



## — Feminism Is a Dead End — For a Communist Women's Movement



Bryan Olin Dozier/NurPhoto

Left: Abortion rights rally, Washington, D.C., August 2022. Feminists' flag-waving, moralistic appeals to capitalist state are obstacle to fight for women's liberation. Right: Communist women's demonstration in Moscow, July 1920. Banner reads: "Better to fight, suffer and win than to rot for centuries as slaves of the bourgeoisie."



Dietz Verlag

The article below is an edited version of a document titled "For a Communist Women's Movement vs. Feminism," which was written by Cairo Turner and Mónica Mora and adopted by the 16th SL/U.S. National Conference last year. As the article motivates, the feminist program is an obstacle to advancing women's rights. Since the overturn of *Roe v.*

*Wade* this past summer, attacks on abortion rights have continued unabated. Last month, a federal judge in Texas issued a ruling invalidating the Food and Drug Administration's approval in 2000 of the mifepristone abortion pill. The Supreme Court has temporarily stayed the ruling, pending appeal, which preserves the threat of a national abortion pill ban.

What is necessary to fight these attacks and open the way to women's liberation is to build a communist women's movement *today*.

\* \* \*

For decades, women's rights in the U.S. have been under attack, culminating in the recent overthrow of *Roe v. Wade*. Hundreds

of thousands of women and youth protested during the "summer of rage" because the democratic right to abortion was taken away.

The conditions of most women, particularly black and immigrant women, are worse now than they have been for generations: crushing inflation, unemployment, evictions, medical bills piling up—the *continued on page 8*

## Brandon Johnson Will Betray Labor/Black Chicago

Last month, black Democrat and former teachers union organizer Brandon Johnson was narrowly elected the next mayor of Chicago in what is widely viewed as a major victory for the party's "progressive" wing in advance of the 2024 presidential elections. Liberal union bureaucrats and fake socialists like the Freedom Road Socialist Organization hailed Johnson's win over white "establishment" Democrat Paul Vallas,

who liberals and their left tails portray as a stand-in for Trump. For their part, the reformists of Socialist Alternative and Socialist Revolution acted as left advisers to Johnson. Despite the anticipation of the changing of the guard at City Hall among black people, activist youth and trade unionists, this outcome is *no victory for workers or black people*.

We reprint below the April 3 WV leaflet titled "Chicago Elections: Union

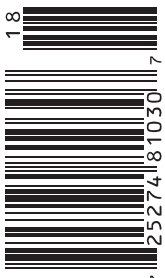
Tops/Left Betray—No Vote for Johnson or Vallas!" which lays out why Johnson will trample on the aspirations of labor/black Chicago. Responsibility for the attacks to come lies squarely with the union bureaucrats and reformist left, who sowed illusions in this capitalist class enemy. Against these misleaders who push trans-class political alliances that prepare defeats, we point workers and the oppressed to the only path for-

ward: independent class struggle for their needs on the basis of a program for the multiracial proletariat to run society.

\* \* \*

Lori Lightfoot's reign over "Segregation City" came to an end in February with her third-place finish in the first round of the Chicago mayoral elections. From frequent feuds with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), to enforcing the devastating lockdowns during the pandemic, to carrying out massive police repression during the height of the BLM protests in 2020, Lightfoot's tenure showed just what workers and the oppressed have to gain from backing a "progressive" bourgeois politician to be the top cop in Chicago: more misery and repression.

Since Lightfoot took office as a "reformer" in 2019, riding the wave of anger over the cop killing of Laquan McDonald and its cover-up, everything has gotten worse. Schools are even more segregated and dilapidated; housing prices are driving black and working-class Chicagoans out of the city or turning them onto the streets as part *continued on page 2*



## We Need a Multiracial Revolutionary Workers Party!

# Chicago...

(continued from page 1)

of a surging homeless population; and the prices of everything keep going up while wages fall far behind. Unemployment in the ghettos remains at depression levels, and cop terror continues. All of this despite waves of protests, strikes and union organizing drives enveloping the city over the last decade. The question is: Why, in spite of the thousands protesting the Laquan McDonald and George Floyd murders, has black life in Chicago only gotten worse? Why, despite two major teachers strikes in 2012 and 2019, has education continued to get worse?

The answer lies in the contradiction between the aspirations of workers and the oppressed and the liberal program pushed by their leaders. The bankrupt strategy of the union bureaucrats and their fake-socialist tails is building alliances with the class enemy, looking for capitalist politicians who will supposedly run the capitalist state to work in their interests. This



Max Herman/NurPhoto

**12 December 2020: Chicago Teachers Union official Stacy Davis Gates during union protest to extend COVID lockdown of public schools. Precluding fight for union control of safety, CTU bureaucrats sought to pressure Mayor Lightfoot to implement health and safety measures.**

strategy ensures any struggles remain within the parameters set by the bosses' profit system, though none of the problems facing the working class—education, segregation, housing—can be solved

within this framework. To advance, workers require a leadership that can unite the class across racial divisions and lead their struggles as part of a broader strategy for workers power.

The race to replace Lightfoot is yet another example of workers' leaders pushing a dead-end strategy. Like everything else in this city, this election is polarized along racial lines. The leadership of the working class is building the campaigns of Brandon Johnson, a black Democratic Party "progressive," and Paul Vallas, a white establishment Democrat. The reformist left backing Johnson presents this as a titanic contest between "progress" and "reaction," between racism and anti-racism. *Don't be fooled!* As mayor of Chicago, an executive officer of the capitalist state, it will be their job to defend capitalist profits and maintain the forcible segregation and oppression of black people. The mayor runs the city on behalf of the LaSalle Street bankers and bosses, not workers or the oppressed. They command the cops that torture black people, terrorize the ghettos, beat demonstrators, break picket lines and bust unions. While Vallas and Johnson have tactical differences on the most effective way to administer capitalist misery, they are both committed to its preservation. Should the city hire 2,000 cops, or 200 detectives and bring in the ATF? Is the best way to bust the teachers union smashing them outright or through back-channel dealings? Neither of these Democrats represents the interests of workers and the oppressed, and anybody telling you otherwise is lining you up behind the same liberal dead-end strategy that got us here in the first place. *No vote to Johnson or Vallas!*

## What Is To Be Done

The problems facing the working class and the oppressed demand major struggles *against* the capitalist class and their interests, not support to their representatives. To even begin integrating Chicago would require massive public works projects to build low-cost, quality housing. Ending mass unemployment in the ghettos requires shortening the workweek and spreading the available work with no loss in pay, and training and hiring thousands of people. Even these basic measures are fundamentally *counterposed* to the interests of capital. The bourgeoisie *requires* black oppression to drive down all workers' living standards and to prop up their rule by keeping the working class divided along racial lines.

The sorry state of education in Chicago is only going to be improved by building state-of-the-art, integrated schools, abolishing the charters, parochial and private schools, and hiring tens of thousands more teachers. But the bourgeoisie is only interested in educating the proletariat insofar as is necessary to exploit them profitably, and with U.S. imperialism in terminal decline and massive deindustrialization, they can well settle for schools that resemble prisons for black and Latino children. It wouldn't be a good return on investment to educate the students in Chicago Public Schools for careers they won't have and jobs which barely exist. There are massive profits to be had in every one of these sectors of the economy, and

they will be defended by the bourgeoisie, their state, and their politicians. Progress can only be made in struggle against the capitalists, and the ultimate solution lies only in their overthrow. Despite industrial decline, Chicago remains a union town, with key industry. Workers could shut this city down!

But instead, the "solution" being offered by the trade-union leaders and the reformist left is to back one or the other of these capitalist candidates for mayor. For the reformist left, the preferred candidate is Brandon Johnson. A former teacher and organizer for the CTU and full-time capitalist politician as a Cook County commissioner, Johnson was virtually unknown before rocketing from 3 percent in the polls to second place in the first round thanks to relentless promotion by the reformists and the CTU, who funneled \$2.2 million in donations from the union's treasury into his campaign.

Johnson's rise from relative obscurity reflects both the anger in the city at the mounting misery and the lack of leadership pointing the path forward for the oppressed. He promises to tax the rich to fund education, give people housing, provide childcare and stay the hand of the police. But the promises of bourgeois "progressives" like Johnson are simply lies to garner votes and push the illusion that one can clean up the worst excesses of capitalist rule while maintaining the underlying property relations producing them. Take housing, for example: Johnson, like Lightfoot before him, is proposing a one-time tax on property valued over \$1 million to fund affordable housing. But housing is a font of wealth for the bourgeoisie, whether as landlords gouging tenants or as real estate magnates in the Gold Coast planning out the next phases of gentrification across the city. Fixing Chicago housing requires a major transfer of wealth out of the hands of the real estate speculators, landlords and banks, not tinkering around with tax rates. Johnson is committed to defending capitalist property, so he will never take the measures needed to actually address the problem; in fact, he'll drop his reform plans like a hot potato the minute he hears a cry of protest from the housing speculators, the landlords and the banks.

Real struggles are needed for housing, education, childcare, and against racial oppression, and they will inevitably clash with the capitalists and their state. Unions like the CTU, SEIU and AFSCME endorse Johnson, arguing that with him at the helm, they'll have "one of their own" sitting across the table, and workers will get a fair deal. But Johnson's background as a CTU organizer only makes him a more effective agent of the capitalists. His connections with the unions better position him to force concessions than someone like Vallas, an open enemy of teachers unions and pusher of privatization. Johnson has stated his commitment to the bosses openly, saying, "There will be some tough decisions to be made when I am mayor of the city of Chicago. And there might be a point within negotiations that the Chicago Teachers Union quest and fight for more resources—we might not be able to do it. Who is better able to deliver bad news to a friend than a friend?"

