratism and consistent proletarian democratism." (6.47-8)

It is generally the oppressed petty-bourgeois masses who, at a time of upsurge, constitute the revolutionary bourgeois-democracy. It is common to misrepresent Lenin's talk of the revolutionary bourgeoisie as referring to the big bourgeoisie, and hide that he was referring to the insurgent peasant and petty-bourgeois masses. Lenin distinguished the different factions of the bourgeoisie and reproached the Mensheviks, pointing out that a communist party "operating in a bourgeois society, cannot take part in politics without marching, in one instance or another, *side by side* with the democratic bourgeoisie. The difference between us in this regard is that we march side by side with the revolutionary and republican bourgeoisie, without merging with it, whereas you march side by side with the *liberal and monarchist bourgeoisie*, also without merging with it." (5.39)

In the Arab Spring, the working class, as it takes part in the democratic movement, often finds itself fighting side by side with various sections of bourgeois democrats. To avoid merging with these forces, and to be vigilant about which forces have already begun to recoil from the struggle, it must be conscious of this.

### **Class differences among the people**

But let's look more closely at this difference between the various forces of bourgeois democracy. Marxism distinguishes, not just between the basic masses and the big and middle bourgeoisie, but also among the working masses. In the conditions of 1905 Russia, Lenin sometimes referred to basic masses as "the 'people', that is, the proletariat and the peasantry". (12.107) But while grouping them as the people, he also brought

out the differences and contradictions among them. So, for example, he recalled that Marx, in analyzing the democratic revolutions of 1848, “always ruthlessly combated the petty-bourgeois illusions about the unity of the ‘people’ and about the absence of a class struggle within the people. In using the word ‘people,’ Marx did not thereby gloss over class distinctions, but combined definite elements that were capable of carrying the revolution to completion.” (Postscript.III.149)<sup>4</sup> So, depending on context, when Lenin talks of the bourgeoisie in *Two Tactics*, he is referring to the big and middle bourgeoisie (the bourgeoisie which is outside the “people”), or he is talking of the entire bourgeoisie, including the petty-bourgeoisie.

These class differences are why, even when the democratic movement is militant, it is not the same as a movement for socialism. Indeed, Lenin pointed out, referring to a peasantry that still saw its salvation in small-scale ownership, that “the peasantry is attached to the revolution not only by the prospect of radical agrarian reform but by its general and permanent interests. Even in fighting the proletariat the peasantry stands in need for democracy, for only a democratic system is capable of giving exact expression to its interests and of ensuring its predominance as the mass, as the majority.” (12.108)

It is often advocated that, since the entire people is oppressed by big capital, then it all has a similar interest in fighting the bourgeoisie. But it’s one thing that capitalism oppresses the mass. It’s another whether the petty-bourgeois sections of the people still see petty production and participation in commodity production as its bastion.

These class differences among “the people” give rise to the need for the working class to avoid simply merging with the democratic movement. The failure to recognize these differences can give rise to a glorified view of democratic struggles, and constant disappointment in their outcome.

### From democracy to socialism

Lenin famously put forward in *Two Tactics* that the imminent democratic revolution in Russia might conceivably lead to an immediate socialist revolution. And he discussed the conditions need for this to happen (more on this in a moment).

In the Arab Spring, this is not a possibility, but that doesn’t mean that socialism is irrelevant. By building its own independent trend and not restricting itself to the tasks of the general movement, the working class carries out preparatory work for socialist revolution.

Lenin wrote that “In answer to the anarchist objections that we are putting off the socialist revolution, we say: we are not putting it off, but we are taking the first step towards it in

the only possible way, along the only correct road, namely, the road of a democratic republic. Whoever wants to reach Socialism by a different road, other than that of political democracy, will inevitably arrive at conclusions that are absurd and reactionary both in the economic and the political sense.” (2.17) And indeed, we have seen that groups who denigrate mere democratic movements, if they have no prospect of leading to immediate workers’ power, have often ended up giving political support to police states and notorious tyrants, such as Qaddafi, Bashar al-Assad, Saddam Hussein, and Ahmadinejad in Iran, on the plea that these rulers, even as they suppress all political life among the working masses, are somehow anti-imperialist despots.

### A change in class alliances

But what are the conditions that would allow the democratic revolution to be followed immediately by a socialist one? Lenin wrote that “*The proletariat must carry to completion the democratic revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush by force the resistance of the autocracy and to paralyze the instability of the bourgeoisie. The proletariat must accomplish the socialist revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the semiproletarian elements of the population in order to crush by force the resistance of the bourgeoisie and to paralyze the instability of the peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie.*” (12.110, emphasis as in the original)

In other words, it’s not a matter of choice whether a revolution will be democratic or socialist. It depends not simply on whether revolutionaries wish to see a socialist revolution, but on whether the conditions exist to allow a democratic movement to pass over to a socialist revolution. There are different class alliances in the two revolutions, and so it depends on the attitude of different classes, and on the objective conditions that influence that attitude. For example, a crucial question is whether the peasantry is still acting as a unified whole in its support for small property, or has split up on a class basis, with a semiproletarian section close to the working class in its conditions of life and economic aspirations. Here it’s not only important whether a semiproletarian section exists, but whether it has become separated in its consciousness from the peasant bourgeoisie. More generally, the position and consciousness of the urban petty-bourgeoisie, which is extremely large in a number of countries, has a similar importance.

### Other views

The Marxist views on democratic revolution differ from that of other trends that have sought support among the working class. Pure-and-simple democratism sees democratic change as full liberation, and hence is always disappointed in its expectations. Reformism sees socialism as simply moderate capitalism with a humane and caring government, so it has no reason to distinguish democratic and socialist movements, and looks for accommodation with the bourgeoisie. Meanwhile naive revolu-

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<sup>4</sup>So, depending on context, when Lenin talks of the bourgeoisie in *Two Tactics*, he is referring to the big and middle bourgeoisie (the bourgeoisie which is outside the “people”), or he is talking of the bourgeoisie among the people (the petty-bourgeoisie), or he is referring to the entire bourgeoisie.

tionism sees whether a revolution is described as democratic or socialist as simply a sign of how militant the observer is.

Another challenge to the Marxist view of the democratic struggle comes from Trotskyism. One of its main dogmas is denouncing “two-stage revolution” as the worst reformism. This is its way of denouncing the idea of the different social nature of movements, bourgeois-democratic or socialist. It regards the Marxist view of the different social nature of democratic and socialist struggles as outdated. In its view, all revolutions are essentially socialist, although they may, at the start, clothe themselves in democratic language as a way of gaining support. This may sound radical and revolutionary. But it leaves Trotskyism in a quandary in dealing with democratic movements. It either has to denigrate them, pretend that they are socialist, or fudge the issue. Tactics based on such large doses of fantasy are likely to lead to frequent fiascos, and are doing so once again. A separate in this issue of *Communist Voice* deals with the confusion and hesitancy of most Trotskyists in the face of the Arab Spring. Some Trotskyists have even taken the opportunity to be zealous apologists for despotic regimes like Bashar al-Assad’s Ba’ath regime in Syria, or the recently fallen Qaddafi regime in Libya.

Meanwhile *Two Tactics* was written mainly against that section of the Russian social-democrats who would later be known as Mensheviks. The title, *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, referred to the clash between the reformist tactics of trailing the bourgeoisie put forward by the Mensheviks, and the revolutionary tactics put forward by Lenin. At the time the book was written, the communist movement was referred as social-democracy, and so the book refers to the two different paths being set forward for the social-democrats.

But political terms would soon change. In 1914, when World War I broke out, the leadership of most social-democratic parties, and of the Second International itself, betrayed their past vows and the cause of the working class by siding with their own bourgeoisies in the war. The social-democrats of one country

would incite their nation’s workers to back a war against the workers of other countries. This resulted in one of the most important splits in the workers’ movement. The term “social-democrat” became, in the eyes of those workers and activists who undertook revolutionary action against their own bourgeoisie, a shameful term denoting treachery, betrayal and spinelessness. Within several years, a new world revolutionary organization was formed, the Third or Communist International. This was the most successful and revolutionary workers’ movement that the world had ever seen, until its political stands were undermined by Stalinism, and it was eventually dissolved in 1943.

Meanwhile the Second International, broken up by national rivalries during World War I, was re-established in 1923 as the Labor and Socialist International, and gradually moved closer and closer to the bourgeoisie. This was the grouping that the Mensheviks supported. It dissolved in 1940, but was again re-established in 1951 as the Socialist International. The SI still exists, but it has long joined arm-in-arm with the dominant bourgeoisie in Europe and elsewhere; it has renounced even the pretext of following Marxism; and it has repeatedly been entrusted with the leadership of the government in major capitalist countries. In the current world economic crisis, “socialist” governments are among those imposing drastic austerity upon the working masses. For example, the present Greek government, infamous for its extreme austerity, is led by George Papandreou, the current president of the Second International. And when the Arab Spring broke out, it overthrew the tyranny of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Ben Ali’s party being a member of the SI, and Mubarak in Egypt, Mubarak’s party also being part of the SI, both parties being expelled from the SI only as they fell from power.

The role of social-democratic parties in imposing austerity in Europe and running two police states in North Africa shows the struggle over what is a real socialist party, and what is a reformist party, is not a mere sectarian squabble. Ultimately, it concerns whether the party is in league with the bourgeoisie or not. □

# Against left-wing doubts about the democratic movement

by Joseph Green

This is a much-expanded version of a talk given at the *Detroit Workers' Voice* Discussion Group meeting of June 19, 2011. This article was written prior to the victory of the struggle against Qaddafi in October, and the term Libyan regime always refers to the Qaddafi regime.

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This is a historic moment in the life of the Middle East and North Africa. There is a wave of struggle sweeping the region. This is a region which has been dominated by police states and monarchies who have held the masses in check, and who have stolen from the people much of the fruits of the struggle against colonialism. These are countries which have often been under states of emergency for decades. Now the ground is trembling under these regimes.

One would think that left-wing groups would welcome this historic period. It is the task of the revolutionary left to support struggles for freedom, while showing the class differences that arise in these movements and providing a realistic perspective for where they are going. These struggles will not end capitalist exploitation, but they remove some of the chains holding the working masses down and open the path towards future class struggles.

But there are left groups which regret some of these struggles, which they look on quite skeptically or even denounce. This reflects the ongoing crisis of revolutionary thought. We have talked of this crisis since our formation a decade and a half ago, but it's common in certain circles to disregard these issues as mere sectarian squabbles or minor doctrinal disputes. No, these are differences that affect even whether one supports democratic struggles. And this is why it is important to have an anti-revisionist standpoint, and not simply accept that whatever is said to be Marxism really is Marxism.

So let's look at why the Arab Spring has been so unsettling for much of the left. We'll deal with three issues. One is that some of the dictatorial regimes are favorite regimes of parts of the left. Another is that many left groups can't deal with the social nature of movements which are democratic but not socialist or revolutionary. And finally, there are the complexities posed by the NATO bombing in Libya, and other imperialist interventions in the countries in turmoil.

## The supposedly anti-imperialist tyrants

The first issue is that the oppressive regimes aren't all in a single alliance; some are more closely aligned with US imperial-

ism, others more closely to other imperialisms. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the state-capitalist bloc in Eastern Europe may have ended the Cold War, but the rivalry between the great powers over spheres of influence hasn't ended. A number of left groups don't recognize that today Russia, China, and India are imperialist powers, and they confuse the squabbles among the imperialist powers with anti-imperialist struggles against US imperialism. In line with this, they don't judge Middle Eastern and North African regimes by their class relations, but by which imperialist bloc they are closer to.

Thus, the Syrian, Iranian, and Libyan regimes, which have better relations with Russia, China or India than with the US, have been favorite regimes of certain leftists for a long time. Such a stand is similar to that of the reformist government of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, which has emphasized for years its strong solidarity with such dictatorial regimes as those in Iran, Belarus, Syria, and Libya. This hasn't simply been a diplomatic effort to avoid the savage pressure of US imperialism on Venezuela; Chavez has gone out of his way to present these regimes as friends of the masses.

But the Arab Spring has had no respect for the dividing lines in the imperialist world, and the masses have risen against both staunchly pro-US regimes and some dictatorial regimes which the US squabbles with. They have struck both conservative regimes and those who have professed "socialist", anti-imperialist, or revolutionary credentials. One of their targets is the Syrian regime, where the ascendance of the Ba'ath party to power eventually put an end to open mass political life. In the so-called "Syrian Corrective Movement" of 1970, Hafez al-Assad came to power within the Ba'ath Party via a military coup against the then-ruling faction, and he proceeded to consolidate a police-state apparatus, which after his death in 2000 was continued under the command of his son, Bashar.

This regime has ruled by a state of emergency that has lasted for decades. It was lifted in mid-April, but this was only a cosmetic measure: Bashar decided he didn't need a special decree in order to surround villages with soldiers and tanks and slaughter protestors. Yet as the regime wades through rivers of blood, it has gotten the renewed endorsement of various left groups around the world. This includes the Workers World Party, a group quietly based on Trotskyist principles. It posted on its website a vile article of May 5 by Sara Flounders entitled "Events in Syria — Which Side are you on?"<sup>1</sup>, which embellished the lies of the Syrian government. She denounced the Syrian protestors as counter-revolutionary pawns of US imperialism, and said that what's going on in Syria is an example of "U.S. destabilization campaigns that used corporate media fabrications, externally financed opposition groups, targeted assassinations, 'special operations' sabotage and well-trained Internet operatives". Even she couldn't deny that the regime has some problems, but she ignored its police-state apparatus and its history of murderous repression. Indeed, her view is that the regime itself is the force for progress in Syria, and she wrote that

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.workers.org/2011/world/syria\\_0512/](http://www.workers.org/2011/world/syria_0512/).

it “has recognized the importance of making internal reforms”. Her article is typical of WWP’s lack of scruples or conscience in their support of repressive regimes.

In 2004 the Party for Socialism and Liberation split away from WWP, but it retains the same stand of backing the Syrian government as WWP. It doesn’t say much about what’s going on in Syria, and its main statement was an article of April 29 by Mazda Majida entitled “Oppose any form of imperialist intervention in Syria! Analysis of Syrian protest movement and its historical context”.<sup>2</sup> It repeatedly implies that the protests are suspect. It denies that workers and activists should have solidarity actions with the democratic movement, saying that if the purpose would be “to get the word out about the Syrian regime’s repression, it is unnecessary for progressive forces to do that. The business media is already doing that, and they have an audience of hundreds of millions.” And it regards the “historical context” as the supposedly progressive role of the Ba’ath police-state regime. It does admit that this regime is “bourgeois-nationalist”, but it regards bourgeois nationalism as the most wonderful thing for a country, short of socialism.

The *Monthly Review* calls itself an “independent socialist magazine”, regards itself as an antidote to sectarianism, and has strong connections with a number of academics who claim to be Marxists. And it, too, is hesitant about the Syrian uprising. It won’t directly praise the Syrian government, but it has a mournful tone about the mass actions. Meanwhile it also sponsors *Monthly Review Zine*, which lauds the Syrian government to the sky. Its article “Millions of Syrians Rally for Syria and Bashar” claimed that the Syrian people were united around Bashar al-Assad.<sup>3</sup> It also features a cartoon by Victor Nieto entitled “US embassy at work in Syria” (July 20, 2011) which, just like WWP, presents the uprising as a US plot.<sup>4</sup>

The WWP, PSL, and *Monthly Review Zine* support the murderous Syrian regime in the name of opposing US imperialism. This is also how they support the oppressive theocratic regime in Iran. WWP, for example, has preached year after year in support of it. It describes the oppressive life under the regime as an ongoing “revolution”; it denies that there was any fraud in the election of President Ahmadinejad; and it presents the regime as a bulwark against Western imperialism and Israeli zionism. In its eyes, here again the workers, activists, and nationalities oppressed by a dictatorial regime are essentially counter-revolutionaries, but in the case of Iran, *Workers World* doesn’t want to say this openly, so it simply ignores what is happening to the masses. Similarly, PSL called for defense of Ahmadinejad against demonization, regarding his “reactionary social views” as a minor flaw in a leader of a regime which is supposedly “standing up to imperialism”.<sup>5</sup> For its part, *Monthly Review Zine* has been so enthusiastic about the Iranian regime that one of

*Monthly Review*’s editors, Barbara Epstein, resigned in protest in 2009.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile 52 Stalinist parties and organizations, meeting at the so-called 20th International Communist Seminar in Brussels, Belgium on May 13-15, 2011, backed the Syrian regime in its time of need.<sup>7</sup> These groups call themselves “communist”, but, like the Trotskyist WWP and PSL, they have converted Marxism, the doctrine of working-class liberation, into an apology for repression. They are parties that support various state-capitalist regimes of the present and past, regimes that spoke in the name of socialism and Marxism but sat on top of the working class, exploiting it and denying it any political rights. In its resolution on the Arab Spring uprisings, the resolution condemns the Syrian uprising as US plot, but in a bit more mealy-mouthed way than WWP does. On one hand, it repeats the same type of lies that we have seen WWP trumpet so freely, and writes: “It is clear that Syria is the victim of destructive and provocative manipulation by American imperialism and its ally Israel, and by other reactionary forces in the region. Washington has long aimed to bring down the Syrian regime, which it categorizes as part of the ‘axis of evil’, and to replace it with a puppet regime loyal to America and its allies.” On the other hand, the resolution claims to support “the national democratic forces in Syria which are acting to obtain the legitimate demands of the people.” But whether “the national democratic forces” are the people being murdered, or those shooting them down, is left to the imagination of the reader.