## Segregation City

Support for Johnson is also based on illusions that as a black mayor he will defend black people because he understands their struggles. Chicago has had three black mayors and has been run by the "friends of blacks and labor" Democratic Party for 90 years. The sprawling South and West Side ghettos are just as crummy as ever, cop-infested and impoverished. The reality is black politicians like Johnson and Lightfoot and the black masses *do not share a common interest*. While all black people are oppressed due to their skin color, the black petty bourgeoisie, from whom black Democratic Party politicians like Johnson, Lightfoot, and the celebrated Harold Washington sprang, draw their influence and a large

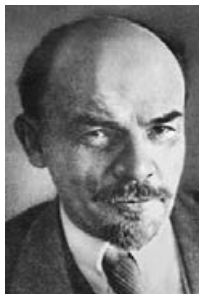
*continued on page 12*



TROTSKY

## For Revolutionary Unity of U.S. Workers, Latin American Peoples

*In 1938, the Mexican government under Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated the Anglo-American oil corporations. Cárdenas had room for maneuver due to the antagonism between the U.S. and British imperialists, the imminence of World War II and, particularly, the intensification of the class struggle in the U.S. that had led to the CIO's formation. In the article excerpted below, Leon Trotsky polemicizes against Latin American populists*



LENIN

*who argued that unification of the region and nationalization of foreign-owned companies could be achieved with the blessing of U.S. imperialism. In opposition to this reliance on "democratic" imperialism under the liberal Franklin D. Roosevelt regime, Trotsky stressed the need for revolutionary collaboration between the U.S. proletariat and the oppressed Latin American peoples against their common enemy: U.S. imperialism.*

It would be radically erroneous to draw the conclusion from what has been said that the policy of the United States will continue to unfold in the same direction in the future without interruption, thus opening ever greater possibilities for peaceful emancipation to the Latin American people. On the contrary, it can be predicted with full certainty that the "New Deal" and "Good Neighbor" policy [of FDR], which didn't solve any question or satisfy anyone, will only arouse the needs and aggressive spirit of the North American proletariat and Latin American peoples. The intensification of the class struggle engendered the "New Deal"; a further intensification of the class struggle will kill the "New Deal," giving rise and preponderance within the ranks of the bourgeoisie to the most reactionary, aggressive, and fascist tendencies. The "Good Neighbor" policy will inevitably be replaced, and probably in the very near future, by the policy of the "threatening fist" which might be raised first of all against Mexico. Only the blind or petty-bourgeois phraseologists of the [reformist Mexican union leader] Lombardo Toledano or [Peruvian populist] Vegas Leon type can close their eyes to those perspectives. A year sooner or later, the question will be presented in a very acute form: Who is master on this continent? The imperialists of the United States or the working masses who people all the nations of America?

This question, by its very essence, can only be resolved by an open conflict of forces, that is to say by revolution, or more exactly, a series of revolutions. In those struggles against imperialism will participate, on the one hand, the American proletariat, in the interests of its own defense; and on the other hand, the Latin American peoples, who are struggling for their emancipation, and who *precisely for that reason* will support the struggle of the American proletariat....

Naturally, this doesn't mean to say that [CIO head John L.] Lewis and [AFL head William] Green will become outstanding advocates of the Socialist Federation of the American continent. No, they will remain in the camp of imperialism until the very end. It also will not mean that the *whole* proletariat will learn to see that in the liberation of the Latin American peoples lies its own emancipation. Nor will the entire Latin American people comprehend that a community of interests exists between them and the American working class. But the very fact that a parallel struggle goes on will signify that an objective alliance exists between them; perhaps not a formal alliance, but, indeed, a very active one. The sooner the American proletariat *vanguard* in North, Central, and South America understands the necessity for a closer revolutionary collaboration in the struggle against the common enemy, the more tangible and fruitful that alliance will be. To clarify, illustrate, and organize that struggle—herein lies one of the most important tasks of the Fourth International.

— Leon Trotsky, "Ignorance Is Not a Revolutionary Instrument" (January 1939)

# WORKERS VANGUARD



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DIRECTOR OF PARTY PUBLICATIONS: Liz Gordon

MANAGING EDITORS: Jeanne Mitchell,

EDITOR: Michael Davissou

Steve Henderson

PRODUCTION MANAGER: François Donau

CIRCULATION MANAGER: Susan Fuller

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# IG: Lovesick for Lockdowns

## Crossing the Class Line in the Pandemic

The following document, written by SL/U.S. Central Committee member Jake Jots, was endorsed by the 16th SL/U.S. National Conference last year.

The catastrophe created by COVID-19 is a consequence of capitalism, criminally compounded by the clear class treason of labor's leaders and the left. Capitalism created the miserable conditions fueling the crisis: decrepit housing, horrible health care, dilapidated schools, dangerous work conditions, scarcity, oppression, etc. The reactionary response of the ruling class multiplied the misery of the masses: workers were laid off in droves; whole sections of industry, schools and childcare facilities were closed; "essential workers" were subjected to massive attacks, speedup and givebacks and were forced into life-threatening conditions where over a million died. The leadership of the unions and the left utterly betrayed the workers: preaching class collaboration and reliance on the state, they disarmed our class and prevented the struggle necessary for workers to defend themselves against both the deadly threat of the virus and the devastating offensive of the bourgeoisie. Labor's leaders and the left were complicit in the disastrous ruin of workers worldwide.

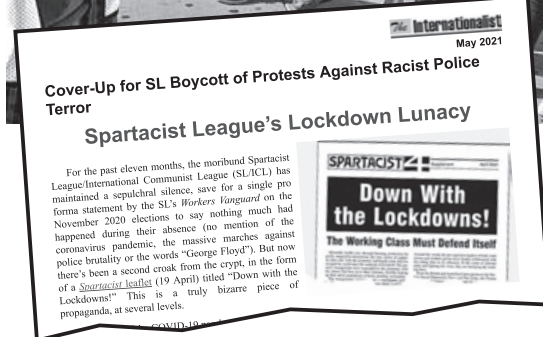
The ruling class pushed the lie that the only recourse for workers was to forfeit their lives and livelihoods for the "greater good," and that they must look to the state—the violent apparatus of class domination—as the arbiter of public health. The labor bureaucracy fell in line, proudly leading "essential workers" to sacrifice in the name of "national unity," while pushing class-collaborationist illusions about "having a seat at the table" in the bourgeoisie's management of the crisis.

The fake socialists followed suit and offered nothing but a militant veneer on the treachery of the pro-capitalist bureaucracy, agreeing that the only option was to pressure the government for minor changes in policy (in many cases *more* closures and repression), while accepting the devastating measures and the



Andrew Lichtenstein

Above: IG joins protest to keep New York City schools closed, offering advice to bourgeois state on when to reopen, 18 September 2020. Left: IG denounces as "lunacy" SL call for independent revolutionary action to defend workers' lives, livelihoods in opposition to state.



omnipotence of the state. In the U.S., the program offered by these class traitors dovetailed perfectly with the Democrats' 2020 election campaigns, in which they exploited Trump's anti-science ramblings to posture as the "rational" wing of the bourgeoisie, further duping workers into supporting the destructive designs of their class enemy and thwarting any effective struggle for the defense of workers' lives.

Contrary to the suicidal strategy of subservience offered by these sycophants, workers needed to fight against the closures and repression. During the pandemic, as always, the interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat remained irreconcilably counterposed, and the state remained a tool for the defense of capital. The measures enacted by the bourgeoisie and carried out by their state did not represent some mythical trans-class "necessary evil" for the "greater good."

The bourgeoisie responded to defend their social order with methods that flowed from, upheld and advanced their

class interests, while undermining the ability of the working class to struggle for their own. The proletariat desperately needed a massive expansion of production and infrastructure to provide adequate health care and safe conditions, but the bourgeoisie only needed to maintain a viable pool of wage slaves at the lowest possible cost. The reactionary measures only aimed to head off further calamity for the capitalists by deepening the immiseration of the masses and leaving the root cause of the crisis untouched.

Because the bourgeoisie must maintain production for private profit, they were only capable of a reactionary response that would necessarily be at the expense of the working class. Only the independent mobilization of the workers could provide a progressive path forward. But for that, they needed to take matters into their own hands: take control of safety in workplaces and redistribute the existing resources. It was the duty of communists to intervene and chart this course, starting from the immediate needs in the pandemic and linking the struggle to the necessity of taking state power.

Workers needed to fight *against* the attacks and *for safe conditions*. They needed to fight for *more* and *better* schools and childcare facilities, for *more* production, for *more* jobs, for *more* wages and for the *unions*, not the *state*, to determine what conditions are safe for work. To wage this struggle, they needed to fight *against* the repression, atomization and devastation of the working class. The fundamental prerequisite was to break workers from the "saving lives"/"national unity" blackmail peddled by the capitalists and their labor lieutenants, which dictated that nothing could be done but to support government measures. Workers required a revolutionary leadership to break the bonds to the bourgeois state and conduct class war for their defense. It was incumbent on revolutionaries to draw the class line, expose the traitorous misleaders shepherding workers to the slaughter and oppose the lockdowns, which decimated the working

class and bolstered the bourgeoisie's oppressive apparatus.

### Internationalist Group Salutes the State

After a year of capitulating, the Internationalist Communist League produced the "Down With the Lockdowns!" statement, which took on the lie that the only option was to submit to the class enemy and put forward a program of revolutionary opposition counterposed to the betrayals of the labor leaders and the left. In response to our statement that the working class must defend itself by taking matters into its own hands, breaking with the labor traitors and "national unity," the Internationalist Group (IG) produced a screed that doubles down on their perfidious program of reliance on the capitalist state. In "Spartacist League's Lockdown Lunacy" (May 2021), they denounce our call for independent revolutionary action and opposition to the machinery of bourgeois force as "lunacy." It confirms that their program, like the union bureaucracy's, is an obstacle to the advancement of working-class interests and even to their basic defense.

The IG objects to our statement that the lockdowns were *reactionary* public health measures that weakened the fighting ability of the working class:

"So the ICL admits that lockdowns 'may' slow the rate of infection, but only to dismiss this. Does it recommend any public health measures to deal with the deadly coronavirus—selective quarantines, emergency hospitals and isolation facilities for those who have contracted the disease or are in danger of infection, anything at all? Nothing. Nor does it even mention that worldwide over 3 million people have died of COVID-19. Frankly, these poseurs who besmirch the name of communism and the Fourth International don't care. Like so much of what they say they are for against these days—until the next wild line change—it's all just words to them. In contrast, public health measures against this modern plague are of enormous concern to the working class."

—"Spartacist League's Lockdown Lunacy" (May 2021)

The IG's full-throated defense of the bourgeois state as the benevolent defender

*continued on page 4*



Jack Vartogian/Getty

Homeless man in front of bank, New York City, July 2020. "National unity" was a lie; we were not "in this together." Ruling-class blackmail, echoed by labor tops and left, was wielded to force acceptance of reactionary health measures, attacks on workers, oppressed.

**SPARTACIST** Supplement April 2021

## Down With the Lockdowns!

**The Working Class Must Defend Itself**

Misericord health care, decrepit housing, production for profit, imperialist domination, the very nature of capitalism... Around the world, the pro-capitalist leaders of both trade unions and workers parties have only collaborated with the ruling class in its efforts to contain the virus, to contain the working class, to contain the masses of the world... The bourgeoisie has responded to the pandemic with the same old tactics: repression, atomization, and devastation... The bourgeoisie's lockdowns are a reactionary public health measure. Workers must oppose them! Lockdowns may well temporarily slow the spread of infection, but they weaken the fighting ability of the working class... The bourgeoisie must maintain production for private profit, they were only capable of a reactionary response that would necessarily be at the expense of the working class... Only the independent mobilization of the workers could provide a progressive path forward... But for that, they needed to take matters into their own hands: take control of safety in workplaces and redistribute the existing resources... It was the duty of communists to intervene and chart this course, starting from the immediate needs in the pandemic and linking the struggle to the necessity of taking state power... Workers needed to fight against the attacks and for safe conditions. They needed to fight for more and better schools and childcare facilities, for more production, for more jobs, for more wages and for the unions, not the state, to determine what conditions are safe for work... To wage this struggle, they needed to fight against the repression, atomization and devastation of the working class... The fundamental prerequisite was to break workers from the "saving lives"/"national unity" blackmail peddled by the capitalists and their labor lieutenants, which dictated that nothing could be done but to support government measures... Workers required a revolutionary leadership to break the bonds to the bourgeois state and conduct class war for their defense... It was incumbent on revolutionaries to draw the class line, expose the traitorous misleaders shepherding workers to the slaughter and oppose the lockdowns, which decimated the working class and bolstered the bourgeoisie's oppressive apparatus.

**Break with the Labor Traitors—Reforge the Fourth International!**

**Statement of the ICL International Executive Committee (19 April 2021)**

Available in Arabic, Catalan, English, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, Tagalog, Turkish.

Read online at [icl-fi.org](http://icl-fi.org).

# Pandemic...

(continued from page 3)

of workers' health and safety is a grotesque violation of basic Marxist principle. It is not a question of "recommending" an alternative policy for the bourgeoisie, but of mobilizing workers in struggle to defend themselves and for solutions that can actually begin to address their needs. *Any* struggle in the interests of workers would *necessarily* be carried out *against* the capitalists, their state and the lockdowns. But the IG dutifully deludes workers with the lie that, when it comes to public health, all classes share a common interest and that the bourgeoisie and its state will deliver us from danger. The IG's position places them firmly on the wrong side of the class line, which they attempt to obscure by regurgitating the same moralistic effluvia spewed by the capitalists to instill subservience to their diktats. Behind the supposed concern for "saving lives," the capitalists conceal the brutal pursuit of their class interests, and the IG, their touching faith in the bourgeois state.

Our difference with the IG is not over whether the virus posed a deadly threat for workers that called for immediate action. Our difference is the class line. The intervention of a revolutionary party was desperately needed to raise the class consciousness of workers and to dispel their illusions in the state so that they could effectively defend themselves in this deadly situation. Our statement illustrates why workers must break with their treacherous leaderships and rely only on their own forces to defend themselves and advance their interests. The IG takes umbrage at this and instead implants deadly illusions and servility to the state. In the context of the mortal danger presented by the pandemic, the IG's refusal to break workers from the bootlicking bureaucrats on the question of the state is a criminal betrayal.

## Remote Learning Was a Frontal Attack

In "The Fight Over Reopening Schools Is a Class Battle" (September 2020) the IG argues:

"At the time schools across the United States were closed in mid-March, this was a necessary step in order to implement general quarantining of the population to contain community spread of the deadly coronavirus. Shutting down many businesses, combined with 'stay-at-home' and 'shelter-in-place' orders, did eventually slow transmission rates. However, when the orders were prematurely lifted after a month or two, particularly in the South and West, the stage was set for the summer resurgence of COVID-19."



Noam Galai/Getty; TWU Local 100 (inset)

Belying any claim to communism, the IG kneels before the bourgeois power, extols its efficacy and laments only that people weren't locked up longer. They not only hoodwink workers with the false idea that the ruling class was working in their interests and that nothing else was possible, but they also echo the reactionary position of the union bureaucracy, which fought to keep schools closed and remote. This is an abdication of the fight for safe working conditions, as it makes any struggle impossible; it guarantees the IG won't fight for free, quality, integrated public education. Far from "necessary," the closures were antithetical to the needs of the working class and premised on accepting the miserable state of education and childcare.

The school closures and remote learning schemes were oppressive to youth who were cut off from social interaction and fell behind in basic education. Black students, already segregated into failing schools with no resources, were hit even harder. Teachers and students were subjected to surveillance through remote learning software. Teachers and school staff were massively overworked, laid off, isolated and atomized. With the closing of schools and childcare facilities, even women who did not lose their jobs were forced back into the home to suffer the unpaid burden of the family. And domestic violence increased.

Everyone knows that the closures were devastating for black people, women, youth, and workers. The IG knows this and elaborates on many of the horrific consequences in their article. They even polemicize against CORE (Chicago Teachers Union leadership), MORE (United Federation of Teachers caucus in New York), the Democratic Socialists of America and the



Left: Non-union New York City subway cleaner during pandemic. Right: NYC mayor Eric Adams, flanked by former and current TWU Local 100 heads Tony Utano (left) and Richard Davis, respectively. TWU bureaucrats canceled union meetings, enforced PPE ban, refused to organize cleaners and kept system running at expense of workers' lives.

Socialist Equality Party for demanding that schools stay shut until COVID is all but eliminated.

The IG can both support the bourgeoisie's devastating measures and criticize their own bedfellows because there is no programmatic difference between them, only a quibble over criteria. All these left groups share the perspective of reliance on the state—the very instrument that would be used against any real struggle to improve conditions. Their starting point is not class independence but an embrace of the bourgeoisie's authority, thinly veiled in an appeal to science. The IG states, "Contrary to Trump's demand to resume in-person instruction everywhere, the overwhelming verdict of scientists is that in much of the country, reopening schools is not possible at this time."

The IG offers the same "solution" as the bureaucrats and others on the left: deference to the bourgeoisie until the threat subsides. They conclude: "Thus, we are for keeping schools closed where infections are high, and to use union power to make the schools safe where they can be opened." Thus, the IG supports the reactionary policies of the bourgeoisie against the working class, so long as they are supposedly carried out in the name of science. But the struggle for safe conditions cannot advance one inch in alliance with the capitalist state, even with the IG earnestly advising them on a more scientifically sound policy.

The IG's claim that nothing else was "possible" makes sense only if one regards private property as something holy and inviolable—the social context of the science the IG cites. The elite private schools, with their small class sizes and superior facilities, were able to operate during the pandemic, and there is no "scientific" reason this should have remained a privilege of the wealthy. Every major city, especially New York, is full of empty luxury real estate that is spacious, well-ventilated and able to provide conditions far superior to the existing crumbling schools. The role of a revolutionary party was to explain to workers that the labor movement must take over this property and put it to work for socially useful purposes that can actually begin to address their needs and that in no way is the state their ally in the struggle.

Teachers and construction unions should have demanded a massive program of public works to erect modern, quality facilities where such property did not already exist. With workers taking the lead and property at their disposal, steps could have actually been taken to integrate education, linking the struggle for safe conditions to the struggle against black oppression. Beyond just the schools, the pandemic underscored the miserable living conditions of workers and the unacceptably inhumane condition of the homeless population. Mass construction of quality, integrated public housing was so obviously called for. Instead, the IG strongly suggests that the state should have shut down all construction.

Despite explicitly supporting the lockdowns, the IG regularly invokes the need for "class struggle" and "union power," but these slogans are meaningless since the IG has already yielded to the "necessity" of the bourgeois monopoly over health and safety. The IG can call for

better HVAC, bathroom remodeling, etc., but how do they propose to win even such meager demands? Wage a strike, but send everyone home as soon as the state deems the situation unsafe?

Like the program of the trade-union bureaucracy, the IG's support to the lockdowns fundamentally undermines the ability of workers to wage even the most minimal struggle. Moreover, this subordination to the bourgeoisie limits the struggle to impotent half measures that are acceptable to the ruling class. While the IG narrowly criticizes the bureaucracy's support to the Democrats as a brake on militancy, they share the same framework that binds workers to the state and leaves them prostrate before their enemy. In the pandemic, as always, the workers needed a revolutionary leadership to defend themselves—one that was able to provide a revolutionary course of struggle *against* the state and in *defiance* of the "saving lives" blackmail.

## Union Bureaucrats Serve Up NYC Transit Workers

In NYC, the transit workers were devastated by the pandemic, and their leadership betrayed them. The bureaucrats canceled union meetings, enforced the bosses' ban on PPE, refused to organize the non-union cleaners and kept the system running at the expense of workers' lives. The union tops accepted the trashing of seniority rights, a hiring freeze and a service reduction. They did this all in the name of "national unity" and "essential" sacrifice, while preaching reliance on the Centers for Disease Control and the Democrats. It is not only the MTA bosses that workers needed to fight against, but the betrayals of their leadership, which offered them up for sacrifice using the same justifications pushed by the IG.

But another course was possible—one that would have actually represented the interests not only of TWU Local 100 members, but of workers and the oppressed more broadly. Again, there is a vast amount of real estate in NYC, like the 32-story, 1.6 million-square-foot MTA headquarters at 2 Broadway. Workers should have appropriated the necessary space to organize their work and meetings. While they were at it, the question of providing quality accommodations for the homeless population who had taken refuge in the subway system could have been addressed.

When the MTA refused the bureaucrats' requests for PPE, a detachment of workers should have gone and taken the pallets of masks the bosses had stockpiled. Workers needed to take control of safety in opposition to the bureaucrats' co-management schemes. All cleaners needed to be brought into the union immediately. Against the hiring freeze, the union needed to take control of hiring and bring in masses of workers to spread the work with no loss in pay—a measure that could have combated the mass unemployment as well. Workers needed to take control of service and run more trains to eliminate overcrowding.

In response to opposition from the bosses and their state, workers should have gone on strike. The lockdowns and closures imposed by the state did *nothing* to improve the existing dangerous conditions and crumbling infrastructure.

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## Spartacist League Forums

### Liberalism: Dead End for Black Liberation

# FOR BLACK TROTSKYISM

## For a Multiracial Vanguard Party!

### NEW YORK CITY

Saturday, May 6, 3 p.m.