By backing Bashar al-Assad, these forces reveal themselves as apologists for shooting down the working people en masse. They justify this with non-class anti-imperialism: they back any regime that has some difference with the US government, especially if it has ties with Russian or Chinese imperialism, no matter what relation that regime has to the working masses of its own country. They don’t realize that in so doing, they are not the most militant fighters against US imperialism, but are simply looking for a niche in the imperialist system.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup><http://comments.gmane.org/gmane.science.economics.progressive-economists/63421>.

<sup>7</sup>The Freedom Road Socialist Organization was the American group at this seminar.

<sup>8</sup>It’s typical that these articles lauding the anti-imperialism of the Syrian regime don’t mention that US imperialism sent Maher Arar to Syria to be tortured for information as part of “extraordinary rendition”. Nor do they mention the accommodations that exist between Syria and Israel, where even the bourgeois press has admitted that the Israeli government is worried that its supposed arch-enemy, the Syrian regime, might fall. (See, for example, “Israel fears the alternative if Syria’s Assad falls” by Edmund Sanders in the *Los Angeles Times*, March 30, 2011.) The PSL article cited above does mention that “In April 1976, the Syrian army entered Lebanon with the backing of the United States, blocking the victory of the progressive forces” and that the regime had been “siding with counter-revolution in Lebanon and imperialism in Iraq”, but regarded this as mere flaws in an overall anti-imperialist stand. It doesn’t matter what the Syrian and other police states do, the non-class anti-imperialists will continue to back them. They don’t recognize the economic, social and political evolution of the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie and of the regimes there.

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<sup>2</sup><http://pslweb.org/liberationnews/news/oppose-intervention-vs-syria.html>.

<sup>3</sup><http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/syria300311.html>.

<sup>4</sup><http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/vicman200711.html>.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Mazda Majidi, “U.S. demonization campaign targets Iran’s leader: Smearing Ahmadinejad in the service of imperialism”, October 2, 2007, <http://www2.pslweb.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=7409>.

It would have taken a good deal of honesty and courage for WWP, *PSL*, *Monthly Review Zine*, and the Stalinist parties to admit that they have been wrong about the nature of the Syrian government and its role in the Middle East. Instead, they stubbornly cling to such an oppressive regime even as it circles towns with tanks. They won't give up on these regimes because their support for bloodstained despots isn't an isolated error, due to insufficient information. Instead, it's what they have done repeatedly over the decades.

## The end of an epoch in the Arab world

Non-class anti-imperialists often look back fondly to the period where bourgeois nationalist trends succeeded in seizing the fruits of the anti-colonial and anti-monarchical struggles and establishing their own regimes. In Egypt, there was Gamal Abdel Nasser, who came to power in the military coup of 1952 which overthrew King Farouk. Nasser electrified the Arab world, but also put his foot down on top of the Egyptian communists while executing working-class strikers. In Syria and Iraq, the Baath party eventually pushed aside other forces that had risen up against the monarchy and imperialism, crushed both other bourgeois-nationalist forces and the working-class movement, and established a police state. In Libya, Qaddafi came to power as a result of the anti-monarchist struggle, and then eliminated any political rights for the masses.

In general, these regimes sought to carry out economic development, opposed for a time various of the Western imperialist policies for the region, and postured as anti-imperialist, perhaps socialist, or even as having abolished the state (in the case of Libya). They also suppressed any rival domestic currents, eliminated as far as possible any independent political life among the masses, oppressed national and ethnic minorities, contended with other nationalist regimes for regional leadership, and built huge militaries, which were used more often in fighting for regional domination (as in the decade-long Iran-Iraq war) than in opposing outside imperialism or Israeli zionism. These regimes didn't hesitate to adopt savage measures. If Britain brutally and murderously used poison gas against Iraqi villages in the early 20th century, in the mid-20th century Nasser used poison gas against the Yemenis, and in the latter 20th century, Saddam Hussein gassed the Iraqi Kurds at Halabja .

These regimes often sought support from one imperialist power against another. Nasser famously played off Western imperialism against Soviet social-imperialism in order to get aid from both sides. So did Qaddafi. In itself, it says nothing about a regime that it plays off one imperialist power against another for the sake of survival; even revolutionary regimes might be forced to that expedient. But the reason certain of these regimes could play the game so well, was that their internal repressive nature harmonized well with the exploitative nature of the imperialist powers. And conversely, the repressive nature of the state-capitalist Soviet Union allowed Khrushchov to embrace Nasser's regime even as it stomped on the Egyptian working class including the pro-Soviet communists, while Brezhnev went so far as to declare that Egypt was following "the road of non-capitalist development".

It was important to oppose imperialist savagery against these countries even if the local regimes were repressive. It was

important to support Egypt regaining the Suez Canal, to oppose Israeli zionist aggression against its neighbors, to support the struggle of the Palestinian people, to zealously oppose CIA intervention, and so on. But certain sections of the left went far beyond this to glorifying various of the bourgeois nationalist regimes. They got used to this, and it became an ingrained vice; to this day, they see support of these regimes as the gold standard of anti-imperialism. In a way, this was Khrushchov's policy towards Nasser repeated over and over, even if it was done by Trotskyists who believed that it was possible to cleanse this policy of its bloody taint by declaring that it was only "military but not political support" of tyranny. Right from the start, real communist policy — not Stalinist or Trotskyist policy — would have been to oppose the imperialist aggression in the region while also finding ways to support the working masses within these countries. It would have been to show that real anti-imperialism didn't mean closing one's eyes to the internal class struggle.

As the years went by, these regimes shed most of their anti-imperialist colors. When they achieved certain goals and strengthened the ruling bourgeoisie that stood behind them, they made deals with the imperialists, some becoming closely attached to US imperialism and others, although seeking reconciliation with US imperialism, maintaining their traditional closer ties with other imperialist powers. Egypt under Sadat, and then Mubarak, became a collaborator with Israeli zionism in suppressing the Palestinians, and a close US imperialist ally; indeed, it became second only to Israel as the major recipient of US foreign aid, mainly military aid. It might seem that such a policy change was simply a result of Nasser's death. But the similar evolution of other bourgeois nationalist regimes suggest that it had more to do with the evolution of the local bourgeoisie as it gained a niche in the imperialist system.

For example, the Libyan regime went through a similar conservative evolution under Qaddafi. For a time Qaddafi had engaged in a zig-zag policy of first supporting and then opposing, this or that group or cause. One day he would support the Eritrean struggle for national self-determination, and the next day he would support the Mengistu regime in Ethiopia that was massacring the Eritreans. One day he would give refuge to Palestinians, and then in 1995 he would throw them out as an alleged protest against the Oslo Accords. One day he would support various liberation groups, and the next day send troops to support crazy Idi Amin of Uganda or offer money to build relations with the megalomaniac Bokassa I, who would later declare himself Emperor of the Central African Empire. But eventually he ended up promising the European bourgeoisie that he would be a bulwark against black migration from Africa; he would hug one European imperialist president after another; and he worked arm-in-arm with the multinational oil companies.

What was going on was that the local bourgeoisie and bureaucracy were growing in these countries, while the masses were being trampled on. Economic development programs tended to stall after a time, and the regimes eventually turned to neo-liberalism. The stronger of these regimes became would-be imperialist powers and major regional power-brokers. Their wars with neighbors, or even Saddam Hussein's disastrous wars with US imperialism, were not struggles against imperialism, but a bloody jockeying for position within it.

The current uprisings are striking not just at the most conservative regimes, but also oppressive regimes that originated as radical-sounding bourgeois-nationalist regimes. It's not that bourgeois nationalism has come to an end. All bourgeois regimes in the region, even the most conservative ones, now deck themselves out in nationalist colors. But the long detour in the development of mass politics that the left-posturing bourgeois-nationalist regimes represented may be drawing to a close.

## The nature of democratic movements

So part of the left is upset that the Arab Spring spread to Syria and Libya, and didn't restrict itself to challenging the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, or Jordan. But there is also a certain doubt in parts of the left about the movement as a whole, no matter which regimes it strikes. This doubt concerns supporting a movement which only challenges certain injustices, and does not aim at establishing socialist regimes, or regimes which the left might imagine as socialist.

The Arab Spring shows the masses refusing to accept the passive role that the police states and authoritarian regimes have placed them in. It is a revolt against tyranny, but also against the increasing misery from neo-liberal reforms and economic crisis. The high food prices of the last few years, the increasing inequality fostered by neo-liberal reforms, and the growing unemployment, which extends even to educated youth, have spurred on this upsurge.

But this is not a socialist movement, nor even a radical anti-imperialist one. Instead it has a lot in common with the liberalization movements which we have seen elsewhere around the world in the last several decades. These movements brought down various dictatorships, but often left conservative or even market-fundamentalist regimes in their place.

In the case of the Arab Spring, everywhere the insurgent masses are split up in disparate groupings. Everywhere different class factions take part in the struggle, and different class interests are expressed. Nowhere is the struggle led by a clear revolutionary force, by a truly socialist force as opposed to the fake socialism of various regimes, or by a real anti-imperialist force as opposed to the fake anti-imperialism of the nationalist regimes. Even as the masses fight the market fundamentalism of the old regimes, there are strong elements in the movement who advocate more market fundamentalism, and these elements are supported by imperialism and the local bourgeoisie. And everywhere there are illusions about the imperialist powers.

Why then should this movement, which will not bring economic liberation, be supported? Why, when it will bring, not universal harmony, but a new class struggle? Already we can see, in Egypt, that the overthrow of Mubarak was not followed by freedom and prosperity, but by a new struggle over what is come next. There is a strike wave and workers organizing; there is also the attempt of Islamic forces to bring a conservative religious rule, and the attempts of Mubarak's party to make a comeback. The army, which was the backbone of the Mubarak regime, is still the ruler in Egypt; and both US imperialism and Saudi Arabia, in particular, are seeking to prop up the army in order to keep as much of the old institutions as possible.

But the reason to support this movement is precisely *because* it will bring a new class struggle. This is the only path to the

working masses themselves taking politics into their own hands. There is no way forward for the working class other than by fighting against tyranny, and by using whatever freedoms it wins to organize, or extend and strengthen, its own independent trend. These two things — the working class seeking freedom, and using this freedom to develop a specifically working-class trend in the movement — are interrelated, as only the working masses seek to sweep away all the old institutions of political tyranny.

This means that the Arab Spring, even if the uprisings are successful, is only the first step, and the resulting regimes will probably be quite disappointing. But nonetheless, breaking the iron grip of the old regimes has the possibility of rejuvenating the politics of the region.

The best coverage of the Arab Spring in the radical left press has brought news of some of the strikes and attempts at new organization by the working class. It has also covered some of the efforts of the new regimes in Egypt and Tunisia to limit the democratic changes, as well as pointing out the treacherous stands of bourgeois sections of the movement. But there's also a certain disdain for the movement in much of the coverage. This is seen not just in Trotskyist journals, but in the IWW as well. In its May Day issue, it says little about the movement, other than to support Bahraini trade unions. The IWW may regard itself as revolutionary, but its syndicalist outlook results in standing aloof from political movements. So the masses assaulting tyranny in one police state after another doesn't inspire it.

## Dreams of immediate socialist revolution

Certain left Trotskyists have a standoffish attitude to anything but an immediate struggle for workers' power.<sup>9</sup> Consider the recent Spring 2011 issue of *Proletarian Revolution*, the journal of the League for the Revolutionary Party. It enthuses over the upsurge and carries articles on it. But it does so in the belief that the uprisings may culminate in the immediate overthrow of "capitalist rule and imperialist domination"; it stresses that Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution" shows that nothing significant can be gained except by carrying out socialist revolutions.<sup>10</sup>

Its article "Tunisia's Revolution in Danger" describes the struggle that has continued after the dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled the country. The working masses have pushed for serious change, not just the replacement of one tyrant by another. *PR* lauds this mass struggle, but regards it as proof that a revolutionary socialist movement is near. Thus it writes:

"By overpowering the dictatorship's local governments and police in some cities and towns and replacing them with demo-

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<sup>9</sup>The Trotskyist movement is split into a multitude of fragments, but divides roughly into two parts. The left-Trotskyists preach their Trotskyism in the open and argue about who is more loyal to Trotsky's teachings, while the right-Trotskyists like to pretend that they regard Trotsky as only one of many revolutionaries, and they are more likely to criticize some individual views of Trotsky. Despite this difference, they share a common theoretical standpoint.

<sup>10</sup> *Proletarian Revolution*, Published by the League for the Revolutionary Party (Communist Organization for the Fourth International), No. 84, Spring 2011, "2011 - Year of Mass Struggle", p. 2, col. 2.

cratically elected councils of the struggle, the working class and poor have already taken steps toward overthrowing the ruling class and building a government of their own. Workers have also started taking over operation of some enterprises after they kicked out their bosses for having collaborated with the dictatorship. Trade unions are calling for the nationalization of the enterprises Ben Ali and his family owned.”<sup>11</sup>

These encouraging events show that the masses have been going beyond the narrow role that bourgeois politicians would restrict them to. But the article makes no attempt to judge how much of the working class is involved, how long such actions will continue, or what the masses are willing to fight for. Instead it says things like “*Whether or not the workers understood it*, these were all steps toward overturning capitalist class relations and putting the working class and poor in power.” So the workers are going to establish socialism without realizing it. All they need, according to the article, is a leadership that knows the theory of permanent revolution.<sup>12</sup>

Now it may happen that the masses aren’t conscious of the revolutionary implication of their actions. But on this plea, the *PR* makes no attempt to get an overall picture of the mood of the working masses, to judge how extensive its organization is, to compare the strength of the left-wing forces and the Islamist forces, or to judge the economic situation. Moreover, whether or not *PR* understands it, even in democratic movements, popular councils, worker collectives, and large-scale economic nationalizations can and do occur. One has to avoid getting completely carried away by excitement and judge carefully what type of movement is taking place.

Instead of carefully assessing the actual state of the mass consciousness and organization, *PR* dreams of immediate proletarian revolution. So the *PR* says that the next step is for the masses to form a “militia of the working class and poor”, establish “a government of councils of workers’ and poor people actively engaged in transforming society”, and organize “national elections ... to a Constituent Assembly”, which would have the task of “ratifying the power in the hands of the councils of workers and soldiers.”<sup>13</sup> LRP doesn’t, apparently, have any doubts that revolutionaries would dominate local militias, or that the Constituent Assembly would vote for socialist revolution. It doesn’t even bother discussing the issue.

*PR* contained similar material on the Egyptian movement, both a letter to a socialist group in Egypt, and an article “The Egyptian Revolution Must Advance — *or It will be Defeated*”. It is certainly correct to point out the treacherous role of the bourgeoisie and the army. But the article’s basic idea is that the next step is “a conscious struggle for the working class to seize power”.<sup>14</sup> Once again, there is no serious assessment of the weight of the different trends among the working people. Instead *PR* argues that there has to be an immediate socialist revolution because, in its view, nothing short of that can bring any benefit.

<sup>11</sup>*PR*, “Tunisia’s Revolution in Danger”, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>*PR*, p. 3, emphasis added; p. 5, col.2.

<sup>13</sup>*PR*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>*PR*, The Egyptian Revolution Must Advance — *or It Will Be Defeated*, p. 11.

It argues that it is impossible for there to be “a stable democratic capitalist regime ... in Egypt”; it holds that any “democratic forms” are “out of the question” in the Middle East.<sup>15</sup>

Far be it from us to denigrate the goal of socialism. On the contrary, at all times the socialist goal helps lend the working-class movement a revolutionary character. But the immediate tactics of the working class vary, depending on whether a socialist revolution is imminent. Pretending socialist revolution is around the corner holds back the development of the class-conscious workers movement which will eventually bring the socialist revolution; among other things, it could lead activists to overlook many important class differences in the democratic movement in the belief that the movement as a whole, except for the big bourgeoisie, was objectively socialist.

But *PR* ignores all the preparatory work needed for socialist revolution, and doesn’t bother judging the present balance of class forces in Egypt. *PR* replaces an assessment of the actual conditions of the class struggle at present, with the argument that the only possibilities are utter defeat or workers’ power. *PR* is incapable of dealing with intermediate situations, and it tries to prove that anything but utter victory or utter defeat is impossible. As mentioned above, it reasons that there can’t be “genuine” or “stable” democracy, as if bourgeois democracy wasn’t always an arena of struggle between the classes. The fact is that Egypt is not on the verge of socialist revolution, and *PR*’s impatience for immediate revolution reflects its inability to understand what class-conscious workers should do now. Such fantasy is the only way it can fit Trotskyist prescriptions to the Arab Spring; otherwise, it would have to denounce the Egyptian movement.

The irony is that Trotskyism is the same trend that claims that socialism isn’t possible except as a world system. On one hand, in every struggle, in Egypt or Tunisia or anywhere, *PR* declares that the struggle would immediately lead to socialist revolution if only it were led correctly. But on the other hand, it declares that these revolutions couldn’t actually achieve socialism, as this would violate the Trotskyist view that socialism in one country is impossible.

Indeed, at the end of an article declaring that the Egyptian workers must seize power, *PR* implies that this alone wouldn’t satisfy the workers’ economic needs. That, it says, would only be possible when the entire region rises in revolution, “imperialism’s client states are overthrown, including the racist colonial-settler state of Israel. Socialist revolutions throughout the region would establish a federation of workers’ states.... This would maximize genuine international cooperation and the pooling of resources, *the only solution* to the misery of the workers and poor.”<sup>16</sup> If this were taken seriously, it would mean that Egyptian revolution was futile unless the entire region was ready for socialist revolution. After all, the masses will only support a revolution that improves their conditions. By way of contrast, a serious demand for immediate revolution in Egypt should include an assessment of what that revolution could do to satisfy mass demands in the years before the revolution triumphs on a regional or world scale. But Trotskyism doesn’t have much of an

<sup>15</sup>*PR*, *To the Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt*, p. 6; “2011 - Year of Mass Struggle”, p.2.

<sup>16</sup>*PR*, p. 11, emphasis added.



idea of this, just as it has little idea of what the goals should be in a democratic movement at a time when revolution is not imminent.

A similar, but more depressed, viewpoint is given in the May-June issue of *Class Struggle*, which gives the views of the Trotskyist *Spark* organization. This is contained in an interesting article entitled “Arab World: Set Ablaze by the Winds of Revolt”.<sup>17</sup> Just like the League for the Revolutionary Party, *Spark* adheres to “permanent revolution”, but it is a bit more realistic about the prospects of immediate socialist revolution.

The article mainly discusses the background to the Arab Spring, rather than the mass movement itself, but it has a significant passage about the class nature of the struggle: “Behind this expression, ‘democratic transition,’ are the confused aspirations of the exploited masses for more freedom and more rights, starting with the right to eat a full meal. But it also expresses the aspirations of the bourgeoisie itself for change.”<sup>18</sup> It concludes that the movement might go on to be a “genuine revolution”, and it would be “stupidly pessimistic to fix limits in advance”, but “it would also be as stupid to pompously declare that a ‘revolution’ is developing in the Arab countries.”

But *Spark* does not go on to distinguish between democratic and socialist movements. It still has some hope for an imminent socialist revolution, and declares that anything else would be futile. It does not discuss the particular class alignments in either a democratic revolution or a liberalization, and the resulting tasks of the working class, but simply argues that unless there is a “genuine revolution” (its term for socialist revolution), then the entire struggle will have been in vain: it will have served “only to get rid of a handful of elderly dictators who would have died anyway, and to give the imperialist powers the opportunity to cover up the dictatorships with parliamentary cloaks.”<sup>19</sup>

Now, it’s true that how far the movement goes, which regimes collapse, and what they are replaced with, can’t be specified in advance. What we do know, however, is that the struggle, as far as it is successful, will give rise to a new class struggle, and that this is a vital step forward even though socialist revolution is not imminent. *Spark* doesn’t understand this, and the article is devoted to denigrating the idea that democratic reforms are of any value to the working class.

However, in the last paragraph of the article, *Spark* reverses course and concedes that, even without a socialist revolution, “the present revolts” might “end up conquering some freedom and consolidating it”. But it doesn’t see much value to this. The only thing it suggests that the working class could do with this freedom is learn about what activists did in the past, “even if only

through reading about it in books”. For *Spark*, it was decades ago that there were significant events from which the masses learned about politics by fighting their oppressors, and the *Spark* talks in its article about how the masses learned from actions in those exciting and revolutionary times. But for today and the Arab Spring, supposedly the only way the masses can learn about struggle, is to learn about the past. How much more depressed can one get about the movement of today? Of course, the history of the revolutionary movement is important, but it is only those who take part in the class struggle today who will really understand the lessons of the past and the real meaning of Marxist theory.

This approach influences how *Spark* deals with Libya. If it worries that the overall Arab Spring might simply result in the removal of some overage dictators who already had one foot in the grave, what it sees in Libya is mainly the imperialist intervention. Since there is no way to imagine that immediate revolution is possible in Libya, it doesn’t care much about the uprising. It has little to say about the masses in Libya who are fighting the Qaddafi regime, and what the nature and prospects of their movement is. So this brings us to the complexities of the Libyan situation.

## The uprising in Libya and the NATO intervention

The general character of the movement in Libya is similar to that in the rest of the Middle East and North Africa. In Libya, as elsewhere, the uprising was motivated by outrage at impoverishment as well as tyranny. In Libya, as elsewhere, there are bourgeois and pro-imperialist figures and viewpoints in the movement; however, the imperialist intervention has multiplied the influence of Western imperialism.

But the first issue is to judge what type of regime is under attack in Libya. The Qaddafi regime stemmed from a revolt against the pro-imperialist monarchy of King Idris in 1969, and it started out as one of the most stridently bourgeois nationalist regimes in the region. However, it quickly became a police state subordinated to Qaddafi, and his rule has lasted for decades.

Qaddafi’s regime is one of those most beloved by certain left groups. It posed as a socialist regime which had abolished the state; it defied the imperialists on oil pricing and in its support for various armed liberation groups; and it had loud, if quirky, rhetoric. It used some of its oil money to finance education, health, and housing in Libya and in an attempt to develop economically.

It also used this money to buy a huge amount of tanks and other weapons, to finance a long-running war with Sudan, and to buy influence in Africa, the Middle East, and throughout the world. It backed such vicious enemies of the masses as Idi Amin in Uganda and Bokassa I in Central Africa: Qaddafi even advised Amin to expel Asian Ugandans, which Amin did. His regime also backed terrorist trends in various liberation movements; and had a nasty habit of assassinating dissidents in exile.

Of the old stridency, only rhetoric — and some connection to Russian and Chinese imperialism — remain. Qaddafi’s regime has long since reconciled with the European imperialist powers, and also had excellent relations with the Western oil companies.

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<sup>17</sup> *Class Struggle*, published by *Spark*, #70, May-June 2011, “[Arab World: Set Ablaze by the Winds of Revolt](#)”. It is introduced by a blurb that says that the article was “written on February 23, 2011, just as the events were developing” and “is translated from the March 2011 issue of *Lutte de Classe* [*Class Struggle*], put out by comrades of the French Trotskyist organization *Lutte Ouvrière* [*Workers Struggle*].”

<sup>18</sup> *Class Struggle*, p.22, It would be more accurate to say that “sections of the bourgeoisie” aspire to some democratic change; other privileged sections of the bourgeoisie were doing just fine, thank you, under the old regime.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Qaddafi, who saw himself as a great leader of the African continent as well as of the Arab world, took to assuring the European bourgeoisie that he was the bulwark against black African immigration. Meanwhile Libyan developmental efforts floundered; the economy remained completely dependent on oil; Qaddafi turned increasingly to neo-liberal economic policies; and unemployment reached 20-30% during the last decade.

No matter, various left groups backed Qaddafi's regime and closed their eyes to its internal nature. And it was notorious that at least one was bribed. This was the Workers Revolutionary Party in Britain, associated with the at-one-time prominent British Trotskyist leader Gerry Healy, which received a substantial amount of money from Libya as well as funds from Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq.<sup>20</sup>

Now, discontent had been building up in Libya, and when full-scale rebellion broke out in February this year, the revolt was broad and deep. It immediately triumphed in the second and third-largest cities in Libya, Benghazi and Misrata; there were demonstrations in the capital and largest city, Tripoli; and a significant section of the armed forces revolted. But the class basis of the movement was affected by Libya's economy being based on oil. Like many oil emirates, much of the manual work in Libya is done by foreign workers, who mainly have fled the current bitter struggle between the regime and the uprising.

At the start the uprising went from victory to victory, but Qaddafi's regime was the first threatened regime to regain its poise, and it began the bloodiest repression until then of any of them. In the ensuing civil war, by mid-March the well-equipped and trained forces of the Qaddafi dictatorship were on the verge of drowning the uprising in blood.

This created the situation that allowed outside military intervention. For their own purposes, the US and European imperialists began bombing and some other operations against the Qaddafi regime, and this intervention blunted Qaddafi's offensive. The NATO powers weren't too happy about the democratic movement in Libya, and continually expressed doubt about it. But they wanted to keep their influence in Libya, and they also wanted to prevent regional instability, which they feared would have resulted from the mass slaughter of the insurgents.

Thus the uprising survived as a result of a fight between two anti-people forces, the NATO imperialists and the Qaddafi regime. Meanwhile the imperialists didn't want to unduly

strengthen the democratic movement; they provided support to the uprising in a way that they hoped would make it dependent on themselves, on their execution and interpretation of a no-fly zone, and their dribbling out of funds and supplies. The NATO countries sought to have a say in the political decisions of the uprising, even promoting the idea of a compromise settlement between the regime and the uprising. Only after the struggle had stretched on for months did various countries start to recognize the democratic movement as the legitimate government of Libya, although even now there is still some talk of seeking a compromise solution.

The NATO intervention has earned the legitimate hatred of activists. They don't want to see another imperialist war; they don't want to see big powers bombing North African and Middle Eastern countries; and they don't want to see the outside powers calling the shots in Libya. The intervention also reinforces outside influence on the nature of the government to come. It will have long-lasting negative effects.

At the same time, most activists didn't want to see Qaddafi wade through pools of blood to stay in power. Many activists denounced both the intervention and the Qaddafi regime, but usually in the belief that the democratic movement could have survived without the intervention.

But, in fact, the uprising wouldn't have survived. The Qaddafi regime was on the verge of re-establishing control by slaughtering an opposition that had little military knowledge or organization, and couldn't defend itself against heavy weapons. The regime was flush with tanks, aircraft, rockets, and other weapons bought from the imperialist powers of the East and West with its oil money, and its army had training and military experience.

Our organization, the Communist Voice Organization, has denounced the imperialist motives of the intervention, and the dangers it poses to the Libyan struggle. But we continue to support the Libyan uprising: the main and determining aspect of the situation in Libya is still the struggle between the Qaddafi dictatorship and the masses who rose up against it. It is this which determines the character of what's going on. International solidarity should center on support for the working masses who are in struggle, and on the need for an independent workers' trend inside the overall struggle. It's legitimate for an uprising to survive by making use of contradictions between reactionaries, but this does not mean that those who support the uprising have to prettify the imperialist powers who are engaged in the intervention. On the contrary, the more imperialist motives and methods are exposed and denounced, the more solidarity can be given to the democratic movement. This also does the most, as far as is possible from the outside, to help puncture pro-imperialist sentiments in the Libyan movement due to the intervention.

But it doesn't help puncture illusions in the imperialists if the left groups outside Libya call for military support for the regime against the intervention.<sup>21</sup> Yet this is precisely what various

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<sup>20</sup>See *Weekly Worker*, paper of the Communist Party of Great Britain, issue #695, Nov 1, 2007, "In the footsteps of WRP? The pro-Iran apologetics at the Stop the War conference brought back unsavoury memories of Gerry Healy's 'Libyan gold'. James Turley examines the history." In the mid-1980s, in connection with the internal crisis and split in the WRP, the International Commission of the Fourth International investigated, among other things, the connections of the WRP with various Arab regimes, the sums received, and the services rendered. The resulting confidential report, "The Interim Report of the International Committee Commission, December 16 1985", was leaked, and excerpts from it can be found at a number of internet locations, such as <http://libcom.org/library/revolution-betrayed-wrp-iraq>. According to the report, the WRP also received sums from such oil emirates as Qatar, Kuwait, and Abu Dhabi. But Libya seems to have supplied far and away the most funds.

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<sup>21</sup> Some groups have gone even further, parroting the lies of the Qaddafi regime about the democratic movement, just as the lies of the Syrian regime about the democratic movement are parroted by WWP, (continued...)

Trotskyist groups and others have done, either denouncing the democratic movement or pretending that there are two entirely separate military struggles going on in Libya: the uprising against Qaddafi, and the outside intervention against Qaddafi.

### Trotskyist “military support” for Qaddafi

Indeed, various groups hold that the movement in Libya is essentially different from the rest of the Arab Spring. From before the beginning of the bombing, the Trotskyist Spartacist League saw nothing of value in the uprising against Qaddafi. It’s not that it likes Qaddafi. It writes that “There is no doubt that Qaddafi is a butcher of his ‘own’ citizens” and “not least of the crimes of the Qaddafi regime has been its racist treatment of black African migrant workers, who are subjected to arbitrary arrest and deportation—and at times outright pogromist attacks—while being used as scapegoats for unemployment and other ills.” But the opposition is just as bad in its eyes, as the “leadership of the anti-Qaddafi opposition includes Islamists, tribal leaders, former generals of Qaddafi’s army and former officials of his blood-soaked regime”. It concludes that “Marxists presently have no side in this conflict.”<sup>22</sup>

It’s true that the masses rising up against Qaddafi include many people with Islamist ideas, illusions in imperialism, illusions in Western economics, or attachment to tribal leaders. And it’s true that the crisis in Libya was so deep that the regime’s officialdom itself split. But that’s similar to what has been happening in Egypt and Tunisia. There too, the masses are under the influence of many diverse political trends and class stands, while splits appeared in the Egyptian and Tunisian regimes.

The problem facing the Spartacist League is that it could pretend that working-class revolution is imminent in Egypt and Tunisia, but not in Libya.<sup>23</sup> Thus, according to the

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<sup>21</sup>(...continued)

*Monthly Review Zine*, etc.

<sup>22</sup>*Workers Vanguard*, published by the Spartacist League, No. 976, 18 March 2011, “Imperialists Hands off Libya!”, article dated March 15, <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/976/libya.html>.

<sup>23</sup>Thus *Workers Vanguard* #973, February 4, 2011, writes that, with respect to Egypt and Tunisia, the democratic aspirations “can be realized through the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat”. (See “Tunisia, Egypt, and the Permanent Revolution”, <http://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/973/qotw.html>). And then *Workers Vanguard* #974, February 18, 2011 fleshed this out further by giving a call for a workers and peasants government in Egypt, saying that “**Today, there is a palpable basis** to advance a perspective of building broader organizations of the working class. ... The emergence of such organizations, culminating in workers councils, would pose the question of which class rules society. Acting as a pivot around which millions of toilers are united in their struggles against the exploiters, workers councils, such as the Soviets which arose during the Russian revolution, **would be organs of dual power, vying for power with the bourgeoisie.**” (emphasis added) in an article with the long title: “Mass Upheaval Topples Hated Mubarak/Egypt: Military Takeover Props Up Capitalist (continued...)”

Trotskyist theory of “permanent revolution” that SL upholds, it can only take a scornful attitude to the merely democratic struggle in Libya. It doesn’t matter that the masses are fighting a notorious tyranny.

Worse yet, the Spartacist League isn’t simply neutral, but stands for “military defense” of the Qaddafi regime. It calls this the defense “of Libya”, but what it is referring to is defense of Qaddafi. So just as it called for the defense of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf wars, it is calling for the defense of Qaddafi today.<sup>24</sup> However, according to the SL, **military** support has nothing whatsoever to do with **political** support. In their mind, they are “giving no support to Qaddafi’s capitalist regime” when they support its military efforts. If this were true, it would mean that to vote for an oppressive regime would be political support, and forbidden, but to kill for such a regime is an entirely different matter, since it is merely military support. And in practice, the SL doesn’t even try to show how one can give military support to Qaddafi against the intervention without also giving military support to his campaign to crush the democratic movement. But since they don’t give a damn about the Libyan people rising against tyranny, why should they care?

### Vacillating stands

Some other Trotskyist groups aren’t as willing to write off the entire Libyan uprising, but they have trouble figuring out how to combine their military support for Qaddafi with a bit of sympathy for the insurgency against Qaddafi. Thus the *Spark*’s article “Libya: Stop the Western Imperialist Intervention!” vacillates in its attitude to the opposition.<sup>25</sup> At the end, it finally mentions that “proletarian revolutionary militants want Qaddafi to fall”, but earlier it describes the civil war between Qaddafi and the democratic uprising as “two factions competing to rule Libya”. It’s doesn’t demand support for the insurgents, but only an end to the NATO intervention.

But didn’t the democratic movement survive because it took advantage of the fight between two former friends: the NATO imperialists and the Qaddafi regime? The article hems and haws. In some places, it seems to admit that Qaddafi would otherwise have crushed the insurgency. But it’s unwill-

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<sup>23</sup>(...continued)

Rule/For a Revolutionary Workers Party! For a Workers and Peasants Government!” (<http://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/974/egypt.html>). *Workers Vanguard* also called for a workers’ and peasants’ government in Tunisia: see the long elaboration of this in the article “For Permanent Revolution Across North Africa!/Tunisia: Dictator Flees, Protests Continue/For Revolutionary Workers Parties!” in *Workers Vanguard* #973 (<http://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/973/tunisia.html>).

<sup>24</sup>For material on the debate of the Communist Voice Organization and our predecessor, the Marxist-Leninist Party, USA, with the Spartacist League over whether there should be “military support” for Saddam Hussein, see the articles linked to at [www.communistvoice.org/00DefendIraq.html](http://www.communistvoice.org/00DefendIraq.html).

<sup>25</sup> *Class Struggle*, issue #70, May-June 2011, pp. 24-27.

ing to say outright that the people should have let themselves be slaughtered rather than survive by making use of the contradiction between two reactionaries, the US/NATO imperialists and the Qaddafi regime. But that's one way the article can be read.

But it tries to avoid being explicit. Instead it presents what is going on as determined mainly by the intervention, not by the mass uprising against Qaddafi. It compares the situation to what happened in Iraq and Afghanistan, where "imperialist intervention resulted in a drastic aggravation of the situation of the population".

But it also claims that the insurgents turned against the bombing of Qaddafi's forces, saying that their "relief was short-lived, due to the way the military operation developed." And it states that, "in the short or in the long run", the intervention can only make things worse. Some readers might take all this to mean that the insurgency could have survived, and even done better than it did, if it hadn't been for the intervention. That isn't true, nor is it true that the insurgents turned against the intervention. If we want to deal with these facts, and help undermine imperialism's influence in Iraq, we can't close our eyes to them.