Brooklyn Friends Meeting House  
110 Schermerhorn St., Brooklyn  
(Take 2, 3, 4, 5 to Borough Hall  
or A, C, F, R to Jay St./Metrotech)  
For information: (212) 267-1025  
nysl@tiac.net

### BAY AREA

Saturday, May 20, 2 p.m.

Oakland Public Library—Main Branch  
Auditorium (downstairs)  
125 14th Street, Oakland  
(Between Oak & Madison, 8-minute walk from  
Lake Merritt BART)  
For information: (510) 839-0851  
sbayarea@fastmail.net

(The Oakland Public Library does not advocate or endorse the viewpoints of meetings or meeting room users.)

### CHICAGO

Saturday, May 13, 3 p.m.

5615 S. Woodlawn Ave.  
Chicago  
For information: (312) 563-0441  
chicagospartacist@sbcglobal.net

### LOS ANGELES

Sunday, May 21, 4 p.m.

First Unitarian Church of Los Angeles  
Severance Room  
2936 W. 8th St., Los Angeles  
(Two blocks south of the Wilshire/Vermont  
Red/Purple Line stop, between Vermont Ave.  
and S. Westmoreland Ave.)  
For information: (213) 380-8239  
slycla@sbcglobal.net

(The views expressed by the participants are not necessarily those of the First Unitarian Church.)

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# The Bankruptcy of Trade-Union Economism

# For Revolutionary Leadership of the Unions

We print below, edited for publication, a report to the 16th National Conference of the Spartacist League/U.S. by Central Committee member and Workers Vanguard production manager François Donau.

In this period of capitalist decay—the epoch of imperialism—*none* of the problems facing the working class and oppressed can be resolved within the confines of the economic struggle. Fights for higher wages and better contracts and conditions are necessary battles along the road to revolution but cannot resolve the fundamental issues facing the working class. To end the special oppression of women and black people and to liberate the workers and oppressed from their misery require a revolutionary *reorganization of society*. Any serious struggle to qualitatively improve the conditions of workers and the oppressed runs up against the interests of private property and the bourgeois state.

Even if reformist trade-union leaders distrust the cops and the courts, they will inevitably disarm workers locked in struggle against the class enemy, which has at its disposal a state apparatus of organized violence to defend its interests, because they do not have the Marxist understanding of the capitalist state. Every major strike confronts the repressive force of the bourgeoisie: pickets are attacked by cops; they face court injunctions; their leaders are jailed, etc. This was true of the 1981 PATCO air traffic controllers strike; it was true of the 2005 New York City transit strike that defied the Taylor Law, and it is now true of the rail workers strike, which Biden and Congress spiked. Even the organizing drives at Amazon and Starbucks are embroiled in court battles with no end in sight.

The only program that can politically arm workers for these confrontations is one based on the understanding that the capitalist state is an instrument for the suppression of the working class to ensure the domination of the exploiting class. No matter how militant labor leaders are, if their program is not to replace the capitalist state with a workers state, they will try to enlist the state against the bosses through labor legislation or “labor friendly” politicians or favorable court rulings. All these things bind workers to their exploiters. At every step, reformist trade-union leaders will fail to mobilize the kind of power necessary to take on the capitalist state and win.

While reformist trade-union leaders might distrust the Democrats, they are not clear that you can’t pressure them to act in the interests of the workers because these leaders do not have the Marxist understanding that the Democrats are political representatives of the class enemy. Without the perspective of building a revolutionary workers party politically independent of all bourgeois forces, no matter how militant labor leaders are, they will be swindled by the lies of liberal hypocrites who pose as “friends of labor,” like Bernie Sanders, and they will seek the help of these fakers. But when push comes to shove, the liberals will *always* side with the bourgeois order. When the pressure is on, the reformists will sacrifice the interests of the workers for fear of alienating their liberal “allies.”



Minnesota Historical Society

**Revolutionary leadership was key to victory of 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strike. Above: Trotskyist strike committee member Vincent (Ray) Dunne arrested by National Guard. Marxist understanding of capitalist state, expressed in strike bulletin (inset), was crucial.**

A program of militant struggle cannot inoculate workers against the dead end of class collaboration. Only a leadership that fights for revolution understands that the power of the working class lies in its mass strength, solidarity and independence and will not sacrifice these for illusory alliances with representatives of the class enemy.

While reformist trade-union leaders might express platonic solidarity with other unions, the bosses will be able to pit the unions against one another because these leaders will inevitably sacrifice the interest of the class as a whole for inadequate and ephemeral gains. Unions will scab on each others’ strikes and raid each others’ members. The only perspective that can unify the working class is the fight for power, because it links the struggle for workers’ immediate interests to their historic mission as gravediggers of

capitalism. This understanding can only be introduced to the working class by a revolutionary party.

There is no middle ground between reformist and revolutionary leadership. As Trotsky says in “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay” (1940):

“In other words, the trade unions in the present epoch cannot simply be the organs of democracy as they were in the epoch of free capitalism and they cannot any longer remain politically neutral, that is, limit themselves to serving the daily needs of the working class. They cannot any longer be anarchistic, i.e., ignore the decisive influence of the state on the life of peoples and classes. They can no longer be reformist, because the objective conditions leave no room for any serious and lasting reforms. The trade unions of our time can either serve as secondary instruments of imperialist capitalism for the subordination and disciplining of workers and for obstructing the revolu-



Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

**15 September 2022: Sellout rail union leaders hobnob at White House with Commander-in-Chief Biden. Ten weeks later, in name of “national unity,” these bureaucrats bowed to the state as Biden spiked possible strike.**

tion, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat.”

## Communists Must Fight for Leadership

For 30 years, the starting point of the SL/U.S. has been that the low level of class struggle fundamentally changed the tasks of communists, and we shelved the Transitional Program. Rather than link today’s struggles to the necessity of the working class taking state power, the SL/U.S. *explicitly* separated the “fight to forge a new class-struggle leadership” from the future formation of a revolutionary workers party. In the “Lessons of the Battle of Longview” (WV No. 996, 17 February 2012), we say: “The road forward lies in the fight to forge a new class-struggle leadership of the unions that will wage the battles *out of which* a revolutionary workers party can be built” (emphasis added).

Abandoning a revolutionary perspective, the SL/U.S. pushed the program of social democracy, the historical political outlook of the “militant” trade-union secretary. It divided its program into a *minimum* part consisting of struggling for reform demands *now* and a *maximum* part consisting of revolutionary struggle in the indefinite *future*. Correspondingly, a militant reformist party would be built now, and in the future class struggle would give birth to the “revolutionary party.” This is a purely Pabloite conception, the cult of spontaneity substituting for building a Leninist party: the intervention of a vanguard is *not* necessary to bring revolutionary consciousness to the class, but rather this consciousness is the natural outgrowth of the economic struggle.

It sounds just like the Communist International in 1928: transitional demands when the tides are rising, but a reformist program when it ebbs. The draft program for the Sixth Comintern Congress, the one that Trotsky criticized in *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), argued:

“When the revolutionary tide is not rising the communist parties, taking as their starting-point the workers’ daily needs, must put forward partial slogans and demands and link them with the chief aims of the Communist International. They must not advance transitional slogans which presuppose the existence of a revolutionary situation...”

—Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919-1943*, Vol. 2

The SL/U.S., like the Comintern in 1928, had no need for a bridge from the struggles of today to the conquest of power, because it was on the path to social democracy, for which revolution is good only for holiday speechifying. Without the bridge, all that remains is the impotent reformist program.

The *Then and Now* SL/U.S. pamphlet, the central weapon of the section for combat in the working class for nearly a decade, is pure economism. It is *not* a tool to raise the consciousness of the working class to communist consciousness; rather, it pushes narrow militancy. It blurs the line between trade-union economism and revolution, that is, the line between reform and revolution. As Lenin taught us, the economic struggle alone can only lead to the understanding that the interests of labor and capital are counterposed: build unions, fight the bosses and struggle for

*continued on page 6*

# Unions...

(continued from page 5)

reforms. This is still bourgeois consciousness, counterposed to the revolutionary program for working-class rule. Marxism is not just the recognition of class struggle, of the irreconcilable interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; it is the recognition of the need to establish the revolutionary *dictatorship of the proletariat*.

The starting point of the pamphlet is that what made a crucial difference “then,” in 1934, was that the three city-wide strikes were led by “reds.” This point could have value because it raises the question of leadership. But the key question is, on *what program* is the leadership based? Plenty of other strikes in that period were led by the likes of John L. Lewis, who was not even a socialist. While reformist leaderships can lead victorious strikes, militancy is not enough. The entire purpose of that pamphlet should have been to counterpose the revolutionary program of the Trotskyists, who led the Minneapolis strike, to the centrism of the Musteites and the treachery of the Stalinists who led the strikes in Toledo and San Francisco, respectively. Instead, it disappears that distinction and hails all three as “class-struggle leaderships.” This is the opposite of the initial motivation by former SL/U.S. National Chairman Jim Robertson for a historical pamphlet:

“The outcome of the major labor struggles was that the Communist Party embraced the popular front and the Trotskyists embraced the Musteites. The sequel was that the government jailed the Trotskyists.”

The key lesson should have been the need for Trotskyist leadership. The Minneapolis struggle was consciously organized by the Trotskyists of the Communist League of America, who were able to clear a centrist obstacle to revolution by winning over the Musteites to fuse with them. In contrast, the Stalinists were, as Trotsky called them, “the great organizers of defeat,” from their “Third Period” ultraleftism to subordinating workers to the popular front around Franklin D. Roosevelt, that is, a political alliance with the liberal president, and enforcing a no-strike pledge in World War II.

Because the CIO union federation was built on a reformist basis, the outcome of the gigantic class battles of the 1930s was...a new bureaucracy that shackled the workers to the bosses, supported U.S. imperialism in WWII and thus was instrumental in establishing the hegemony of postwar U.S. imperialism. To call the Stalinists a “class-struggle leadership” is a rejection of the central lesson of the period: the unions will be either secondary instruments of imperialism or instruments of revolution.