The article goes on to say that "And the more time goes by, the more the fraction of the Libyan population that had expectations might realize that imperialist support is not free." Yes indeed, the intervention will undoubtedly give rise to frictions with imperialism in the future. It's not as if the intervention could ensure the eternal loyalty of the Libyan people to imperialism, or even their agreement with its current plans. But one often gets the feeling that this is what the *Spark* and other Trotskyists fear. When it comes right down to it, they don't have faith in the working masses and their ability to get organized and rise in struggle. Instead they worry that the Libyan masses will be tied to imperialism forever because of the intervention, and presumably feel that if there hadn't been an intervention, then the resulting massacre in Benghazi and crushing of the democratic uprising, no matter how regrettable, would somehow have left Libyans with more of an anti-imperialist consciousness. They don't realize that it is the broader and freer development of political life and the class struggle that will eventually break illusions in imperialism.

Now, if the cause of the Libyan masses should be abandoned, on the grounds that imperialism is intervening, then what does this mean about the other struggles in the Arab Spring? Is there a single country in the Middle East and North Africa where imperialism doesn't intervene, first on one side and then on the other? As a matter of fact, imperialism has intervened, albeit in less blatant ways, elsewhere in the Arab Spring. According to the *Spark*'s article itself, "Last January when demonstrations against the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia intensified, the imperialist leaders — in particular of the U.S. — were content to discreetly advise the dictator to step down. The leaders of the Tunisian army were also advised not to involve themselves too much in the repression, which was carried out mainly by the police forces. Thus, after

Ben Ali's departure, the heads of the army could assert that the army had remained at the service of the people, and learn on this credit to become the true arbiters of the 'democratic transition,' due to take the place of the fallen regime.

"In taking their distance early from a discredited dictator, the U.S. leaders appeared to be in favor of a broader democracy in Tunisia, which was outrageously hypocritical — the U.S. had supported Ben Ali almost to the end."<sup>26</sup>

Thus US imperialism intervened in Tunisia, and, as a matter of fact, hasn't stopped intervening. It is trying to prop up the forces it prefers in the post-Ben Ali governments. But does this mean that the Tunisian movement should have been denounced? Does it mean that one should have defended the Ben Ali government against US and European pressure? No, no, a thousand times no! To call such actions defense of Tunisia against imperialism would have been hypocritical. It would have been just as cynical and outrageous as the imperialist claims to support democracy that *Spark* refutes.

*Spark* raises the issue of whether the army can succeed in becoming the arbiter of Tunisian life. The circumstances that will determine whether this happens are the political trends among the working class and the movement as a whole, the extent to which the working masses adopt political stands truly independent of the local bourgeoisie, and the strength of the exploiting classes. The Tunisian movement is not presently revolutionary or anti-imperialist, and it will split into different class and political fragments. But the masses are coming, however slowly and painfully, into political life. These factors have to be judged carefully. But the article looks only at imperialism's role in Tunisia, and leaves out assessments of the nature and strength of the mass movement. And just as the article overlooks the mass struggle in Tunisia, it brushes it aside in Libya as well.

And it's not just Tunisia and Libya where imperialism intervenes. The *Spark* points out that "Essentially, the same maneuver took place in Egypt, when demonstrations started to grow against the Mubarak regime." And indeed, it's true that the US and other reactionary powers, such as Saudi Arabia, are massively intervening in Egypt to prop up the military and other reactionary forces, funneling money to the military, etc.

Similarly, imperialist intervention is taking place in all the countries of the Arab Spring. For example, US imperialism seeks to influence the opposition in Bahrain and Yemen, just as it does in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. But this is not a legitimate reason to abandon support for the democratic movement. It is, instead, a reason to pay attention to the class and political divisions in the democratic movement, to support the development of an independent working-class trend within the movement, and to realize the long struggle that lies ahead even after repressive regimes fall.

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<sup>26</sup>*Class Struggle*, p. 24.

## LRP's "military support" for both sides

Another example of a vacillating stand comes from the League for the Revolutionary Party in a rather incoherent article entitled "Down with the Imperialist Intervention in Libya!" in issue #84, Spring 2011, of *Proletarian Revolution*. It admits that "The rebellion in Libya had originally broken out as part of the broad upsurge of popular struggle against the region's rulers." But it holds that as there is now a NATO intervention, "imperialism represents the biggest and most immediate threat to the masses of Libya and the region." So it withdraws its support for the uprising, and instead demands that everyone should take the stand of "opposing all steps toward the seizure of power by forces like the TNC" [Transitional National Council — the present leadership of the uprising], on the grounds that the TNC called for the intervention.

This would seem to mean that the LRP supports Qaddafi's crushing the uprising and regaining control over Libya. However, the LRP also calls for opposing Qaddafi's attacks on the "masses" in the uprising, although not necessarily Qaddafi's attacks on the insurgent "fighters". In this half-hearted and incomprehensible way, it wants to support the masses without supporting the TNC. Meanwhile, it holds that "military support" should be given to Qaddafi against the intervention and, presumably, against the TNC. Thus, if there were Trotskyists in Libya, they are commanded to fight first on one side of the civil war (against Qaddafi); and then, after the start of the intervention, on the other ("military defense" for Qaddafi); and finally, after due consideration, on both sides simultaneously (for Qaddafi against the TNC's fighters, but also alongside the masses fighting against Qaddafi). No wonder the article ends up admitting that it can't quite figure out how this would work out in practice.

Let's look at this more closely. The LRP admits that, prior to the intervention, the uprising was a just struggle against tyranny. But once the intervention started, it concludes that one must "stand for the defense of Libya, without giving one ounce of political support to Qaddafi and his regime." Here again, as for the Spartacists, the term "defense of Libya" is used to mean *military* support for the Qaddafi regime; otherwise, the LRP wouldn't have to immediately disassociate its military support *for Libya* from even a single ounce of political support *for Qaddafi and his regime*.

In fact, the LRP is referring to their traditional formula, "military but no political support", and they have a footnote to an article by Sy Landy promoting that slogan. But they just can't quite get themselves to say "for Qaddafi", so they say "for Libya". The slogan "defend Qaddafi" just sticks in their throat. This is their blush of shame. When they agitate about various wars, they talk about support for, say, Libya, Argentina, or Iraq, but when they explain their slogans theoretically, they usually admit that they are supporting the dictators involved: they talk of "military support" to "the bloodthirsty General Galtieri of Argentina against the British imperialists, and to the criminal Saddam Hussein against U.S./U.N. imper-

ialism — to name only a handful of enemies of the working class who for a historical moment were forced to fight on the right side."<sup>27</sup> And in the same way, they imagine that today Qaddafi, like Galtieri and Saddam Hussein, has been "forced to fight on the right side" and should be supported.

But is Qaddafi "on the right side" in the present conflict? The LRP admits that he is a dictator, and he not only oppresses the Libyan people but is opposed to all the democratic struggles in the region: "Qaddafi has expressed his hostility to the Arab struggle for democracy from the beginning." But the LRP suggests that he is on the right side anyway, because he is supposedly opposing imperialism. And yet they admit that he has close ties with Western imperialism, and write that "in recent years they [the imperialists] had warmly embraced his dictatorship in return for his opening up Libya's oil resources and overall economy to greater exploitation, repressing Islamist political forces and rounding up African immigrants into concentration camps to prevent them crossing the Mediterranean into Europe." Indeed, he appeals to the Western imperialists by reminding them that he was, until a few months ago, in a common front with them; LRP points out that "when protests began in Libya against his own dictatorship, Qaddafi spoke out in an attempt to remind the imperialists of his loyalty to them as 'an important partner in fighting al Qaeda.' He appealed to the European imperialists' racist hostility to immigrants,... Finally, when the imperialists began complaining about Qaddafi's massacre of rebels, he repeated his assertion that the rebels were nothing but armed supporters of al Qaeda and favorably compared his attacks on rebel-held cities to Israel's monstrous bombing of Gaza in 2009".<sup>28</sup> So much for Qaddafi's vaunted anti-imperialism.

The LRP article does say that, even now, with the intervention proceeding, it's wrong for the Qaddafi regime to attack the masses. Mind you, it's supposed to be OK for him to attack the uprising, as it is led by the TNC, but he should keep his hands off the masses who support the uprising. Just try to figure out how to make this distinction in practice! But the LRP says that it is possible for activists, while giving military support to Qaddafi, to "stand for the defense of the masses against their most immediate threats. In cases where Qaddafi's forces were attacking the masses, revolutionaries would look to fight alongside all those resisting them."<sup>29</sup>

But how exactly does one give military support to the Qaddafi regime, which supposedly is fighting on "the right side", while supporting the masses who are, in fact, fighting Qaddafi's regime and its army? Perhaps the LRP believes that the units of the Qaddafi armed forces are divided into those righteously fighting the intervention and those viciously fighting the masses, and that one can ensure that military supplies

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<sup>27</sup>*Proletarian Revolution* #59 (Summer 1999), Sy Landy, "Self-Determination and Military Defense: The Marxist Method", <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/landy/1999/xx/military.htm>.

<sup>28</sup>*PR* #84, Spring 2011, pp. 13-4.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

sent to the Qaddafi regime are only used by the units fighting the intervention? And, by the way, LRP's "military support" for Qaddafi really does mean supporting the provision of supplies, if supplies are available, or enhancing the military efficiency of Qaddafi's troops, if that is possible. It is only the lack of resources that turns LRP's "military support" into merely a slogan. The late LRP theorist Sy Landy made this perfectly clear, writing that "It may be that for lack of resources we can offer no actual military or technical support. Then the slogan becomes a propaganda statement, a means to begin to convince enough workers of our method so that in the future more tangible offers of military assistance will be possible."<sup>30</sup>

But in any case, what does fighting the intervention mean for the Qaddafi regime, other than slaughtering the opposition? Has the LRP listened to Qaddafi's speeches, or paid attention to what his troops are doing? Well, it turns out that while LRP doesn't try to distinguish between the units of Qaddafi's military, that being too much nonsense even for it, it does try to distinguish among the units of the popular uprising, only being willing to support certain units, and at certain times. It writes that "*when* Qaddafi forces are attacking rebel-held towns in order to crush *not just the fighters* at this point, *but the masses* in these areas, a bloc with the anti-Qaddafi forces to defend the masses is still *very likely* necessary."<sup>31</sup> Geez, even in this case LRP isn't completely sure whether it is right to defend the masses — it's just "very likely".

And how long will such a "bloc with the anti-Qaddafi forces" last — only for the hours during which the shells are falling? And what happens when the masses are not being attacked by Qaddafi's forces, but are themselves attacking Qaddafi-held areas? Presumably LRP will then turn on the masses and help Qaddafi's forces slaughter them.

So the LRP is drawing a distinction between when Qaddafi's forces merely attack "the fighters", and when they attack "the masses". Does this boil down to the issue of which side is doing the attacking? What if the uprising attacks a regime-controlled village where the masses are being suppressed by the Qaddafi forces, on which side would LRP fight then? And what about Tripoli, where the regime could only suppress anti-Qaddafi demonstrations by shooting at them? Would LRP have a "bloc with the anti-Qaddafi forces" to liberate Tripoli? Or with the Qaddafi forces to defend Tripoli from the uprising? Or imagine that it could defend the masses in Tripoli while leaving the city under Qaddafi's authority?

The LRP doesn't even try to figure these questions out. Instead of showing what its strategy means concretely, it resorts to mumbling: "It is impossible to paint the details of such hypothetical scenarios from afar." Really? It's only a "hypothetical scenario" that a civil war is going on? It's only a "hypothetical scenario" that Qaddafi's forces were attacking the masses in city after city, as well as having crushed demonstrations in Tripoli by drowning them in blood?

It's an unpleasant reality that the democratic movement in Libya was saved, for the time being, by a NATO intervention. NATO's involvement will no doubt have long-lasting bad effects. But this is just one of many obstacles to the class struggle, and revolutionary work means dealing with all the difficult conditions facing the masses. Yet LRP can't figure out how to handle this situation. So it fantasizes that it can prop up Qaddafi's military strength so he can fight the intervention and the TNC and stay in power, while counterbalancing it by occasionally supporting the masses in this or that battle against Qaddafi's forces.

The LRP's equivocations and vacillations arise from the its loyalty to a theoretical framework that is completely inadequate to deal with the actual situation. According to the theory of "permanent revolution", LRP can only support the masses in a basically socialist movement, but the uprising in Libya, as elsewhere in the Arab Spring, is a democratic movement. However, like other Trotskyists, LRP makes an exception for what it regards as anti-imperialist struggles. It can support an anti-imperialist struggle even if it isn't part of a socialist movement. But in this case, it separates the idea of anti-imperialism from any relationship to what's going on among the masses. So it can't distinguish an actual anti-imperialist movement from any fight that develops between Western imperialism and even the most reactionary, pro-imperialist governments.

The only way to build up a force that can really fight imperialism is to support the development of an independent movement of the working masses. The Arab Spring is not a revolutionary or anti-imperialist or even anti-neo-liberal movement, but it is shaking the old tyrannies. As far as this is successful, it will bring larger masses of people into political life. The immediate results of the democratic uprisings, even if they are successful, will be quite modest. But the fall of the old tyrannies will eventually contribute to a real movement against imperialism; backing the old tyrannies, whether through "military support" or outright apology, not only betrays the working people, but keeps the old bulwarks of imperialist domination in place. □

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<sup>30</sup>Sy Landy, *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*PR* #84, p. 14, emphasis added.

# Privatization in the name of “socialism”

## Over a million jobs cut as Cuban state-capitalism imposes a new wave of market reforms on the workers

by Mark Williams

*The following article is a speech, edited for publication, that was originally given at the “Detroit Workers’ Voice” Discussion Group meeting on May 15, 2011. It discusses the dramatic changes in Cuba that were ratified at the Sixth Congress of the Cuban “Communist” Party, April 16-19th, 2011.*

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In this *Detroit Workers’ Voice* Discussion Group meeting we will discuss Cuba and the recent economic changes and austerity measures there. The *Detroit Workers’ Voice* leaflets and this discussion group have been created by supporters of the Communist Voice Organization, which upholds anti-revisionist communism. Naturally, we hope our views are taken up by other workers and activists. But this discussion group is not open merely to those who agree with all we have to say. We hope these discussions provide a forum for workers to speak up, learn, and give their opinions on how to advance the workers’ cause.

Solidarity with the Cuban working masses requires that workers here oppose the efforts of US imperialism to bully and blockade Cuba. Obama continues the economic embargo of past presidents since the 1959 revolution toppled the hated US-backed Batista dictatorship. Thus continues the arrogance of Republican and Democratic administrations. First US imperialism tried to strangle the revolution with the Bay of Pigs invasion and now hopes to economically deprive it.

But solidarity with the Cuban workers also requires opposition to the Cuban government and the social system it has overseen. While Raul Castro, who has replaced his brother Fidel as the leader of the Cuban bureaucracy, still claims to be “defending socialism”, this road to “socialism” has long been a myth. It’s not that they’ve simply hit some unfortunate setbacks while striving to bring about socialism. It’s that they long ago consolidated a new form of oppressive state-capitalist society that’s now more and more heading to market capitalism. That’s why just as the capitalists of Europe, the US and elsewhere are pounding the masses with brutal austerity measures, so is the Cuban government.

### The Cuban “socialist” leaders unleash capitalist austerity measures

Indeed, the Cuban regime is taking a backseat to no one when it comes to austerity. The most stunning measure was the decision to eventually cut over a million jobs in the state sector. Keep in mind, the entire workforce of Cuba is about 5.5 million, with about 85% employed by the state. Indeed already by the end of March, about half a million state jobs were scheduled for elimination.

Raul Castro took no pains to conceal his disdain of the Cuban worker. This past August he announced that “We have to permanently erase the notion that Cuba is the only country in the world where people can live without working.” And he ranted against “inflated payrolls in nearly every field of national life” and “wages that have no connection to results”. He emphasized the need for “suppressing the paternalistic approaches that discourage the need to work”. As it turns out with every capitalist, so it turns out for Raul: when the economy tanks, turn on the workers.

Why, to listen to this, one would think the Cuban worker had it easy. In fact, merely procuring enough food and the simplest necessities has long been a monumental struggle for the Cuban worker no matter how hard he or she worked. Much of the population is forced to rely on the black market to get basic goods they need. No doubt such a miserable return for their work hardly inspires the workers’ productivity, too. To the extent that some workers were placed in fictitious jobs by the Cuban government, this was not because the workers were too lazy to work real jobs, but because such jobs did not exist. That policy was more or less a way for the Cuban rulers to cover up the unemployment that existed in the state-capitalist economy. But the fake “socialist” leaders of Cuba offer nothing to solve this problem but further ruination of the workers. They seek to inspire productivity in classic capitalist fashion, by mass layoffs and the threat of destitution.

In line with tirades against “paternalistic” or “egalitarian” treatment of the workers, the Cuban authorities have come out with big cuts in the social programs. These social programs have been in tatters for quite a while, but have at least kept the Cuban workers from utter destitution or starvation. Well, it’s a new day. For all of society, the plan, according to a draft of the “Economic and Social Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution” of the pseudo-communist party, is “the orderly elimination of the ration book system as a form of distribution that is regulated, egalitarian and subsidized” (#162).<sup>1</sup> The ration book was a big

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<sup>1</sup>(#162) is the number of the policy guideline calling for eliminating the ration book in the first draft of the Cuban Communist Party document *Economic and Social Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution*. In the text above, wherever a number appears between (continued...)

part of the social safety net that guaranteed a certain, if very limited, amount of basic food and other items.