For us, the call for a “class-struggle leadership” of the unions was historically a popularization of the call for a *communist* leadership. In a 1974 letter, comrades Robertson and Liz Gordon explained:

“Thus for example in our party press we have had to learn that in the main Midwestern industrial centers, to call for a *communist* program in the trade unions is downright misleading in conveying the understanding that we intend, as compared to calling for a *class-struggle* program in the labor movement. Just imagine what ‘communist’ might mean to militant but religious and East European-descended workers! Likewise, barring only overriding security considerations, we certainly encourage caucuses influenced by us to propagate that part of the Trotskyist program, which is found in a full and contemporary expression of the demands set forth in the Transitional Program. But it would be a weakness on our part to give equal emphasis to all of these demands equally at all times. To do this would obliterate the necessary distinction between agitation and propaganda. This consideration however is quite different from for example the CSL’s [Class Struggle League which dissolved in 1975] opportunist appetite to hide parts of the Trotskyist program which it formally professes. Moreover we must always be aware that in any case one cannot say everything that communists must say to the rest of the workers from within the framework of the trade unions themselves. Hence our party press must seek to compensate for the partial gag order imposed on all of our comrades within the trade unions.”



Fred Ellis

Jerry Cooke/Getty

**Left: Stalinist Communist Party eulogized imperialist president Roosevelt, enforced no-strike pledge during World War II, which ILWU president Harry Bridges (seen here at 1944 CIO convention) sought to extend into postwar period. Despite CIO’s militant origins, its leadership’s class-collaborationist program chained workers to bosses, criminally supported U.S. imperialism in war.**

However, in the recent period, *Workers Vanguard*—the party press—gagged the Trotskyist program. To carry out revolutionary work in the class, militants need the direction of a party committed to fighting for power, and the purpose of the party press is to give them direction. In Lenin’s words, it is the collective propagandist, agitator and organizer.

But the program of WV pointed in a totally reformist direction. The call for a “class-struggle leadership” was used to refer to a militant, explicitly *non-revolutionary* leadership. The role of the SL/U.S. has not been to struggle for communist leadership now, but to “revitalize the unions” and push for more class struggle. The article “UAW Holds Off GM Bosses, But Strikers Sold Short” (WV No. 1164, 1 November 2019) argues:

“If there is one lesson to be drawn from the GM strike, it is the need for a class-struggle leadership of labor, one based on the understanding that the capitalist bosses and the workers share no common interests. Such a leadership would have

work. The *Then and Now* pamphlet barely mentions black oppression because its purpose is not to win workers to the need to fight for power. If it had been, the pamphlet would have put front and center that question, which is strategic for the American socialist revolution. Instead, it pushes the idea that economic struggle alone will unite black and white workers.

Slavish to spontaneity, WV repeatedly presented the temporary unity between black and white workers sometimes achieved on the picket line as sufficient. For example, the article “Racism, Fear-mongering and the Midterms” (WV No. 1144, 16 November 2018) states: “The anger and discontent of the American working class needs to be expressed in *class struggle*. It is through such struggle that workers can overcome the racial and other divisions fomented by the bosses.”

*No!* Genuine unity requires consciously uniting the struggle for black freedom with the struggle of the proletariat as inseparable parts of a program to free the black

can unite black and white workers. Anything else leaves the crippling divisions in the class intact, and black workers segregated at the bottom of the workforce. In the U.S., the battles of the working class will face the bourgeoisie’s relentless divide-and-rule plots. Even the basic fight for union organization, especially in the South, is impossible without confronting black oppression head on.

This requires a struggle against liberal illusions and all forms of false consciousness and a struggle against all wings of the trade-union bureaucracy. WV was fond of citing Lenin’s conception of the vanguard party as a “tribune of the people,” but only to bastardize it in a liberal direction, transforming it into a party that would unite all the good enlightened people. But the purpose of the Leninist party is to instill in the working class and all the oppressed the conscious understanding of the need to fight for workers rule. In *What Is To Be Done?* (1902), Lenin wrote:

“The Social-Democrat’s ideal should not be the trade-union secretary, but *the tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalize all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.”

The New York City transit workforce is heavily black and Latino, and the system is so riddled with racial discrimination and inequality that workers call the disciplinary system “plantation justice.” The incumbent bureaucracy of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 is, at best, indifferent to this discrimination. It is challenged by a black nationalist caucus, Progressive Action (PA). A number of black workers look to PA to fight against the racism on the job because the union is not defending them.

The article “TWU Tops Push Through Rotten Contract” (WV No. 1168, 17 January 2020) criticizes the incumbent bureaucracy for not being militant enough, while criticizing PA for “play[ing] into the bosses’ divide-and-rule ploy.” At the same time, WV does not put forward any program to fight the oppression of black workers in that industry. For WV, the fact that black workers are fighting against their special oppression is what divides the working class. This is criminal; it alibies both the bosses and the Local 100 leadership. Furthermore, it strengthens the political hold of PA on black workers. All this is what a program of trade-union militancy means.

The role of communists is to fight for a revolutionary leadership that explicitly takes on black oppression and show how this fight will benefit the whole workforce. In contrast, the programs of both the union leadership and that of PA are dead ends that can only further the bosses’ efforts to pit workers against each other. Communists must fight against both wings of the



WV Photo

**February 1986: SL-supported NYC transit union caucus rally in defense of token clerk James Grimes, who faced charges for defending himself on the job. Revolutionaries in union linked defense of Grimes to broader program for black liberation.**

mobilized all workers at the Big Three in a common front against the automakers. Against the capitalists’ courts, injunctions and cops, it would have built mass picket lines, drawing in allies from working-class, black and Latino communities. A fighting union leadership would have given it organization and direction.”

WV could say, “Don’t trust the cops, Democrats or National Labor Relations Board,” but the key lesson that it does *not* draw is that waging class battle on that basis, which will inevitably run up against the state, is only possible under the political direction of a leadership that has a program for power. Any other leadership will either cave in or be outmaneuvered by the bourgeoisie.

## The Fight for Revolutionary Integration

For the SL/U.S., pushing an economist minimum program meant abandoning revolutionary integrationism in trade-union

masses and all workers from the chains of capitalism. That unity can be achieved only by winning white workers to fight for black liberation, overcoming the skepticism of that possibility among black workers. A program of trade-union militancy *cannot* achieve that goal because it doesn’t challenge workers’ consciousness, and restricts itself to what is considered possible under capitalism.

To win white workers to fight for black liberation, they must be won to the understanding that only the destruction of capitalism can free themselves from exploitation. In turn, black workers need to be broken from the illusion that liberal integrationism or black nationalism can improve their plight. They must understand that genuine integration and equality can only be achieved by the destruction of the capitalist order.

Only a revolutionary integrationist program, the program for workers revolution,

bureaucracy represented by the incumbents and PA.

Another egregious example of what results from simple trade-union militancy was the junking of the fight against segregated International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) locals. The SL/U.S. dropped its historic call to "End all segregated locals and hiring halls in the ILA" with the spurious justification that the question was "complicated" because black workers "prefer" the segregation, fearing loss of work and being at the bottom in an integrated local. This capitulation to the racist status quo and the ILA bureaucrats, black and white, was a betrayal of our communist purpose.

Any outfit claiming to be revolutionary must fight to end the segregation of the locals, which hurts the entire union membership. It also should fight like hell to ensure that black workers don't draw the short straw, which can only happen under a new union leadership dedicated to workers running society. Union control of hiring, reduction of the workweek with no loss in pay, opposition to state intervention in the union, an end to the racist disciplinary system, etc., must be raised in a way that addresses the special needs of black workers and benefits the workforce as a whole. This program must be raised in political combat against the bureaucrats, black and white, who support segregation.

But rather than fight for leadership on a communist program, the SL/U.S. crawled for years before "progressive" black bureaucrats like those atop ILA Local 1422 in Charleston, South Carolina, and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 in the Bay Area. We built their credentials instead of striving to break workers from them, just as the Internationalist Group has done.

### For Revolution in the Belly of the Imperialist Beast

The Biden administration is aggressively pursuing U.S. imperialism's strategic interests in Ukraine, overseeing the pillage of its colonies and neocolonies in Latin America and all over the world and pushing counterrevolution in China. Unconditional opposition to imperialism is the elementary duty of a revolutionary party in the U.S.

The union bureaucrats act as direct agents of U.S. imperialism. They support Ukraine in the war and sanctions against Russia. They push anti-China protectionism and work hand in hand with the State Department. These labor traitors push a program of class collaboration, deluding



Mik Milman

**Both wings of ILWU bureaucracy are lackeys of imperialists. Left: Transport Secretary Buttigieg thanks ILWU president Willie Adams for enforcing labor discipline during pandemic to avert supply chain collapse. Right: ILWU "progressives" push pacifist opposition to official ILWU pro-NATO declaration, seeking more "peaceful" imperialist pillage.**

workers with the lie that U.S. imperialism's war aims and plunder abroad are in their interests.

To the contrary, workers pay the cost for the imperialists' wars abroad, not only as cannon fodder but also with no-strike pledges and sacrifice in the name of the war efforts. "Peaceful" imperialist plunder also results in the devastation of the working class. The expansion of the imperialists' sphere of exploitation allows them to outsource jobs and drive down conditions, whether their depredations are carried out with bombs or trade deals.

We fight for revolutionary defeatism in the war in Ukraine, and revolutionaries in the U.S. have a special responsibility to

fight to overthrow the imperialist behemoth from within. A communist opposition must be built in the unions that openly challenges the bureaucrats' support to Ukraine, i.e., the designs of the U.S. ruling class. It must also oppose and expose the "progressive" trade unionists and reformists who criticize U.S./NATO depredations while preaching a pacifist solution, i.e., "peaceful" imperialist plundering of the world. Even an antiwar union militant will be a tool of imperialism as long as they do not proceed from the need to overthrow the whole imperialist ruling class. Pushing the lie that lasting peace is possible without the destruction of capitalism means pushing workers into the arms



WV Photo

**13 May 1972: During Vietnam War, SL intervened against SWP and its National Peace Action Coalition, which promoted dead end of "peaceful, legal" alliance with liberal wing of imperialist bourgeoisie. Like the SL, union formations supported by it called for "labor strikes against the war" as concrete way to strike blow against U.S. imperialism.**

## Pandemic...

(continued from page 4)

Conversely, *workers* shutting down the system in their struggle for safety could have actually resulted in improvements. But because the leadership of the TWU refused to wage this fight and bowed to the blackmail, the system remains just as unsafe today, and conditions for workers and riders are even worse.

The bare minimum course of action was to strike for safety. The argument against was that it would screw over other "essential workers." But it was the MTA bosses and Democratic Party government, with the complicity of the union tops, who were screwing workers by cutting service and packing people into fewer trains and buses. Revolutionaries had to show how the transit workers fighting against the lockdowns and "national unity," "saving lives" blackmail was in the interests of the nurses and all other workers. Safer, cleaner, more frequent service was desperately needed by those still forced to work.

Transit workers taking on the blackmail that said there was no other alternative but to sacrifice their lives for the greater good would have given impetus to others facing the same assault—teachers, nurses, etc. A strike would have defied the Taylor Law and led to a larger confrontation with the state—an action notably incompatible

with promoting the state as the arbiter of public health. Smashing the Taylor Law would be particularly in the interest of teachers and public-sector health care workers in their fight for better conditions and would have provided a way to broaden the struggle beyond the TWU.

At the end of the IG's article "MTA Bosses' Coronavirus Disaster: For Workers Control of NYC Transit!" (May 2020), they call for workers control of transit and safety, a hiring hall and plenty of demands about PPE. But the call for union control of safety, in any Marxist sense, is categorically *counterposed* to their support to the lockdowns, i.e., the capitalist state's control of safety. At best, this can only amount to enlisting the unions as adjuncts of the bourgeois state to help enforce government rulings. While the IG lists some fine demands (which they qualify as "emergency measures"), they cover for the bureaucrats' betrayals that precluded their achievement, spending much of the article positively quoting them with the caveat that they only took action under pressure from the ranks and they should be ousted if they support the Democrats.

The IG does not take on the "national unity" blackmail pushed by the bureaucrats to ward off a strike; in fact, they repeat it:

"Workers should absolutely use their power to shut down operations to ensure safeguards are met, as the Detroit bus drivers did in their March 18 walkout. At the same time, keeping the NYC buses

and subways running amid the pandemic is essential, not only to ensure that health-care workers can get to and from work, but also for the hundreds of thousands of workers—mostly low-wage, African American, Latino and immigrant—who have no choice but to go to work, and whose labor is vital to supplying a population confined to their homes."

Negating their paltry lip service to a strike, the IG aligns with the bureaucrats and the bosses, accepting the entirety of their reactionary framework: the only option was to lock the population up in their homes and any struggle to improve conditions is a threat to human life.

Contrary to the claims of the capitalists and the IG, a revolutionary leadership wouldn't have hung nurses out to dry during a strike, but organized *with* them to carry out the struggle. A revolutionary does not temper the impulse to strike against life-threatening conditions with the moralistic blackmail of the bosses. They would explain that in this action transit workers should begin to exercise management of society as a whole and send delegations to other unions to unite them and plan the attack. Those delegations would explain that they are waging the same fight against the same class enemy and that the strike's victory is in the interest of *all* workers. Special service for health workers could have been arranged. In fact, this happened during the shutdown; and if management did it, workers could do it better.

As for the unorganized workers, there needed to be a massive organizing drive to bring them under protection of the union and involve them in the workers' planning of how to run society. While the IG invokes "dual power," it is an empty phrase, like "workers control," as nothing they argue points to the working class relying on its own strength and taking control of society. In fact, they *denounce* us for having that program. For the IG, waging the required struggle against the state in a time of crisis is "lunacy," and the bureaucrats who tied workers to the state, calling for more repression and closures, are to be commended.

While the IG tries to slander us for "boycotting" the mass liberal protests for police reform (we did not), they supported the school closures, which were disastrous particularly for black students, and they support the lockdowns, under which police were dispatched to enforce "public health" measures. While the IG tries to slander our program for the independent mobilization of workers against the bourgeoisie and their state to defend our class as a "sharp turn to the right," they offer only a more militant version of the bureaucrats' bankrupt reformism and reliance on the state. The difference between us and the IG is not "sanity" vs. "lunacy"; it is reform vs. revolution, and the working class *needs revolutionary leadership now* to advance its interests and even to defend itself. ■

# Feminism...

(continued from page 1)

post-pandemic “new normal.” The lockdowns exacerbated the burden of domestic work for women stuck at home caring for children and elderly people, while they tried to keep their ever more oppressive jobs. Many women never returned to work after the lockdowns.

There has been a constant erosion of abortion rights for years, including under Trump. The strategy of Republicans during the Trump administration was to pack the courts with anti-woman conservatives. The Democrats’ and feminists’ response was to hold protests against justices like Brett Kavanaugh and to sign everyone up to elect Democrats who after some grandstanding would continue voting for the anti-abortion Hyde Amendment, as they have been doing for decades. And now that the feminists have achieved their goal with a Democrat in the White House, *Roe* has been officially overturned.

After the Supreme Court leak about the overturn of *Roe*, the feminists went into a frenzy to mobilize people to vote for Democrats in the midterm elections. After all, this worked so well the last time. Many protesters ended up voting for the Democrats as supposed defenders of women, some young people for the first time, because they considered doing so the only way to fight back. This was the answer of the feminists, whose single issue was to bring back *Roe*.

As was obvious to everyone, the Democrats used the topic of abortion to get themselves elected. Those who voted for them hoped that they might pass a law codifying *Roe*, which most people already see is not happening, or that maybe several Supreme Court justices would die around the same time so the president, in turn, could appoint pro-abortion judges. Well, the midterms have passed, the Democrats have been elected and what has happened? Literally nothing. And what are the feminists doing? The same thing. This is clearly a losing strategy, even to regain the limited right to abortion that *Roe* was.

The feminists tell people that the all-out retreat on women’s rights is the result of conservatives being in power. But it is, in fact, the *feminist program* that is the obstacle to advancing women’s rights today.

## The Need for Communism to Emancipate Women

Women’s oppression is rooted in the system of private property, which requires the bourgeois family. This institution is key for the ruling class to pass property to its heirs and to acquire a constant supply of wage slaves to exploit. And where better to get them than from the current wage slaves? And who better to raise this next generation of workers and fill their heads with bourgeois propaganda than the family? Why would the bourgeoisie pay for childcare, laundries and public kitchens when the family is right there to take care of all that for free! And women have the special privilege of being the sex tied to the home to make all this happen.



Left Voice

**Left Voice attempts to bridge reform and revolution, dressing up their feminist program for legislative reform (right) with anti-capitalist rhetoric (left). This class-collaborationist perspective is dead end for women’s struggle.**



Luigi W. Morris

Women workers have an extra special treat of having to grind away at work all day for less pay in terrible conditions and then go back home to their horrible and crumbling housing to look after kids and husbands.

To free these women from their double oppression as workers and domestic servants requires the socialization of the functions of the family. To even begin to address their oppression requires going right up against capitalist profits and property. Quality, *free* 24-hour childcare requires expropriating large amounts of the bourgeoisie’s property to build nice, clean facilities where kids can play and get healthy meals, plus hiring and training tons of new staff, such as teachers and early childhood experts.

But who is going to do this? Get the Democrats in Congress to pass a bill or Biden to sign an executive order? Of course not. The bourgeoisie will never pass legislation to expropriate themselves! Expropriation of the bourgeoisie will happen only through proletarian revolution led by a Leninist party. Real power lies on Wall Street and in the armed bodies that defend capitalist property. Only by sweeping away the bourgeois state and having workers establish their own state can the needs of workers and the oppressed be met. Workers rule is not some utopian thing but the only realistic answer to the oppression of women. In order to take even the tiniest of steps in this direction requires a women’s movement that fights for socialist revolution.

The strategy of the feminists is counterposed to this perspective because their whole program is to seek *formal* equality under capitalism, not to overthrow the ruling class. Instead of fighting to sweep away the state through workers revolution, their strategy is to use the state (the repressive apparatus of violence whose whole purpose is to maintain bourgeois rule) to better serve women. If your starting point is not the need to make a revolution, it is necessarily the preservation of capitalism, which means the preservation of the family and betrayal of the fight for women’s liberation.

What about improving the conditions of women under capitalism? Plenty of women live in decrepit housing with abusive partners and can’t even make ends

meet. Fighting for a pay raise, affordable housing and women’s shelters is urgently needed right now. But it is the feminist program that impedes this fight in every way. To achieve these measures requires a confrontation with the capitalist class. The feminist program is an obstacle to that because they want to preserve unity with the bourgeoisie. And it seems to be going quite well...for the bourgeoisie. Witness the overturn of *Roe*, the lockdowns, the recession and just the miserable conditions that poor, black and other minority women are forced to endure every day.

The feminist program promotes unity of all women, including bourgeois women, under the logic that they will fight for the advancement of *all* women. We communists draw a class line and point to the fact that class comes first. The interests of the workers are opposed to those of the capitalists. A bourgeois woman has a material interest in the stability of the capitalist order that oppresses the working class. So, there is no “sisterhood” between the rich woman and the poor woman.

To maintain capitalism, the ruling class pits male workers against women workers (e.g., unequal pay). This division between the sexes prevents class unity, keeping the profits flowing to the bosses and their rule unchallenged. The exploitation of the working class and the oppression of women are interconnected. Therefore, the struggles for workers’ emancipation and for women’s emancipation can either go forward together or fall back separately. Promoting the unity of all women betrays the fight for women’s liberation. Expropriating the bourgeoisie includes bourgeois women. What does Nancy Pelosi care about more: women getting the right to abortion or the political stability of capitalist America?

## The Popular-Front Movement for Abortion vs. Communist Pole

Feminists resort to methods and tactics that flow from their politics of class collaboration, such as the popular front (trans-class political bloc) they built this past summer. This popular front consisted of all “progressive” pro-abortion elements, ranging from the man in the Oval Office to working-class women and fake socialists, like the SL/U.S. was until recently. Its purpose was to fight against all the backward anti-abortion people and to get a new *Roe*. This could only lead to complete failure to restore even the limited right to abortion.

But what most people want isn’t the limited right to abortion but abortion that is accessible to everyone, as seen by the calls for free abortion on demand. To get free abortion on demand or make abortion accessible to all will require going completely against capitalist interests. Working-class and black women are the main ones who do not have access to abortion. For them to have full access requires desegregation of the ghettos, expansion of health care free at the point of service, a massive public works program and job training and hiring. This will require taking huge swaths of the bourgeoisie’s property and cutting into their profits. An alliance with the liberals has a price, which is sacrificing the needs of millions of poor women. This shows the urgent need to draw a class line in the women’s movement.