And what awaits the new army of unemployed? Unemployment benefits will be cut after a few weeks. (Six weeks says Marc Frank, a long-time apologist of the Cuban rulers.) After that, according to the official pro-government Cuban trade union center, the unemployed are supposed to largely wind up as “self-employed” or rent land from the state for farming. What does self-employed mean in reality? That a million laid off workers will magically become well-off businesspeople? No. It means a giant army of unemployed workers will be forced into a desperate struggle for survival. At best, it means converting workers who had some stable income and benefits into petty entrepreneurs with no stability, hoping to keep their tiny ventures afloat.

Of course the government admits that a lot of those ventures will fail, and undoubtedly, such petty businesses always do. In fact, what will pass as “self-employment” will, for many, likely be little more than hustling in the streets and trying to get an odd job here or there. Even assuming the best outcome, what will likely happen is what always happens with small peasant production and small enterprise. A relative handful will get ahead and will become real capitalists, hiring (and exploiting) those whose ventures fail. So the basis for a more expanded private capitalism is created as the answer to the economic woes of the state sector. And the split of the masses into workers and bosses becomes more commonplace. Indeed, laws forbidding these types of enterprises from hiring outside their own family are being abolished.

Some analysts think that the unemployment may be less than imagined. Why? They think a number of the state enterprises will be privatized, and the privatized enterprises will absorb back some of those who were tossed out of the former state enterprise. That’s possible.

## Cuban state enterprises evolving into private business

This raises the question of how the state economy operates overall. For many years, the Cuban regime has allowed certain state property to be converted into private businesses legally owned by a section of the elite. The new economic measures pave the way to greatly expand this process. Moreover, even if the majority of the economy remains state property, the enterprises themselves will more and more run much like private businesses do in “normal” capitalism.

In fact, for decades Cuba state enterprises have actually adopted many of the basic features of capitalist enterprises. After getting underway with government assistance, enterprises were

largely “self-financed”. Since each firm had to rely on its own resources, they behaved according to their own financial needs, no matter what the centralized state plan said. State plans were rarely fulfilled, and gradually the plans themselves simply adapted themselves more and more to the prevailing anarchy actually going on within the state sector. This sort of state-capitalist economy has been the heart of the Cuban economy since the 1970s, and on this basis grew the new state-capitalist class structure, with well-off and privileged bureaucrats and managers on one side, and impoverished workers on the other.

Side by side with the failures of the state economy, the black market grew, along with more experiments in private production and sales. The increasing reliance on private capitalism zoomed with the collapse of the state-capitalist Soviet Union, which the Cuban economy was dependent on. This included a big push to bring in foreign capitalist businesses, which today play a significant role in key sectors of the Cuban economy.

While outright private and foreign capitalist enterprise has grown, the state economy still remained dominant. But the conversion of state property into private property and the incorporation of “free market” practices by the state economy as a whole has been vigorously pursued by the Cuban leadership.

Present Cuban leader Raul Castro and the ruling bureaucracy has spent the better part of two decades pushing for privatization reforms of the type reflected in the economic program announced over the past months. To get some idea, one can look at the measures described in the Cuban party’s official document called *Economic and Social Policy Guideline for the Party and the Revolution*. This document lists over 290 measures on all facets of Cuban society, but here we will confine ourselves to the section called “The Economic Management Model”.

The essence of the reforms is scaling back state financing of the Cuban economy and letting each enterprise sink or swim like private capitalist businesses. The document declares there should be a big reduction in enterprises getting government funding. It states that while health care and education will remain government funded, “the number of budgeted entities will be reduced to the minimum” and calls for “the maximization of saving on personnel and for the state budget with regard to material and financial resources.” (#31) Leaving aside the question that government support for health and education has also been deteriorating, this indicates that the state sector is to be greatly reduced. Indeed, this is the rationale for cutting the jobs of around 20% of the total Cuban workforce.

And this theme of cutting state-financed enterprises is emphasized again and again. The document states that “Budgeted entities to provide productive services or for the production of goods will not be created. Budgeted entities that can finance their costs from their own incomes will become self-financing . . . or they will be converted into enterprises.” (#32) “Self-financing” means, even if you are still supposed to be a state enterprise, you’re essentially operating like a private enterprise. As to the difference between “self-financing” entities and entities converted into enterprises, this latter entity (“enterprises”) may in this context refer to state property converted into legal private forms. But this is not spelled out in the document. In any case, the Cuban policy is certainly to greatly expand the legal private business sector. And when the document says budgeted entities will not be created for regular goods and services, this means that

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

parentheses, it is the number of a policy guideline in that document.

This document served as the basis for the policies adopted at the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Cuban party in April 2011. The English translation used here is by Marce Cameron, of the Australian-Cuba Friendship Association. Cameron is a supporter of the Cuban regime and claims the document refutes the idea of the restoration of capitalism in Cuba. Cameron’s translation was web-posted at: <http://walterlippmann.com/pcc-economic-and-social-policy-guidelines-2010.pdf>.



either the state sector will shrink to a large degree, or what's called the state economy will be stripped of its state funding. Probably a combination of both will go on.

These economic reforms do not end the "self-financing" state-capitalism system. But they show how state ownership in Cuba adopts basic capitalist features and is evolving more to "normal" capitalism. The document states that "control over enterprise management will be based principally on economic-financial mechanisms, in place of administrative mechanisms, removing the burden of controls on enterprise activity". (#14) This means each enterprise has more freedom to do what it wants in its own economic self-interest without government interference. It's further stated that "enterprises as a rule will not receive budgetary financing to produce good and services." (#17) So each enterprise will operate as an independent entity whose existence depends on its own resources, that is to say, whether it can turn a profit or not. Lest there be any doubt, the document says that enterprises that have sustained financial losses will be liquidated. (#16) By the same take token, profitable enterprises can use their profits as they see fit for future development. (#18) Further, enterprises can "independently decide the number of workers on their payroll" (#22) and can set their own wages, whether in the form of bonuses or slashing them if that's what's needed to make them profitable (#18 and #19).

So we have enterprises that sink or swim according to their own financial fortunes and whether they can turn a profit or not. We have enterprises that can hire and fire workers as they chose. We have each enterprise altering the wages of their workers to suit each particular management's needs. In short, we have all the fundamental features of capitalist enterprises. And since each enterprise is placed in the position to turn profits or die, they are effectively placed in competition with one another, and the anarchy of production found in all capitalist countries soars, creating the grounds for further economic crises. With such a state structure, or rapidly shrinking state structure, there can be no real societal economic planning no matter what hoped-for results some state planning body draws up and no matter how many phrases about building socialism abound.

This has been the trajectory of the Cuban economy for many decades. Whereas a society in transition to socialism would be overcoming each part of the economy operating in independent and anarchic ways, the Cuban economy has gone in the opposite direction. Real social control by the masses over the economy has never existed, and now even the pretense of overall planning is fading into the sunset.

### **Keeping the old bureaucracy in charge, while transitioning to the market economy**

The recent bombshell of austerity measures ushered in under Raul Castro has been a long time in the making. Raul wanted to bring more market capitalist methods into the Cuban economy. But he feared this process might threaten the existence of the present ruling bureaucracy itself, such as happened in the former Soviet Union and other phony socialist countries. Raul made no secret of his fondness for the Chinese government's method of transition to market capitalism, where the process would take place under the tyranny of the phony communist leadership. To

do this, Raul and like-minded Cuban bureaucrats including Fidel, began having the Cuban economy step-wise placed largely under the control of armed forces officers. Raul had headed the armed forces ministry since the early days following the revolution before he assumed the duties of head of state and the party in 2006 when Fidel fell ill. Placing the army in control of the economy assured that Raul could put his closest associates in charge of the economic transition and shove out any rival bureaucrats with disagreements on the pace and methods of capitalist reforms. And placing the armed forces officers into economic management positions meant the officers could get much better salaries and perks, including, in some cases, direct ties to foreign capitalists who were entering the Cuban economy. In other words, loyalty was assured in part by bribing the military hierarchy.

### **Cuban armed forces officers become capitalist-trained economic managers**

This process started in the late 1980s. Raul began to send high-ranking officers to Western Europe. There they studied the newest business practices. Studying Marxist economics was not part of the course. Rather, they studied the likes of the famous capitalist management consultant Peter Drucker. Drucker was famous in capitalist circles for advocating widescale outsourcing of jobs as well as various bankrupt labor-management cooperation schemes to create the illusion that workers and management had common goals. If you visit the Drucker Institute web site, you will find how they admire such things as the present sellout UAW leader Bob King's proposals that the UAW commit to getting along with management rather than concentrating so much on defending the workers. Of course, such labor-management cooperation has been a disaster for auto workers, resulting in drastic concession like cutting future workers' wages in half. Other capitalist management training materials for the Cuban officers came from the IMF and the World Bank, the notorious tools of imperialism which impose austerity measures on country after country. And the training also included US economists sponsored by the Ford Foundation and other US institutions.

The new economic methods associated with this training were called the SPE (sistema de perfeccionamiento empresarial) or "business improvement system." The army takeover, while designed to keep the old-guard rulers in charge, was not designed to bring about stronger state control over individual enterprises or convert employees into military regiments. Rather it was about putting into practice the trendy market-capitalist theories. A focus was on eliminating government subsidies, implementing mass lay-offs, basing the enterprises on what would improve profits, and having the economy based on market demands of the moment. Socialist planning under the control of the workers was nowhere in this plan. Even the old-style bureaucratic centralized planning was kicked aside. One writer aptly called the SPE business improvement system "the closest approximation to a capitalist-type of organization within the current conflicting trends and pace of reforms in Cuba" and "a peculiar experience

of privatizing the Cuban state.”<sup>2</sup>

The SPE methods were first implemented over a decade ago within the armed forces sector’s civilian wing. 40% of the civilian workforce, some 27,000 people, were canned. This “success” led to Raul Castro announcing in 1998 the spread of these business methods throughout the economy. About a third of state enterprises were targeted by the year 2000. Ever since, the armed forces have expanded their grip and the SPE model to a vast amount of the economy. By 2003, the military controlled 89% of the export economy and dominated the foreign trade sectors, tourism, civilian machinery repairs and parts and other sectors. Its reach extended also to various goods and services including sugar mills, biotechnology, consumer products, etc.

The spread of the SPE has created the basis for increasing the class differences in Cuba between the workers and the bureaucratic, party and military hierarchy. These class differences are not new, but they are more pronounced than ever, and are embraced as official policy. In the last two decades, state property has been parceled out to various top bureaucrats and officers to run as private enterprises. For example, there are the “sociedades anonimas” which are private companies where the Cuban elite and foreign capitalists are shareholders.<sup>3</sup> These are big players in the tourism industry, for instance, but also branch into other fields. Various other legal types of private Cuban companies that were formerly state property have also come into existence. The former bureaucrat of a state enterprise is becoming a private capitalist.

The spread of privatization and capitalist-oriented entrepreneurs from within the state economy has been the basis for corruption scandals among the Cuban leadership. The government itself occasionally has to prosecute high officials for corruption, but it cannot put the genie back in the bottle. Corruption is widespread. That’s why even a loyal Cuban party commentator, Esteban Morales, recently published an article called “Corruption, the true counter-revolution.” The article by no means questions the basic Cuban system, but it can’t help but note that corruption is rampant everywhere. And that includes the high officials which Morales contends are the main danger to Cuba. He talks of “people in positions of government and state who are girding themselves financially for when the Revolution fails, and others who may have everything almost ready to transfer state-owned assets to private hands, as happened in the old USSR.” He notes this sort of corruption is what led to the recent removal of the head of the Air Force, General Acevedo, and complains that the official Cuban press hasn’t provided an

adequate account of what happened.<sup>4</sup> For this, Morales was expelled from the Cuban party. According to other sources, Acevedo and other airline officials secretly sold space on Cuban planes to transport good for various Latin American companies, pocketing millions of dollars off the books. There are even reports that Acevedo was setting up his own private airline.

### **Imperialist investment and the enrichment of Cuba’s top bureaucrats**

As mentioned above, a mutual-enrichment program exists between foreign capitalist investors in Cuba and Cuban officials. This took off in a big way in the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which the Cuban economy depended on. Today foreign capitalists have a significant hold on important sectors of the economy. Tourism plays a critical role in the economy and foreign firms have been building luxury hotels and golf courses for tourists and the Cuban elite. Foreign firms mine Cuban nickel deposits, which is one of the chief exports. Cuba’s largest citrus grove operation is run by an Israeli capitalist, Rafi Eitan, who happens to have been the European chief of operations for the Israeli Mossad, the terrorist Israeli secret intelligence organization. While domestic enterprises account for the largest part of the economy, foreign investment has increasingly become critical to the Cuban economy. For example, tourism is a major source of hard currency. This hard currency in turn is vital to whether Cubans get enough food since the country’s food supply is largely imported.

All sorts of measures have been taken by the Cuban government to make sure the foreign investments are highly profitable. The Cuban government builds infrastructure for foreign capitalist projects, and it has relaxed the labor codes to entice investors. Recently foreign capital got another treat, with the Cuban regime agreeing to lease state property for foreign capitalist investors for as long as 99 years. Some Canadian developers, who are big players in Cuba’s tourism industry, said this was important to investors who see this as tantamount to “virtually full ownership” and a long-term safeguard to protect big projects from incursions by the Cuban government. Inspired by such measures, two Canadian companies recently agreed on a new joint venture, a fully self-owned business that’s officially part of Cuba’s Ministry of Tourism that will build a \$200 million luxury hotel. While the Cuban workers suffer brutal austerity measures, the Cuban leadership and outside capitalists are busy greasing each others’ palms.

While capitalists from various countries are investing, the unjust US blockade prevents US companies from doing so. This is despite the fact that there is building pressure from US companies to get in on the action. In fact, some US food producers actually do export to Cuba. But while the US economic blockade is an outrage, this hardly means that US investment or other foreign investment is going to be a means to “save socialism” as the Cuban government maintains. No,

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<sup>2</sup>Amuchastegui, Domingo. “FAR: Mastering Reforms.” *Cuba in Transition: Volume 10*. Papers and Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE), Coral Gables, Florida, August 5, 2000. p. 433. Amuchastegui was a political officer in the Cuban armed forces general staff and professor at Cuba’s national defense college. He defected in 1994, and now writes for *CubaNews*, which seeks better relations between the US and Cuba from a bourgeois point of view.

<sup>3</sup>The term “sociedad anonima”, “anonymous company”, is used in various countries for joint-stock companies or corporations.

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<sup>4</sup>[http://progreso-weekly.com/2/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1589:corruption-the-true-counter-revolution&catid=36:in-cuba&Itemid=54](http://progreso-weekly.com/2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1589:corruption-the-true-counter-revolution&catid=36:in-cuba&Itemid=54).

foreign investments in the Cuban context today are merely another route to the transition from state-capitalism to market capitalism. It is not saving the Cuban masses, who are being driven down as never before, but contributing to the widening gap between the top Cuban officials and the impoverished and unemployed workers.

## **The transition to socialism vs. Cuban revisionism**

So far we have tried to give a brief picture of how state-capitalism is transitioning to private capitalism in Cuba. However, when we critique fake communist regimes like Cuba, it's not merely to point out they are exploiters and tyrants and imitate the normal capitalist countries in many ways. We think that exposing such regimes is necessary to salvage a vision of genuine communism, a vision that reflects the outlook of Marx, Engels and Lenin. We stand against the regimes that have revised communism into a state-capitalist nightmare, and contrast their views to what we call anti-revisionist communism.

The American ruling class and their educational system and media constantly drone against communism as synonymous with tyranny, or at best a nice-sounding theory that can never exist. Of course they do this to promote capitalism, to present it as salvation or eternal. But when countries run by self-proclaimed communist parties betray communist ideals, when they clearly have privileged party and state officials lording over workers who can barely scrape by and have no real say in how society is run, this makes the job of the apologists for capitalism that much easier. The phony communist regimes undermine workers entertaining a vision of a revolutionary alternative. And so do left-wing groups that apologize the Cuban regime, that insist that whatever goes on in Cuba, the Cuban rulers must be supported, or that even if there are mistakes, Cuba is still some kind of workers' state or socialist.

The workers' revolution, as envisioned by Marx, Engels and Lenin, involved the workers overthrowing the capitalist system and eliminating the private ownership of the productive resources of society. Instead of the economy being run by capitalists for the purpose of amassing profits, the workers would collectively own and run the economy, both at the enterprise level and on an overall societal basis. The workers' state would not be a state that merely provides some social programs, but can only fulfill its role by drawing workers and other exploited classes into running the affairs of society. This process would take a protracted period of time. That's because the issue is not simply seizing the workplaces from the defeated capitalists, and it takes time for the workers to learn to run society, to learn to shed the habits learned under capitalism. And it takes a protracted period to create the economic conditions that allow workers to have the time and training to run society. Thus, there is an unavoidable period of a transition to socialism, a transition during which the division of society into classes, into exploiters and exploited, breaks down. This transition lays the groundwork for socialism. Only when the socialist order is established can all the ills produced by the capitalist drive for profit fully be overcome and production truly be based on the needs of the masses. With the elimination of class divisions, eventually the need for the state itself, even a workers' state, ceases to exist. Societal control of production would continue, but this would no longer require an apparatus

that represses part of the population, even if, in this case, we're talking about repressing the remnants of the capitalist exploiters.

When we critique the systems that developed in Cuba, or the former Soviet Union or China, it's not because they didn't instantly make the transition to a fully socialist or communist society. Indeed, we recognize that in the period of transition to socialism, various capitalistic features will still have an important influence in the transitional economy. There may be such things as "self-financing" of enterprises for a period of time, as well as commodity exchange and money. But unless these things are overcome, then a new form of capitalism will arise, even if formally the economy is in the hands of the state. The features of capitalism that remain in the transitional economy can be eliminated only to the extent that the workers can bring the economy under their conscious control and insure that the economy is more and more run as a cohesive and collective whole.

The revolutions in Russia, China, Cuba and other countries got rid of the horrible old social orders and brought with them certain progressive changes and social programs. But the revolutionary motion ebbed, and the issue of workers controlling things was shoved to the side. The new political and economic institutions grew separate and apart from the control of the working masses. In these conditions, the lingering features of capitalism were not overcome, but grew, albeit in new forms. Eventually, the new political and economic institutions became, in fact, the property of a new bourgeois elite of economic managers and high party officials. And on this basis, new class antagonisms were created. What happened in these societies was not the gradual overcoming of capitalist leftovers, but the growth of capitalism under a state/party hierarchy, a new type of state-capitalism. And as time passed, the capitalist nature of the state economy became more naked, more room was given to private ownership, and foreign capitalist influence increased. Market capitalism began to grow within the womb of state-capitalism.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 was a great feat. The Batista dictatorship and the dominance of US imperialism were done away with. The Castroite leadership of the revolution initially had wide support of the masses. But it never had a true socialist vision. Within a few years it had hitched its fate to the Soviet Union, where the Stalinist regime long ago transformed the workers' revolution into a state-capitalist tyranny which subsequent Soviet regimes tried to keep alive by adopting more market measures. As mentioned earlier, in the 1970s the Cuban leaders adopted much of the Soviet-style "self-financing" enterprise system which meant enterprises had to act more like private entities than the property of the whole society. Along with this, the disparities in living standards in Cuba grew between the official and managers and the working masses. Not only could high officials legally make much more than the workers, there were all sorts of perks and privileges. For example, the system of official "parallel markets" arose, which became known among the masses as rich people's markets because only the elite could afford the goods there.

Officially, there was a communist party that ruled, but unlike a real communist party, it was not a party of the workers but of the privileged high party and state rulers. Yes, they provided some meaningful social programs, but those programs have been whittled down to the bare bones. More importantly, the workers

never had control of society, they never decided policy, but merely had to accept what the party and its subservient mass organizations ordered. This is not just our opinion but is widely admitted by groups that support the regime as some sort of workers' state. They will say that the workers are consulted about various things, but don't decide anything. In other words, they say Cuba is a workers' state, or a deformed workers' state, while acknowledging the workers aren't really in charge. Some allegedly socialist defenders of Cuba admit that even their own friendly criticisms of certain Cuban policies would get them banned in Cuba. That shows that such apologists for the Cuban rulers can only continue to support them by stripping any revolutionary content from the idea of a workers' state.

But if the workers are not being converted into the rulers of society, there can be no talk of a transition to socialism. Indeed, what we have seen is that rather than various capitalist features being overcome by the growing control of the workers, the exact opposite has taken place. Workers have grown cynical about the fake communist rulers, and the Castro regime is openly lashing out at the workers as lazy bums who need to be beaten down so they will work harder. Fifty years after the revolution, Cuba is transitioning from state-capitalism to market capitalism. The left-wing groups that continue to promote illusions in Cuba may claim that what is happening now is just a temporary retreat. But it's a retreat for over 40 years with no end in sight. The Cuban leaders today have made this clear. The future they see for Cuba is austerity, private capitalist methods, and more reliance on foreign capitalists.

Some may cry foul. They may say we criticize the moves made by the Cuban leaders but don't offer an alternative policy that they should follow that would put them on the socialist road. But from our standpoint, there are not a series of mere policy changes that will turn Cuba into a socialist country. We can no

more recommend reforms to the present Cuban system to make it socialist than we could recommend reforms to the US capitalist system or the Bush or Obama regimes that would produce socialism here. We are not against any reforms if they really help workers in Cuba or the US. But there are no reforms that could bring about socialism. Only a revolution can do that.

That by no means consigns us to a passive stand regarding the Cuban workers. We must always stand against US bullying of Cuba. And our aim in exposing the Cuban revisionist rulers is to encourage the Cuban workers to take up the task of building up real class organization independent of, and opposed to, the Castroite rulers. This is needed to combat the austerity measures and political repression they face as their rulers adopt capitalist market methods. It's needed to expose the roots of the problem in the state-capitalist solutions of the past. And it's needed to build a political party based on anti-revisionist communism which can present to the workers, and eventually guide the workers to, a genuinely socialist future. □

In 1995-98, *Communist Voice* carried a series of articles on how the Castroist system has developed over the years and the different phases the economy has gone through. They show that the present Cuban crisis isn't simply a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its aid to Cuba, but has strong roots in the class contradictions of Cuban state-capitalist society. They also show how the Castroist leadership has dressed up any measures it takes, no matter what impact they have on the workers, and no matter what Cuban workers thought of them, as "socialism". These articles are available at the *CV* website, see <http://www.communistvoice.org/00Cuba.html>.

# State-capitalism or socialism

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What is the nature of the despotic but supposedly socialist regimes, like the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union yesterday and the present-day regimes in Cuba and China? Is it socialism or state-capitalism that forms the basis of the oppressive political systems in various countries that called themselves “communist” but gave no voice to the working class? This issue of *Communist Voice* carries material relevant to this question, which still is one of the central issues in the theoretical crisis in left-wing thought. It deals with the on-going privatization in Cuba, which shows how market fundamentalism is growing in Cuba and with the debate in Ukraine on the nature of the former Soviet Union.

This issue of *CV* also deals with the Arab Spring, and the issue of the nature of the state sector also arises in this connection. It is one of the reasons that various sectors of the supposed anti-imperialist left are skeptical of the mass uprisings in the Arab Spring. They are upset that it is striking regimes which have both a major state sector, such as Libya and Syria, and stronger ties to Russian and Chinese imperialism than to US and European imperialism. These sectors of the left are non-class anti-imperialists, who don't evaluate regimes by their relationship to the masses, but by arbitrary economic and political standards. They unwittingly abandon the standpoint of the class struggle and end up regarding the mass struggle against oppression as simply a plot of this or that section of imperialism. And they don't have faith that, whatever the nature of the regimes that follow the downfall of the tyrants of the Middle East and North Africa, it is the development of mass initiative of the working masses that will eventually radically transform politics in the Middle East and North Africa.

In fact, the question of the nature of state ownership will arise in other ways as well, such as perspectives for the US economy. As the environmental and economic crises deepen, there is a renewed interest in Marxism and what it takes to overcome capitalism. Market fundamentalism, which seems so firmly entrenched, is in crisis. The capitalists are clinging more and more tightly to market fundamentalism as it strangles the masses, yet the time is coming when even the capitalist government will have to move to regulation and a renewal of the state sector. What should the attitude of the working class to the renewed regulation be? Should it be regarded as pro-working class and socialistic in itself? Or should the working class remain vigilant against capitalist management, whether by corporations or the state apparatus run by the capitalists? Should activists prepare the

working class for a fierce struggle over the nature of the renewed regulation and empowered state sector to come, or simply sigh in relief whenever state regulation is strengthened? The attitude towards the state-capitalism of the past in other countries will affect the attitude of activists towards the coming state regulation.

For activists in Ukraine too, the debate among activists in the Ukraine over the nature of the former Soviet Union isn't just an historical question. It already bears on current issues. For example, it affects their evaluation of such things as the nature of those present-day “communist” parties which are descended from the former “Communist” Party of the Soviet Union.

This issue contains the translation into English of an article by the Ukrainian communist activist Yuri Shakhin, thus bringing to readers here an example of the best of the discussion in the Ukrainian left. Shakhin's article is an insightful comment on the discussion which has been going on in the journal *What Is To Be done?*, a journal which uses the name of one of Lenin's famous works. Some of the people in this discussion, such as the participant D. Yakushev, advocate that since the Soviet Union didn't have the exact same form of capitalism as in the West, and it had replaced the former tsarist bourgeoisie, it must have been socialist. They present a glorified picture of what existed in the past. They think that capitalism didn't arrive in the Soviet Union until perestroika under Gorbachev.

Another participant, S.S. Gubanov, denounces the cheery picture of the Soviet Union painted by Yakushev as illusionary and simply repeating Stalinist myths. He sets forward his explanation for why the Soviet economy, while differing from the Western market economies, was not socialist. But his economic reasoning is flawed by his idea that what was wrong with the Soviet economy was that it was not *real* state-capitalism. In his view, actual state-capitalism is well-nigh tantamount to socialism.

Shakhin holds that the system was state-capitalism under both Stalin and his successors who denounced him, such as Khrushchov. He points out problems with Gubanov's reasoning, and stresses the need to make a class evaluation of the Soviet economy.

And this issue of *CV* also contains our letter to Shakhin commenting on the Ukrainian discussion, and pointing out the need to look explicitly at the question of what the transitional economy between capitalism and socialism would look like.

We at *Communist Voice* are anti-revisionist communists. We are dedicated to helping the working class organize a new and stronger class struggle than in the past, and we hold that communism will once again become the banner of the working class, when it rises in revolutionary struggle. But we hold that communism can only play this role when activists repudiate the distorted form of Marxism that is used to justify despotic regimes abroad and subservience to the liberal bourgeoisie here in the US. We are opposed to the parody of Marxism and socialism by the new bourgeoisie that came to power in the Stalinist Soviet Union and in the various state-capitalist countries. Revolutionary Marxism-Leninism, which stands for the mobilization of the

working class and its genuine role in transforming the economy and society, was replaced with the teaching that the state sector is socialist in itself, and that a country can be a “workers state” if the state sector dominates the economy and the old bourgeoisie has been replaced by a new privileged ruling strata of technocrats

and exploiters. A supposedly “benevolent” despotism is not socialism, but another form of capitalism. This distortion of Marxism is advocated by both Stalinists and Trotskyists, and both these revisionist political trends will have to be thrown aside if revolutionary Marxism is to be reborn today. □

# The theory of state capitalism of S. S. Gubanov: A critical analysis

by Yury Shakhin, a Ukrainian communist activist

The theory of state capitalism is very important. This is the dividing line that separates Marxism from Stalinism, and at the same time, it's a necessary component of the Renaissance of Marxism, to ensure its purification from the deforming influence of Stalinism. To date, there are several variants of the theory of state capitalism. Furthermore, not all of them are well developed. This is partly a consequence of the “Soviet” period, which is still not resolved. Marxists, critics of the official Soviet ideology, did not have the ability to freely share their views. As a result, study groups, often individual persons, worked out theories of state capitalism in complete isolation. Each cultivated his views on the matter. Because they were gained through suffering, their supporters were slow after the collapse of the Soviet Union to join a free discussion, let alone adjust their positions. On the other hand, after the collapse of the Soviet Union there was no influential Marxist party in any of the republics. A united organization stimulates discussion, supports the exchange of ideas, aligns the participants' attitudes. But this was not the case. As a result, supporters of the theory of state capitalism further cultivated their systems. Some of them are of undeniable interest and worthy of critical analysis. One of these theories was developed by S. S. Gubanov, a member of the Executive Committee of the Workers' United Front in Russia.

Gubanov's theoretical model is valuable for its primary focus on the economic side of the issue. He proposed the following overview of capitalist development:

“Private capitalism is private-capitalist property, private-capitalist income mainly in the form of profit, and the private-capitalist way by which profit, as such, is appropriated.

“Monopolistic capitalism – much the same, only with a higher, monopolistic form of centralization: property, profit, and appropriation.

“Corporate capitalism raises the level of centralization even higher, developing the branch structure and transforming it across sectors, with greater consolidation of ownership, profit and appropriation.

“State-monopoly capitalism adds further to the corporate one a national standard of centralizing ownership, profit and appropriation.

“Finally, state capitalism establishes nationalized property, nationalized income and a state-wide way to appropriate such income. It economically denies private-capitalist ownership, profit and private-capitalist appropriation (where there is no profit, there cannot also be private appropriation). Without negating profit by means of nationalization of the economic income, state capitalism is not present, then nationalization turns into an empty, purely legal formality, a fiction” (*What is to be Done?*, # 16 (39), p. 1).

The most advanced capitalist countries, according to Gubanov, by the 1960's had risen to the state-corporate stage. But a higher stage was reached in history only in the Soviet Union of the 30-50's. Soviet industry at that time made almost no profit. But a part of the added value created by it was incorporated by the state into the price of retail goods and withdrawn in the form of the turnover tax. From there part of the surplus value returned to the enterprises in the form of grants. Primarily this concerns heavy industry, which during the first five-year plans took a planned loss.

However, he explained further interesting things. Gubanov calls Soviet state capitalism “self-originated”, “superstructural” and “non-economic”. Having considered the Soviet economy, he concluded that it had never even been at the level of corporate capitalism. There never were in the USSR anything like western corporations that unite several industries into single technological chains of manufacture. Enterprises were formally nationalized, but did not know what vertical product integration is. The basic units of the economy always remained separate enterprises. Here is a very important difference of views between S. Gubanov and the theories, well-known in the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States, comprised of most of the former Soviet Republics–*CV*], of the English Marxist T. Cliff. Cliff believed that the Soviet economy operates as a single factory. Gubanov insists that it has not yet come close to this level. This is certainly a more fruitful approach because it allows you to explain the anarchy of production in the USSR.

The question naturally arises: how could the USSR enter a higher stage of capitalism, without an economic basis? For a reply S. Gubanov also uses the definition of state capitalism as superstructural. It was held up and implemented only through the policy of the ruling party. While S. Gubanov does not slip into

illusion, he also directly writes that the Soviet leaders did not understand what they were doing: spreading lies about building socialism while they really were intuitively entering state capitalism from above. "Thus, state-capitalism was supported by the political superstructure, while private-capitalism has stemmed from the economic base" (*What is to be done?*, # 17 (40), p. 2). Gubanov clearly distinguishes between formal and real nationalization and stresses that the first had prevailed in the USSR. Finally, he puts forward a tough diagnosis: "nothing, except for the plan, kept national-economic calculation. Without converting the base (and industrialization and collectivization is not enough, because it would require more interdisciplinary, vertical integration to maximize nationalized capital) the political superstructure, sooner or later, was to come into line with the economic basis, i.e. private-economic calculation" (*What is to be done?*, # 17 (40), p. 3). Because nobody in the leadership of the USSR understood this and they couldn't take the conscious actions recommended by Gubanov, the fate of Soviet society was predetermined. Into the State and party gradually infiltrated the representatives of interests of the private-economic basis, and the Soviet Union came to an end. Here you must specify that for Gubanov it is not a penetration of private capital into authority in the legal sense. He means the growing influence of groups associated with the directors of public companies: in juridical essence public, but in economic essence - private.

Outwardly this theory seems harmonious, but it is not free from contradictions. If the USSR had not reached the economic criteria for state capitalism, as identified by Gubanov, on what grounds can you say that it entered this stage? Indeed, according to Gubanov, the basis of state capitalism — the vertical integration of work and property. If nationalized income, which denies private-capitalist appropriation, had to have been the result of vertical integration, the development of corporations, and state participation in economic life, is that not a reason to think that the USSR was a qualitatively different phenomenon? Finally, the only economic indicator of state capitalism to Gubanov is the turnover tax. Can you, with only a specific tax policy talk, about state capitalism? These issues do not find a convincing answer.

Even worse is the case with the class analysis of the Soviet society. Gubanov has not developed this block very much. He defines the Soviet state as a cumulative capitalist, and he talked about the preservation of exploitation in the USSR (*What is to be done?*, # 21 (44), p. 1). At the same time, he writes that the political elements of Soviet state capitalism were embodied in "Soviet power as a power of the labor majority" (*What is to be done?*, # 21 (44), p. 1). This is stated in the same article! He said also that the Soviet State ruled out "unearned accumulation and consumption" (*What is to be done?*, # 21 (44), p. 2). How could this be, when the USSR maintained exploitation?

Elsewhere, S. S. Gubanov declares: "an assessment of the evolution of Soviet power: evolution from workers' and peasants' dictatorship to the dictatorship of the party apparatus, and then the personal dictatorship" (*What is to be done?*, # 19 (42) p. 2). He does not consider it necessary to give it a class evaluation. It remains a mystery: does it rely on a labour majority, or on the collective capitalist? However the class nature of the VKP(B)-CPSU [All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) — Communist Party of the Soviet Union] Gubanov defines more clearly:

"turning the party of socialism into a party, initially only of the top-level superstructural state-capitalism, and afterwards into a party of private capitalism" (*What is to be done?*, # 19 (42) p. 2). As we see, the state and the party, which has grown together with it, received from Gubanov rather ambiguous estimates. To put it mildly, this is an inconsistency.

Continuing his vacillations, Gubanov writes about the "bourgeoisification" of the CPSU and the Soviets, which led to restructuring [perestroika]. However, he writes the word "bourgeoisification" in quotation marks. But this does not diminish the issues. If the Communist Party had already under Stalin turned into a party of state capitalism, then can we talk about it becoming further bourgeoisified if this party had already become bourgeois?