Any struggle against women’s oppression, including against restrictions and bans on abortion, must take place independently of any bourgeois force, centrally feminism. What’s clearly called for is a communist women’s movement. Abortion is a basic reform demand that the bourgeoisie could grant if it wanted to. But full, unhindered access cannot come through legalistic means. Revolutionaries are best at waging even the struggle for reforms because they understand what is necessary to win.

The precondition for advancing the fight for women’s liberation or even for full access to abortion is a split with the feminists and all those who conciliate them. This is the job of socialists, but instead,



WV Photo

**New York City, May Day 2023. Revolutionaries draw class line against feminism to give women’s movement the revolutionary working-class character it needs to advance.**

so-called revolutionaries have been busy cheerleading and bolstering the authority of the feminists and their movements.

The socialist feminists of Left Voice have a radical posture with their anti-imperialist, pro-black and pro-union feminism and anti-bourgeois rhetoric, but what they do with that is more effectively build the left wing of the popular front around abortion. As described in a 15 May 2022 article, they go to liberal protests and call for a “movement to win *national legislation* to guarantee safe, free, legal abortion on demand” (our emphasis). Keeping the struggle for abortion in a legalistic framework is the program of the feminists, who tie the struggle for abortion to the two-party system and the letter of the law.

Left Voice attempts to reconcile socialism with feminism. Their program is class collaboration because it tries to build a bridge between the socialist program and that of the bourgeoisie. In their article “The Antidote to Midterm Despair Is

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Socialist Feminism” (8 November 2022), Left Voice stated:

“In these midterm elections, we all know that progressive change is not on the ballot; the idea that elections and these institutions could bring about change feels like a distant idealistic dream. The working class is on a sinking boat, and while both parties want workers’ votes, neither one will throw them so much as a life-vest.

“Let’s face that fact. And let’s take the future in our own hands.

“The antidote to the despair that so many feel is the fight for socialist feminism.”

This was their sad attempt at saying they are opposed to the Democrats, which is popular to say now. But Left Voice’s call to break with the Democrats means nothing, as they have no intention of exposing why any movement for women’s rights based on an alliance with any bourgeois force is a fundamental obstacle to advancing the struggle for women’s liberation. They pride themselves on being socialist feminists and tailor their demands to be as palatable to as many left-liberals as possible, which keeps them within the popular front.

Although Left Voice may have you think otherwise, the struggle for abortion cannot advance in an alliance with a wing of the bourgeoisie. That is because any alliance with the bourgeoisie, even their shadow, automatically subordinates the fight for abortion rights (or indeed, any struggle) to bourgeois politics and confines it to what is acceptable to the bourgeoisie, strangling the struggle. To be a communist is to understand that the central task is to fight for leadership of the movement by breaking women and youth from feminist politics and from illusions that an alliance with the bourgeoisie will bring gains for women.

While other leftist organizations, such as the Internationalist Group (IG) and previously the SL/U.S., do not call themselves socialist feminists and claim to be against single-issue popular fronts, they stay squarely in the pop front by not drawing a class line against feminism. One expression of this is how both turn the *Women and Revolution* articles from the 1970s, such as “Fight SWP/WONAAC Reformism—Free Health Care for All, Free Abortion on Demand” (May 1972), into a list of liberal demands.

In “Free Abortion on Demand” (September 2022), the IG says:

“The 1972 article laid out a series of basic demands. Though they would certainly put off the Democrats that reformist groups were trying to court, they were (and are) crucial in the fight against women being relegated to the status of baby factories. These demands included free full-time, quality childcare centers; equal pay for equal work, no job discrimination based on race or sex; end discrimination against gays and lesbians—no laws against any form of sexual activity between consenting individuals; jobs for all, a shorter workweek with no loss in pay (‘30 hours work for 40 hours pay’); and workers strikes against the U.S. war on Vietnam. Emphasizing that the workers and oppressed should have ‘no confidence in bourgeois politicians, male or female,’ the article called to break with the capitalist parties and build ‘a political party of the working class.’ This, the historic Marxist journal stated in ’72, is

Our journal *Women and Revolution* (1971-1996) was a weapon against feminists and reformists, like the Socialist Workers Party’s single-issue WONAAC coalition in the 1970s, which limited the movement to reforms acceptable to Democrats. In contrast, we fought for a clearly defined revolutionary perspective, embodied in a program of transitional demands to build a mass, class-conscious women’s liberation movement.

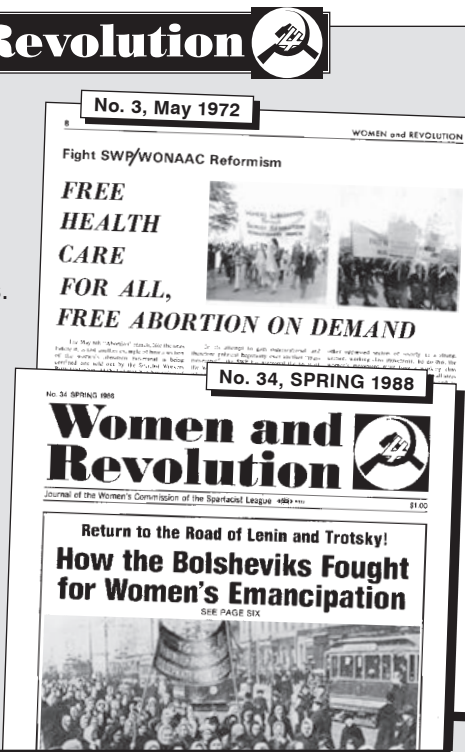
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**For Women’s Liberation Through Socialist Revolution!**

central to the fight for ‘women’s liberation through socialist revolution.’”

The entire goal of *W&R* articles was to provide revolutionary leadership by drawing a class line against feminism. All the articles are intensely polemical on the concrete issues of the time. *W&R* went against all popular fronts and confronted the feminists and their reformist socialist collaborators like the Socialist Workers Party, exposing how they negotiated nothing more than what is possible under capitalism and how they invited bourgeois politicians to their events and excluded us.

Our goal then as now is to give a working-class character and orientation to the women’s liberation movement. What the IG often counterposes, as *WV* did, is a labor contingent, more militant class struggle and the need to break with the Democrats. But without taking on feminism as the bourgeois force that ties the struggle for women’s rights to the ruling class, the call for labor mobilizations is just a social-democratic cover for the feminists’ aims.

Until recently, *WV* echoed the liberals in hailing the feminist movement of the ’70s as the model:

“The rights to legal abortion and contraception were not a gift from the courts or bourgeois politicians. They were concessions granted during a relatively brief but intense period of convulsive social struggles in the 1960s and ’70s, reflecting a broader radicalization....

“The crucial element lacking was the leadership of a revolutionary vanguard party, forged in opposition to the Democrats and their reformist hangers-on. Such a party, a tribune of the people, would have united all those on the receiving end of capitalist brutality around a program to overturn the sys-

tem of exploitation and oppression and to establish the class rule of the workers.”

—“Fight for Free Abortion on Demand!” (*WV* No. 1161, 20 September 2019)

By omitting that what was key during those struggles was to draw a class line and that the feminist program was an obstacle, *WV* put forward pure liberalism. The SL/U.S. turned the vanguard party into a group of nice progressive people whose purpose is to fight against the conservatives. “The summer of rage,” the Women’s Marches in the Trump years and all the bourgeois press promote the 1970s women’s movement because they see it as what needs to happen today in order to improve conditions of women. No! What happened in the ’70s is proof that feminist movements cannot fundamentally alter the status quo because of their politics. Everything since shows the need to organize a communist opposition to break women from feminist leadership.

The *WV* No. 1161 article is a glaring example of the longstanding betrayal of the SL/U.S. in not fighting for a communist women’s movement. It’s a revision of basic Marxism, embracing the framework of progressive pro-abortion people vs. backward anti-abortion people. Instead of trying to break women away from feminism, which paves the way for restrictions and bans on abortion rights and chains the women’s movement to the bourgeoisie, *WV* presents the Christian right as the main political obstacle. This is totally compatible with the pro-abortion popular front, which presents the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* as the fault of Trump installing conservative Supreme Court justices.

The *WV* No. 1161 article goes on to state: “For the working class to take up the fight for women’s emancipation would require a great leap in consciousness, and for that to happen, a revolutionary leadership is key.” What was needed was to fight

for the working class to champion women’s liberation. Instead, *WV* put forward that people should be nice, woke allies of women, which again is totally compatible with the popular front and a bastardization of the tasks of Marxists. The SL/U.S. abandoned the task of fighting for communist leadership today, leaving the leadership of the women’s movement to the liberals. For the working class to take up the fight for women’s liberation requires breaking them from their misleaders, and that means forging a communist pole in opposition to all bourgeois forces.

To better satisfy its pop-frontist appetites, the SL/U.S. said in the *WV* No. 1161 article: “In the U.S., the democratic right to abortion raises the question of women’s freedom.” No, it doesn’t. Abortion is a democratic demand that the bourgeoisie can grant with ease. *WV* deforms this understanding to better merge with the popular front, making its Marxoid verbiage palatable to feminists who think that abortion means women’s liberation.

Both the IG and *WV* criticized feminism and the socialist feminists for being sectoral and bourgeois and staying in the framework of capitalist politics. The IG says: “Revolutionary Marxists fight intransigently for the rights, and full liberation, of women and all the oppressed. This struggle means forthrightly telling the truth that for all the talk of ‘socialist feminism,’ feminism is a bourgeois ideology, posing a sectoral struggle along gender lines that keeps the oppressed within the framework of capitalist politics” (“Supreme Court Cancels Right to Abortion: Trigger for Ultra-Rightist Mobilization,” August 2022).

What the IG doesn’t say is that the program of feminism is the direct cause of the all-out retreat on women’s rights, that a communist women’s movement needs to be built in complete opposition to all bourgeois forces, above all feminism, and that it is the job of socialists to carry out this split. To polemicize against feminism the way that the IG does and *WV* did gives a left cover to all those who dislike “white women feminism” and want a feminism that is “intersectional” and champions the issues of the oppressed. By doing so while covering themselves in loud phrases about the class struggle, they help maintain unity with the feminists.

Recognizing the popular front is not enough: revolutionaries have to take on feminism, the main thing that chains women’s struggles to the bourgeoisie. Just saying it’s a bourgeois ideology and sectoral does not do this. Another glaring example of the IG not seeing their job as breaking young women away from feminism is that they do not say a word against feminism or the socialist feminists on the ground. In a forum that the IG published (“Fight for Abortion Rights with Class Struggle,” November 2022), the word “feminism” isn’t even mentioned.