From our point of view, Soviet power and the ruling party disintegrated as early as the 1920s. The power of the Soviets turned from the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the state bourgeoisie. Then in 1936, this new regime even did away formally with Soviet power. Under the new Constitution the Soviets were turned into analogues of bourgeois parliaments.

Furthermore, S. Gubanov apparently simply denies the class struggle in the USSR. He enters into a debate with one of its targets, who writes: "the imbalances and inflation contributed to the poverty of working class and aggravation of the class struggle." In response, Gubanov states: "truly, imbalances and inflation cause the aggravation of class struggle, but not from the working class but the self-financing [i.e. directors of state enterprises that operated on the *khozraschet* or self-financing basis] and 'shadow' bourgeoisie, speculators, mediators etc." (*What is to be done?*, # 21 (44), p. 3). Here Gubanov openly departs from the class view of a Marxist and goes over to the side of the exploiter — entirely capitalist. From actual Soviet history it is well known that worsening imbalances and inflationary pressures, the deterioration in living conditions caused the working class to strike. So it was in 1932 in Ivanovo, so it was in 1962 in Novocherkassk. And these are not the only instances. These examples are given because they have been well studied by historians.

This leads to a conclusion. Gubanov was unable to completely overcome illusions from Stalinism, and take a coherent class position in assessing Soviet society. Gubanov revealed his remaining Stalinist views in assessing the Khrushchev period. Together with the Stalinists he evaluates the then reforms extremely negatively. But if Stalinists see them destroying socialism in the USSR, for Gubanov they have undermined state capitalism. Gubanov evaluates perestroika in a Stalinist manner as a bourgeois counterrevolution. Finally, he takes seriously the official Russian leftists as Communists. He criticizes Zyuganov, Anpilov and others like them just for their opportunism. Meanwhile, in our opinion, they are true-conservative parties. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation, "Labour Russia", VCU [Vanguard of Communist Youth], etc. — these are right-wing, social-chauvinist organizations. Characterizing them as "opportunists" is too soft. Finally, just like the Russian social-chauvinists, Gubanov called modern Russian capitalism compradorism. From this view he excluded only the second presidency of Putin, when this view finally became completely obvious.

Gubanov tried to deduce the inevitable compradorism of Russian capitalism from his theory of state capitalism. According to Gubanov the Soviet economy excluded the whole cycle of reproduction of private capital by freezing its industrial use. As a result, the shadow capital accumulated in the depths of Soviet society was quite indifferent to the problem of industrial production and showed itself only as speculative. All this is good, but the Gubanov's theory leads to one more conclusion: the directors of Soviet enterprises were representatives of private industrial capital. Gubanov, true, calls the enterprises bearers of private-economic elements, but this terminology does not display the contradictions. It turns out, the private elements in the USSR's economy were different, and some of them were related to industrial production. Why have just the destructive elements

represented by shadow capital won? S. Gubanov does not give an answer, because he cannot pose this question.

An answer requires a specific analysis of class struggle in the perestroika period and the first years after the collapse of the USSR. Some attempts in this direction have already been undertaken, including from Marxist positions, but the problem still requires further discussion.

Thus, we have examined the strengths and weaknesses of the theory of state capitalism, developed by S. S. Gubanov. Hopefully, this analysis will help clarify the problems of Soviet history and achieve clarity in its Marxist assessment.

[English translation by the *Communist Voice*. This article has been printed here with the permission of comrade Shakhin.] □

## A comment on the debate over state-capitalism

June 31, 2011

Dear comrade Yuri Shakhin,

I hope the work of your group for a conference of Ukrainian Marxists that regard the Soviet Union as having been state-capitalist is going well, and I would be interested in knowing the outcome. It is important to have anti-revisionist communism develop as a real trend.

About half a year ago you sent me two articles about state-capitalism. One was "State capitalism and socialism: continuation of the discussion" by S. Gubanov refuting D. Yakushev. The other was your article entitled "The theory of state capitalism of S. S. Gubanov: A critical analysis". It took four months for a CVO comrade to provide me with a rough translation, and additional time for me to be able to study this material and reply. I hope it's not too late to comment.

My comrade did his best to translate these articles, and I am grateful to him for his efforts, but the translation wasn't very clear. For this and other reasons, I may have made some mistakes about what is being said. I kept revising my views about some things in these articles. But finally I decided just to write you about what I thought was being said, and to apologize in advance if I have inadvertently misunderstood what is being said.

I thought that your article on Gubanov was very insightful, and I hope it had a good reception among activists. It pointed out some of the basic inadequacies and contradictions in Gubanov's theorizing, as well as his illusions in the Stalinist period of the 1930s to 1950s. It also raised the need for a class viewpoint. There is need not just to deal with technical points of the economic structure, but to see which class rules, and what struggle between classes has taken place.

There was one side of the issue, however, that I wish you had dealt with explicitly. That is the issue of the conception of the transition to socialism, and perhaps of socialism itself.

When you and I talk about the Soviet Union having been state-capitalism, this means condemning the class nature of the regime. But there are others who envision the transition to socialism in the form of a special kind of state-capitalism. And especially these days, there are those who envision socialism itself in that light — there are "market socialists" and even people who deserve to be called "market communists". Perhaps you had this in mind when you pointed to Gubanov's illusions in the Stalinist period and that he may even believe that the regime was a workers' regime at that time. But I think it would be helpful if the issue of how one conceives of the transition is dealt with more explicitly.

I would like to elaborate on some of these points.

To begin with, I strongly agree with your emphasis on a class evaluation of what the Soviet system was. Your article pointed to the development of a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in the Soviet Union, presumably referring to a new bourgeoisie, different from the old bourgeoisie that was overthrown (although some elements of the old bourgeoisie were absorbed by it). I also thought you did well in criticizing Gubanov for regarding the "truly conservative parties" of Zyuganov, Anpilova and others as communists. This is an important issue. You sharply pointed out that it is wrong to regard them as simply "opportunists". These parties are conservative, social-chauvinist, and even reactionary parties with a hostile class mission to communism and the working-class.

What interested you and other activists in Gubanov's views is that he tries to give a firm economic basis to calling the Soviet system state-capitalism (insofar as he actually does call it state-capitalist). He seeks to refute Yakushev's argument that the Soviet economy had features that prove that it had nothing to do with capitalism. Gubanov refutes this by, for example, discussing how the turnover tax represented surplus value, even if not in the form of profit to the enter-



prise. He also tried to show how the law of value operated in the Soviet economy. And he stresses that the basic problems of the Soviet economy come from inside the economy, not from its relations to other countries. But, as you point out, his views are inconsistent, and his economic analysis is tailored to prettify the Stalinist period.

Indeed, Gubanov's economic analysis is often very one-sided, and he repeatedly oversimplifies economic reality. For example, he refers to the well-known highly centralized aspects of the Soviet economy, but, when talking of the anarchy in the Soviet economy, he says that there was no vertical or horizontal integration of Soviet enterprises. Of course, Gubanov is aware that the plan, the ministries, and other economic bodies sought to provide such a vertical integration of Soviet enterprises. Nevertheless, Gubanov says that, since the individual workplaces didn't take part in national economic calculation, there was no economic integration. This is a surprising argument, especially as he contrasts the lack of integration in the Soviet economy to the integration that exists in "corporate capitalism". But Western capitalism definitely suffers from the anarchy of production. It combines anarchy with monopolies and other forms of economic integration. (Indeed, even inside conglomerate corporations, managers are concerned mainly with their own interests and those of their department, and not those of the overall corporation. This is not the main source of anarchy in private-capitalism, but it is enough of a problem that bourgeois economics even has a name for it: it is one aspect of the so-called "principal-agent problem".)

True, as we have discussed [in previous letters], it's important that the Soviet economy did not operate as a single factory or workplace. But it also had a certain economic integration. In modern capitalism, a brutal anarchy of production exists side-by-side with monopolization, centralization, and socialization of production; monopolization and centralization, while suppressing some features of anarchy, intensify others.

Gubanov's one-sided view of economic integration is not simply a minor error, but a key part of his economic theorizing. This is what allows him to advocate that nationalization in the Soviet Union was only "formal", and not "real" nationalization. He regards that the centralization and integration of enterprises had no economic basis in the Soviet Union. Indeed, he apparently thinks that, until recently, they didn't have much of a economic basis elsewhere in the world either. Hence Gubanov — according to your summary — presents "corporate capitalism" and "state-monopoly capitalism" as developing only in the late 20th century.

Besides being one-sided, such theorizing tramples on the real economic history of the last century. Monopolization and state-capitalism have a much longer history than Gubanov says. Indeed, while Gubanov says that the lack of integration in the Soviet economy was inherited from the pre-revolutionary economy, the Tsarist economy, while backward, had a highly concentrated industry and finance. He undoubtedly knows that. But he seems to give phenomena his own special

definitions, and then theorize on the basis of his idealized picture of economic phenomena, rather than what they actually are.

I think that what is behind Gubanov's inconsistencies and exaggerations is that he has a glorified view of the economic integration of enterprises, and especially of nationalization. It's not that integration and nationalization didn't exist in the Soviet Union; it's that they don't live up to Gubanov's conceptions of them. He seems to regard them as simply good things, without their own internal contradictions, and without relation to the ongoing class relations. So, according to Gubanov's way of thinking, when the Soviet economy shows really ugly features, it must be because of sham or formal nationalization, not true nationalization. This is a really unfortunate position, because its ultimate result would be to preserve the idea, common to reformism, Stalinism and Trotskyism, that nationalization is pro-working class and socialistic in itself. The class-conscious working class has to be able to fight, not only against private capitalism, but against oppressive and heartless forms of government regulation and nationalization; it has to distinguish different ways of carrying out nationalization even when it is demanding nationalization; and it will be hamstrung in these fights if it has to be pretend that bad forms and uses of nationalization are really only a matter of the nationalization supposedly being a "sham".

This brings us to the question of whether Gubanov distinguished true nationalization and "Soviet state-capitalism" from the transition to socialism. You pointed out in your article that Gubanov still has illusions about the Stalinist period of the 1930s-1950s. Does his picture of an economy in transition to socialism, or of socialism itself, differ much from what existed in the 1930s-50s, but carried out in a "real" rather than "formal" way? Is this the meaning of his views about "incomplete transition to socialism" and about there being "Soviet state-capitalism" in the Stalinist period?

In the article you sent me, while Gubanov has economic analysis of what constitutes state-capitalism, he does not give an analysis of the transition economy. Maybe he has it in other articles. But I think it would be important for the discussion of state-capitalism to include an explicit comparison of what state-capitalism is, and what a transitional economy should be. As it is, the relation between state-capitalism, the transitional economy, and socialism is left unclear in his article and your comment on it. But I presume that the Russian, Ukrainian and other activists who are participating in the discussion about state-capitalism differ not only on their assessment of the Soviet Union, but in their very conception of what socialism is, as well as of what the transitional period would be like. It's not a matter of laying down a complete recipe for everything that will happen in the transitional period. It's that there needs to be a general conception of the nature of the transitional economy.

A socialist or communist society can't come into existence right after the overthrow of the old bourgeoisie. I would expect that there would be a protracted transitional period,

during which the economy still had many capitalist features. It would have a capitalist shell, so to speak, including money, commodity production, and financial categories of various types. The fundamental new feature in the economy would be the growing control of the economy by the working class — not just in taking over from the private capitalists but also in the working class being able to actually control those institutions that speak in its name; in determining the overall priorities and planning of the economy; in directing its operations workplace by workplace; in having management gradually lose its distinctiveness from the mass of workers themselves; etc. This new feature of the transitional economy is incompatible with capitalism. And yet the transitional economy combines this new feature with the capitalist (or state-capitalist) shell. This is one of the deepest and most profound contradictions of the transitional economy, and it would last until there is a socialist economy, socialist in the Marxist sense, in which commodity production has been done away with. According to this conception, the main indicator of progress towards socialism isn't the exact level of vertical and horizontal integration of enterprises nor the precise financial systems that still exist, but whether the working class is actually gaining the ability to consciously and collectively control the economy and direct it according to its aims and according to the material circumstances that the society faces.

But it seems that the conceptions of both Yakushev and Gubanov are different from that. Yakushev, if he refers to the ability of the workers to run the economy, probably repeats the old revisionist myths. I presume he not only regards that the old Soviet economy operated like a single enterprise, but holds that the workers were in command. Meanwhile Gubanov, as you point out, neglects the class struggle of the workers against the old revisionist system, and perhaps even thinks that the 1930-50s were a period where the revisionists represented the working class. That is a very important point. Similarly Gubanov misses the key class criterion of whether the workers actually run the economic system or not. He doesn't even raise it. Instead Gubanov exaggerates the significance of certain changes of detail in how the state-capitalist system worked, and in its changes after the Stalinist period. He misses the forest for the trees, and in this sense, his detailed economic analysis of details clouds the actual class relations involved.

Of course, a transitional economy will rapidly develop a dominant state sector. And since this transitional economy still has money, commodity production, and so on, it will formally resemble state-capitalism in a number of ways. Nevertheless, I don't believe that a real transitional economy, where the workers have not been brought back under the control of the old bourgeoisie, nor subjugated to a new one, can be described as state-capitalist. The growing direction of the economy by the working-class control is not consistent with capitalism, and it doesn't make sense to theorize that there is a "good" capitalism that serves the workers' will. (If Gubanov thinks that he has found this supposedly good

capitalism in capitalism "without profit but with surplus-value", then he is profoundly mistaken. This type of theorizing is very common with market socialists and market communists. Each has their own scheme for producing the good capitalism, but they all share the belief that they have discovered the way to civilize marketplace forces.) At the same time, the capitalist shell of the transitional economy is not consistent with socialism. Thus the transitional economy has deep class and economic contradictions, as all such revolutionary periods do. As I have mentioned before, I think the transitional economy is not simply a mixture of capitalism and socialism, but an economic phase of its own, with some features that are distinct from either capitalism or socialism. On the other hand, an economy with a dominant state-sector which is also the dictatorship of a bourgeois ruling class, as happened in the Soviet Union, really is state-capitalism; it is not a transitional economy.

Gubanov, however, seems to believe that the transitional economy can be defined as "true state-capitalism" and has "actual nationalization". He regards "real state-capitalism" in an absurdly idealized form, with 100% state ownership, with gigantic enterprises that are vertically integrated, and without anarchy. If I understand his article right, near the end he even states that "actual nationalization" would do away with the division of labor! I was astonished by this assertion. Either Gubanov simply identifies nationalization and communist economy, or his "real state-capitalism" is a mythic state-capitalism that has never existed and never will exist. Such concepts also put much too great a separation between state capitalism in the USSR and the type of state capitalism that has developed in the Western countries, or in various developing countries.

It seems to me that, even if Gubanov and other activists aren't using this formula explicitly, still his views about nationalization may be inspired by the formula that the transitional economy is "state-capitalism under workers' rule". In any case, the formula "state-capitalism under workers' rule" is widely taken to be Lenin's formula. Nevertheless, I don't actually think Lenin equated "state-capitalism under workers' rule" with the transitional economy: when he used this formula, he would usually be careful to say that he didn't mean state-capitalism in the usual sense. He was stressing the need for a transitional period with what I have called above a "capitalist shell", which is described elsewhere in CVO literature as "capitalist methods". But whether Lenin really defined the transitional economy as "state-capitalism under workers' rule" or not, I don't think that we should. Lenin and the Bolsheviks dramatically advanced communist theory concerning the transition to socialism. There is simply no comparison between what this theory was prior to 1917 (Kautsky's essay of 1902, *The Day After the Revolution*, can probably be taken as representative of this), and what it was after the Bolshevik revolution. Nevertheless, we have to go further in the analysis of the transitional economy and of state-capitalism than the Bolsheviks went, and take account of the subsequent experience since then, and years ago I

wrote an article explaining what I think is wrong with the term "state-capitalism under workers' rule".

Gubanov used his formula about real versus formal nationalization both to refute Yakushev and to deny the fundamental continuity in the structure of the Soviet economy between the Stalinist period and the period after Stalin's death. Gubanov stressed that Yakushev just repeated old myths about the Soviet economy operating as a single corporation or enterprise, but, as you so rightly say, he seems to retain various of his own illusions about the Stalinist period.

In fact, the anarchy of production in the Soviet economy was just as strong in the 1930s-1950s as afterwards. The forms of struggle between enterprises in the 1930s often took on a very blatant form. Nor did the enterprise managers, in their struggle to make their quotas, show great respect to their general instructions. One professor who studied Soviet management wrote that "Even at the height of the 1930's purges, there were some plant directors who went out of their way to write signed articles in the national press describing how, in their own work, they had been violating both the law and instructions from superiors, announcing that they considered these violations to be quite proper, and stating flatly that in the future they had every intention of continuing and even extending the violations." [David Granick, *The Red Executive: A study of the Organization Man in Russian Industry*, 1960, Ch.10, "Bureaucracy and how to live with it", pp. 134-5.]

Gubanov's description of the reason for the anarchy of production in the Soviet economy seems to differ from passage to passage. In some places, he seems to relate the anarchy of production in the Soviet Union simply to the structure of the state sector. For example, he makes a point that, even at its peak, the state sector didn't embrace the whole economy. But in fact, the state sector dominated the Soviet economy.

He makes a major point of claiming that Soviet enterprises didn't have horizontal and vertical links, unlike the situation in "corporate capitalism". But the Soviet ministries did, in fact, link the state economy together. They linked it together in the capitalist way, which differs in form between capitalism and state-capitalism, but which has in common that integration is combined with anarchy.

Gubanov stresses the important point that "Not the arms race, not the 'cold war' exhausted the Soviet Union. *The Soviet economy ... was undermined by the race to [self-financing] cost balance*". It is probably one of the most attractive features of his article that he points strongly to the internal features of the Soviet economy as the means reasons for its weakness. And it's true that the drive of each Soviet director for himself helped tear the Soviet economy apart, as did the fight between rival factions in the ministries. And it's also true that the Soviet revisionists repeatedly tried to get out of their problems by economic reforms that gave more scope to enterprise profit-seeking, and this continually deepened the problems.

But what follows from this? Does Gubanov believe that if only there hadn't been enterprise financial balances, that there wouldn't have been any anarchy of production? Is it all simply a mistake on the part of the political leaders of the state sector? We both seem to get this impression of what Gubanov is saying. You raise the possibility that Gubanov is thinking along these lines, and your article says that Gubanov "also directly writes that the Soviet leaders did not understand what they were doing" and that Gubanov believed the Soviet society fell because "because nobody in the leadership of the USSR understood [the lack of economic integration] and they couldn't take the conscious actions recommended by Gubanov." Such ideas by Gubanov would correspond to his view that nationalization was simply superstructural and political.

But what really happens during the transitional period? There will be commodity production and the use of some type of financial measures. They will exert a continual pull backwards on the economy towards capitalism; the working class will have to use its growing organization, class-consciousness, and activity to oppose this. True, the way the revisionists carry out financial balances will become uglier and uglier. But there is no "good" form of commodity production which in itself is inherently socialist or pro-working class. There is no perfect form of transitional institutions which can avoid a protracted struggle between the working class and the negative tendencies resulting from commodity production and capitalist financial methods — a pull stemming not just from outside the state sector, but manifested inside the state sector itself. The issue of class relations, of working class action and organization — not in name, but in reality — is not just a political question, or a superstructural issue. It is a fundamental part of the economy during the transitional period. This is one of the most basic characteristic features of that economy. Yes, the working class will create and make use of a dominant state sector in the economy. Nevertheless, it's not perfect nationalization or perfect integration of the economy that moves things forward by itself. It's working-class control of the economy that pushes towards socialism and creates the conditions to eliminate commodity production itself.

Gubanov doesn't talk about this struggle depending on the working class. Nor does he make clear what measures he would recommend as opposed to what was done. He does repeatedly raise that the problem is that the individual workplaces or enterprises are not taking part in the national-economic balances, but he doesn't specify how he would avoid this. How would his "real nationalization" avoid this problem? He does mention the issue of the division of labor, but only to say that "real nationalization" would eliminate it. That is absurd.

Far from "real nationalization" being the solution to all the Soviet Union's problems,, the anarchy of production in the Soviet economy followed from the economic nature of nationalization in capitalist and state-capitalist economics. In the *absence* of the working class being able to unite as a class

and to direct the economy consciously, in the *presence* of the dictatorship of a bourgeois ruling class, the state sector will inevitably develop deeper and deeper private and conflicting interests right inside itself. The bureaucratic bourgeoisie, while ruling the country as a class, will be split by private interests and rivalries. These rivalries will act at the enterprise level, and they will also act within the ministries, and elsewhere throughout society. This is why there will never be the glorified state-capitalism that Gubanov imagines, and this is also the main source of anarchy inside the Soviet economy. This rivalry doesn't spring from nationalization only being a formality: Soviet nationalization was real; the old bourgeoisie was displaced as a class; the new managers owed their positions in their enterprises to their place in the bureaucracy; and so forth. The anarchy of production springs from state-capitalism as well as from private-capitalism. The way the anarchy of production manifests itself under private and state-capitalism varies, but the same basic economic law of capitalism operates in both capitalist forms.

This has been a long note, but there's one additional issue I want to raise. At the end of his article, Gubanov puts forward another seriously mistaken point. He is seeking to refute Yakushev, who apparently pretends that great steps to communism would have been achieved in the Soviet Union if only they had had different forms of economic calculation. Yakushev lives in a fantasy world, which ignores the basic economic and class contradictions in the Soviet Union, and sees only different ways in which the ministry could make decisions. So Yakushev dreams of replacing financial calculation with a "new system of assessment of efficiency of the national economy". This is, in Yakushev's view, apparently a mere technical matter of devising a new index for use by the bureaucrats and ministries. And, it seems, he indulges in the time-worn revisionist dream that better computing power would have solved the problems of the Soviet economy.

Gubanov, for his part, doesn't think that such a new method of calculation would have anything to do with the basic ills of the Soviet economy, and that's true. Unfortunately, Gubanov goes further and ruins the point. He ridicules the idea of economic calculation that takes account of the natural properties of product as "feudalism" and only good for a "subsistence economy". And he presents calculation via labor-hours as something which is Marxist, socialist, and liberating, by presenting it as concern for the workers' free-time.

But in actual fact, calculation by the labor-hour is the underlying basis of capitalist value, and an economy run via these calculations is an economy dominated by the capitalist law of value. By presenting calculation via the labor-hour as the only form of economic calculation, Gubanov inadvertently takes bourgeois calculation to be eternal.

It's true that some left communists, in thinking about the future society, not only throw out financial calculation, but any economic calculation at all. They can't imagine economic calculation except in the form of money; so they can't imagine

socialism, the elimination of commodity production, and the fading away of the law of value except as the end of all economic calculation. But Gubanov makes the opposite error, regarding labor-hour calculation as inevitable if there is to be economic calculation. He thinks that this is a serious blow at Yakushev's views. Actually, I suspect that most economists who uphold calculation via the labor-hour are close to Yakushev in their assessment of Soviet society.

I presume that Yakushev pointed out that the Soviet Union pioneered the method of material balances, which takes account of goods being materially distinct products. Yakushev probably tried to conclude from this that the Soviet Union wasn't capitalist, since it used material balances in the five-year plans. But this would be a shallow argument. All systems, even capitalist ones, take a certain account of the material qualities of goods. During war-time, for example, the most diehard capitalist governments seek to ensure that they have sufficient goods to produce war goods. And after World War II, some Western capitalist countries themselves made use of a certain amount of "material balances" in the form of input-output analysis. And, for example, until the rise of neo-liberalism and deregulation, American state governments would generally regulate the supply of energy to ensure that there would be sufficient electricity, natural gas and heating oil to supply both businesses and homes: the capitalist utilities would be given extravagant financial guarantees for living up to this plan, but the state would ensure that a certain material amount of energy was available. True, under capitalism and state-capitalism, planning according to "natural units" will always run into contradiction with financial planning. But a certain amount of material planning is carried out by both corporations and capitalist governments.

I wrote a series of four articles arguing that the labor-hour is not the natural unit of socialist economic calculation. In it, I both dealt with Marx's statements about economic calculation, and the experience of the last century on this issue. I think the hardest part of this issue is imagining how it is possible to have economic calculation without assigning to every economic product a "value" of some type. So, among other things, I tried to give at least some indication of what economic calculation without either money or a labor-value would be like. This issue of the technical method of economic calculation is, of course, only a side point with respect to the ongoing discussion of state-capitalism. But it has some value in its own right. It gives some idea of the radical difference of socialism from capitalism; it debunks the financial craziness of the way market fundamentalists think; material calculation also comes to the fore whenever a regime is taking serious account of social needs; and finally the issue of calculation via natural units will come to the fore as soon as serious environmental measures are taken. The market measures for dealing with the environment (such as carbon trading, the carbon tax, the establishment of "true costs", etc.) are a fraud: there will instead have to be direct regulation and control of carbon emissions and other environmental substances.

So these are some considerations that I hope are relevant to the issues raised in your article and that of Gubanov's. I think the discussion of Gubanov's theories, and the contrast between your and Gubanov's standpoint, would be strengthened, if there was a more explicit discussion of what the transitional economy is conceived of, and how it compares to state-capitalism. But I thought your article on Gubanov was very good. Aside from pointing out many of Gubanov's

inconsistencies, you also raised important class issues that Gubanov ignores, and you pointed out that he ignores the history of working-class struggle in the Soviet Union. These are crucial issues, both from the theoretical standpoint and with respect to political practice.

Comradely regards,  
Joseph Green



## Errata for *Communist Voice* #45

Below are the major errata for article "On the non-naturalness of value: A defense of Marx and Engels on the transformation problem (part one)". Minor issues, such as dropped periods, are not included. The entire errata for *CV* #45 is posted at [www.comunistvoice.org/45cErrata.html](http://www.comunistvoice.org/45cErrata.html), and they have been corrected in the PDF version of *CV* #45 at [www.comunistvoice.org/45c.pdf](http://www.comunistvoice.org/45c.pdf).

The article "A defense on Marx and Engels on the transformation problem" will be continued in later issues of *CV*. Subsequent parts will deal with such issues as the change from prices of production that occurs with the shift to monopoly capitalism and revisionist state-capitalism; the critique of other views of the transformation problem; and the empirical verification of the Marxist economics and the theory of value via the success of its predictions concerning specific features of capitalism. It is not minor differences in pricing that provide a clear distinction between different analyses of capitalism and different theories of value and pricing, but their overall predictions concerning the continuing exploitation of the working class, the growth of inequality, the persistence of the boom/bust cycle, the repeated destruction of productive forces, and so on.

Page 48, col. 1, the last paragraph: the word "thus" should be omitted from "instead, this value thus divides into two parts".

Page 51, col. 1, the last paragraph: add the word "all" so that the end of the second sentence reads "that ensures that they all are exact".

Page 52, col. 1, paragraph two from the bottom: omit "of" so that the end of the first sentence reads "but instead makes this estimate indirectly in terms of exchanges between different products and money."

Page 52, col. 2, the third paragraph: in the second line, underline the second  $m$  so that  $D_{all} \cdot val^h = D_{all} (L_X \cdot m) = (D_{all} \cdot L_X) \underline{m}$  becomes  $D_{all} \cdot val^h = D_{all} (L_X \cdot \underline{m}) = (D_{all} \cdot L_X) \underline{m}$ .

Page 54, col. 2, paragraph 2, sentence 4: add "But in a more general situation" to the beginning of the sentence, and "and/or consumption" near the end so that it reads "But in a more general situation, those three masses of goods might not represent entirely distinct sectors of production: for example, the capitalists might buy with their profits, not just luxury goods, but means of production and/or consumption in order to expand production."

Page 55, col. 2, the last paragraph: omit the words "there are" so it reads "Nevertheless, three different organic compositions might end up being considered:..."

Page 56, col. 1, the 2nd paragraph under "The Bortkiewicz-Sweezy results": change the last clause from "where profits and only profits were spent on the luxury sector" to "where profits were spent on the luxury sector and only on the luxury sector."

Page 56, col. 2, 3rd paragraph, the latter part of the last sentence: the first use of the word "profits" should be replaced by "prices" so that it reads, "if he had switched the money standard in order to ensure that the total prices equal the total value, then this would have upset the equality of the total profits to the total surplus value."

Page 57, col. 1, paragraph 2: "i.e.." should be "i.e.,".

Page 57, col. 2, footnote 18, "pp. 21039" should be "pp. 21-39".

Page 58 col. 2-p.59 col. 1. The repeated references to the means of production should actually be to the "means of production and consumption". This section distinguishes between capitalist revenue (profits spent on luxury goods) and profits that are reinvested and serve to expand production. It identifies the reinvested profits as the surplus means of production, but it should say, the surplus means of production and surplus means of consumption (consumer goods or articles of consumption). The capital used to expand production goes both into constant capital (means of production) and variable capital (used to pay wages which in turn are represented by means of consumption). Instead of referring to SMP (surplus means of production), it should refer to SMPC (surplus means of production and surplus consumer goods). Hence there are a series of changes:

Page 58, col. 2, paragraph 2: the last sentence, "It assumed that the new investment in means of production was exactly proportional to the already existing means of production", should be "It assumed that the new investment in means of production

and consumption was exactly proportional to the already existing means of production and consumption."

Page 58, col. 2, paragraph 3: the third sentence should read "It's because, in his model, in the case where there is no revenue (a) this model would have only means of production and consumption, and (b) the goods purchased by the profits would be means of production and consumption *in exact proportion* to the already existing means." And the last sentence should have and additional two words "and consumption" so that it begins "In this case, the surplus value, which consists solely of the added 10% in means of production and consumption,...".

Page 58, col. 2, paragraph 4: the second sentence should read "Then, even though all of the surplus value was reinvested, if it was invested in an assortment of means of production and consumption that wasn't proportional to the already existing means, then there would be a total profits/total surplus value deviation by an amount equal to the price-value deviation of the new means of production and consumption coming from the surplus value."

Page 58, col. 2, the second paragraph from the bottom: the end of the last sentence should be "and not to the part of the surplus value that is realized as means of production and consumption."

Page 58, col. 2, the last paragraph (which continues to p. 59, col. 1): the last part of the first sentence should read: "and the amount of profits that is reinvested in expanding the means of production and consumption (call this SMPC)."

Page 59, col. 1: every time SMP or SMPC appears, it should be SMPC or SMPC.

Page 59, col. 1, paragraph 3: the last part of the last sentence should be "we can see that this other factor involves the price/value deviation of the surplus means of production and consumption, SMPC."

Page 59, col. 1, paragraph 4: the second sentence should read "The total surplus value is composed of capitalist revenue, plus the surplus means of production and consumption.:  $S = REV + SMPC$ ."

Page 59, col. 1, paragraph 4: the end of the last sentence should read "and that of the surplus means of production and consumption."

Page 59, col. 1, paragraph 7: the first sentence should read "Thus the total profits/total surplus value deviation can be expressed by a formula that involves only the surplus means of production and consumption, SMPC."

Page 59, col. 1, the last paragraph (which continues onto col. 2): in the last sentence the words "but it is also proportional to

the price/value deviation of the surplus means of production..." should read "but it is also proportional to the price/value deviation of the reinvested profits (surplus means of production and consumption),..."

Page 62, col. 2, first paragraph under "A social and non-natural category is still a real category": in the second sentence omit the word "are".

Page 63 col. 1, paragraph 3: the last word should be "works" not "work".

Page 63, col. 1, paragraph 5: the third sentence should be "The idea that commodities..." not "The idea of that commodities..."

Page 63, col. 2, paragraph 2: in the last sentence the word should be "indeterminacy", not "indeterminancy".

Page 64, col. 2, paragraph 5: the last sentence should contain the words "every category on the right side", not "every category on the left side".

Page 65, col. 1, paragraph 5: the second sentence should read "Alternatively, when everything is bought and sold *at its value*, it is the amount of abstract labor-hours contained in *any* product that costs one dollar."

Page 65, col. 2, paragraph 4, sentence three: the words "finding the prices of production of product of a certain value" should be "finding the price of production of a product of a certain value."

Page 65, col. 2, paragraph 4, sentence five: "the price of production of production" should be "price of production", and the formula should be " $\underline{m}_X = T_X \cdot \text{val}_X = T_X \cdot m_X$ " (the "val" should have a subscript X).

Page 65, col. 2, the last paragraph: "a static economic" should be "a static economy".

Page 66, col. 1, paragraph 2: add "in the three-sector model" so that it reads " $T_{\text{total profits}}$  does *not* necessarily equal 1 in the three-sector model, unless..."

Page 66, col. 1, paragraph 3: it should be "c" not "the c".

Page 66, col. 2, paragraph 3: repeated references to SMP should be to SMPC. It should say, not "that is realized as means of production", but "that is realized as means of production and consumption". And the last sentence in this paragraph should end with "that is realized as means of production and consumption."

Page 68, col. 1, second paragraph from the bottom, sentence 4: "second-order corrections" should be "small corrections". □

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- \* Against the pension reform in France
- \* The crisis in Greece
- \* Mid-term elections in US: bowing to big business
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- \* The threat to US postal workers

### ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS:

- \* The BP oil blow-out
- \* Obama's Katrina
- \* Class trends in the environmental movement
- \* Know who you're dealing with (chart)

### MARXISM-LENINISM:

- \* 70 years later: Trotsky's failed legacy
- \* Defending Marx & Engels on transformation problem (pt. 1)

### REFORMISM OR CLASS STRUGGLE

- \* On the US Social Forum meeting in Detroit
- \* Class struggle is the path to a new world

### OTHER:

- \* Health care: about Reid's "The Healing of America"
- \* *Struggle* literary zine begins its 26<sup>th</sup> year
- \* Report on travels in Asia and Europe
- \* Down with racist murder of John Williams by Seattle police

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- \* Auto bailout crushes the workers to resurrect the owners
- \* The Obama economic program – crumbs for the people, trillions for Wall Street
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### HEALTH CARE:

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- \* The health care debate

### THE COPENHAGEN CLIMATE CRISIS:

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### ANARCHISM OR SOCIALISM?

- \* The proletarian party, democracy, and economic planning (Reply to Seattle Ben)

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  - \* Support the American Axle strikers!
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- ### VS. BOTH IMPERIALISM & FUNDAMENTALISM:
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**RCP:** Maoist cultism of the RCP is anti-Marxist

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#### **GROCERY WORKERS' STRUGGLES:**

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\* Fake sovereignty can't hide continued occupation

\* On US Labor Against the War, and why SEIU & AFSCME opposed war while supporting pro-war Kerry

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\* On the open letter to the anti-war movement

\* Behind the empty bravado of non-class anti-imperialism

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\* Occupation regime in action: political dictate, privatization, plunder and poverty

\* Bush's weapons of mass deception & the Democratic Party in service of imperialist conquest

\* Class forces in Iraq

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\* Anti-war slogans in light of the outcome of the war

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### **ENERGY CRISIS:**

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