It is urgent for the labor movement to organize in defense of abortion. But if this is done under a program that conciliates the obstacles to achieving the emancipation of women, it’s a betrayal. The IG capitulates, as the SL/U.S. did, to the liberal leadership of the movement for abortion rights despite calling for “struggle” and a “break with the Democrats.” ■

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# Program for NHS Strikes in Britain:

The following article is reprinted from Workers Hammer (No. 249, Spring 2023), newspaper of our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain.

The NHS [National Health Service] has been gutted and bled dry. The entire system is collapsing and access to even the most basic care is on the line. For the working class in Britain, this is literally a life-and-death question. The strikes by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), Unite and other NHS unions are certainly about wages, but also much more. The very survival of a publicly funded healthcare service is at stake.

This reality is widely recognised. The question is: *what to do?* Every single politician swears up and down that they are entirely committed to “saving the NHS.” To count on them is to count on an arsonist to put out a fire. The Tories have ground the NHS down and are now slamming the door on nurses’ modest wage demands. As for Labour, [party leader Keir] Starmer promises to go back to the legacy of...Tony Blair, the

## High Wages, Quality Health Care, Women’s Liberation!



Workers Hammer

Striking nurses at University College London Hospital, January 18.

### WORKERS HAMMER

very man who opened the doors wide for the private sector in healthcare. The SNP [Scottish National Party], Lib Dems and Greens offer nothing better. Clearly the politicians don’t have the answer.

Social progress comes from one place in this reactionary kingdom: the struggles of the working class. Clearly the unions are central to “saving the NHS.” On the other hand, for 40 years the unions have utterly failed to put a stop to the destruction of the NHS and the erosion of living standards. The fault lies not with the unions themselves but with the disastrous course followed by the union leadership. Instead of building unions as tools of struggle which can defend the basic needs of workers, unions in this country have been hollowed out and are wielded as pathetic public relations tools.

This is apparent in the strategy currently being pursued by the RCN. After almost a century of opposing strikes, allowing its members to be worked to the bone and the state of the NHS to become disastrous, the RCN has called a few strike days. Their objective is to “force the government to stop and listen to what the health care workforce is asking for” (*RCN Magazines*, 16 October 2020). All well and good, but a few spread-out strike days will not “force” the government to do anything. In fact, while the government hasn’t budged, the RCN cut its pay demands in half, from 19 to 10 per cent after only two strike days.

The government will not be made to “recognise” the true worth of NHS work-

ers through media attention. What has happened to the NHS is not some misguided policy but a decades-long campaign to destroy the greatest working-class gain in this country. This will not be reversed without a real fight and certainly not by having illusions in goodwill from Westminster.

Every nurse knows that to treat a patient one must first have a correct diagnosis of the ailment. The RCN correctly identifies low wages as an important factor in the crisis of the NHS. However, low wages are only a symptom of a broader problem. The real cause of the NHS crisis is the general degradation of social and economic conditions in Britain and Northern Ireland. In the last 40 years working conditions, public services and the condition of women have all been ground down by constant attacks. Nothing expresses this reality better than the collapsing NHS—a showcase of miserable working conditions, crumbling services and the brutal treatment of women in this country.

To save the NHS and reverse the general decline in living standards, it is necessary to broaden the struggle and get at the root of the crisis. Towards this *Workers Hammer* advocates that strikes in the NHS be organised around the struggle for: **high wages, quality healthcare, women’s liberation.** These questions cannot be divided into separate boxes but will either go forward or fall back together. To advance, they must all be fought for *together* by the *entire* working class. But none of the NHS unions are pursuing such a strategy, focusing instead on narrow demands divorced from the broader social questions at stake. The question of women’s oppression in particular is ignored or given token mention. *This will not do.* Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we must fight for roses too.

#### Women as Workers

What does women’s liberation have to do with the crisis in the NHS? Everything in fact. The question of women’s oppression is intertwined with every aspect of the NHS. First and most obviously, it relates to the status of women as workers. The NHS workforce is overwhelmingly female, and the NHS is by far the largest employer

of women in Britain. It is no coincidence that NHS employees make generally much less than those in male-dominated jobs of similar qualification.

A large reason behind this pay gap is that the government exploits the social conditioning of women as “caregivers” to demand greater sacrifices than in male-dominated professions. In the name of “saving lives” and “caring for patients,” nurses and other NHS staff are asked to put their own well-being aside. This moral blackmail was ramped up to an extreme during the pandemic. Now, the same method is being used to try to discredit and demoralise the strikes. Nurses and ambulance workers are accused of killing people by striking for better working conditions. This demagoguery must be decisively rejected if any progress is to be made in the NHS.

Far from doing this during the pandemic, the NHS unions totally submitted to the government’s blackmail, giving it free rein to press workers to the breaking point. In return they received nothing but clapping. In the current strike, the RCN has had to oppose some of the very arguments it peddled during the pandemic. It has argued that the nurses strikes are necessary to save the NHS and that it is the crumbling system which is killing working people. This is entirely correct. Why then is the struggle so minimal and halfhearted?

Clearly the NHS unions are still on the back foot, conciliating the argument that it is morally wrong for them to cause disruption. It is time to go on the offensive. The selflessness and social consciousness so strong among NHS workers—and women in particular—need to be unleashed in the fight for better healthcare and wages for all. The bottom line is that the NHS will collapse and many more working people will die if the working class as a whole doesn’t take a stand. The more determined and decisive the struggle, the more support will be won from working people and the more healthcare will be improved.

#### Public Services and the Family

Women’s oppression in the NHS goes deeper than inferior wages. Being an overwhelmingly female workforce means that most NHS workers face a second shift at

home of childcare, housework and care for the elderly. These tasks fall disproportionately on women, making the question of public services all the more important for them. The provision of free healthcare, public education, care homes—these are all modest but very real steps towards taking “caring” out of the private sphere of the family and into the social sphere. Improving the quality and availability of public services directly alleviates the burden of domestic work on women. Conversely, cuts to public services and the absence of affordable childcare only increase the strain.

While the state of public services has a particular impact on working women, it profoundly impacts the well-being of working men as well. Far from dividing workers along sexual lines, making women’s emancipation a centrepiece of the struggle for the NHS has the potential to unite the working class on a much stronger basis than simple economic demands. For example, workers in male-dominated sectors like rail will be much more likely to ally with nurses for better healthcare and reducing the burden of household chores than over wage demands.

Indeed, the condition of women directly relates to the general level of social progress. The early socialist Charles Fourier explained back in 1808 how:

*“Social progress and changes of historical period are brought about as a result of the progress of women towards liberty; and the decline of social orders is brought about as a result of the diminution of the liberty of women.”*

*—The Theory of the Four Movements*

The struggle for the advancement of women is not only an entirely just cause but also a lever that can lift all of society. The fight for a quality NHS and better public services demonstrates this clearly.

#### Healthcare and Capitalism

In order to obtain quality healthcare for all, it is essential to understand what obstacles stand in the way. At bottom it is the very nature of the capitalist economy which drags down and limits the quality of healthcare. When Britain was a manufacturing power, its ruling class had a certain interest in providing a rudimentary degree of education and healthcare. This was not out of charity but because of the pressure from a strong working class, as well as the need for an effective industrial workforce and able-bodied soldiers. As the economy was turned more and more towards purely speculative and parasitical activities in finance and high-end services and the working class was decimated, the need to maintain semi-decent healthcare

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Government blackmailed population into accepting reactionary lockdowns, criminally supported by trade-union leaders. Unions should have called the shots, not the government.

and educational standards for the mass of the population has receded.

Today more and more of the economy relies on a thin layer of highly trained technocrats and specialists. This has meant that education, healthcare and social housing for the general public have all become “wasteful” expenses in the eyes of the capitalists. These services simply do not contribute enough to “productivity” to warrant meaningful investment. As public services receive less funding and the general welfare of the population is degraded, the strain on the public healthcare system becomes untenable. This is the reason for the NHS crisis. It is caused not by a heartless “ideology” or “greed” but by the fundamental interests of the ruling class. This understanding has to be at the centre of the struggle for better healthcare and better working conditions.

### Lesson of the Pandemic: NHS Workers Should Call the Shots

Looking back at the pandemic through this lens leads to clear conclusions. It was *criminal* for the entire labour movement—the Labour Party, unions and left—to support the lockdowns. This meant leaving full control of health and working conditions in the hands of the demented Boris Johnson government, which obviously could not have cared less about protecting the working class in the pandemic.

Instead, what was needed was a determined struggle by the labour movement to take matters into its own hands. The



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**19 September 2022: Spartacist League/Britain organized only protest against monarchy in London on day of Queen Elizabeth’s funeral, while union bureaucrats, tailed by fake socialists, bowed to Crown and canceled strikes.**

cratic intrusions and fight for union control of health and safety. Ultimately the whole system should be run by workers from top to bottom.

### The Road to Women’s Liberation

The fundamental problem with the strategy pursued by the RCN and other NHS unions is that it does not start from the understanding that quality healthcare for all and capitalism are incompatible. Of course, unions must start from today’s struggles and consciousness. But they must use the everyday battles to educate workers in the irreconcilable nature of the conflict. Far from doing this, the NHS unions peddle illusions that the capitalists and their government can be made

and social stability is rapidly eroding. The biggest hurdle to the liberation of the working class and the emancipation of women is certainly *not* the stability of the system. The road to socialism is blocked first and foremost by the absence of a working-class party that fights for socialism.

The current leadership of the workers movement is composed of the utterly pro-capitalist Labour Party and an occasionally militant-talking pro-capitalist union bureaucracy. To break the stranglehold of these traitors, it is necessary to show how their actions undermine the working class at every point and show that *another road is possible*. This is the key task for socialists today. But far from doing this, the rest of the socialist left talks about Marxism

write articles about the need for socialism to emancipate women. But when it comes to the NHS strikes—which impact women in every way—*none* of their articles *so much as mention* the question of women’s oppression, much less advocate that the unions fight for women’s liberation. The same could be said of any other socialist paper.

What explains this apparent contradiction? It comes from a disease identified by Lenin as economism. In Britain it is better known as trade unionism. At bottom this programme limits the aim of trade union struggle to improving the immediate economic conditions of the working class and preaches socialism for the future. When it comes to addressing the oppression of other groups—women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, Travellers, etc.—economism limits itself to denouncing injustice and again...preaching socialism for the future.

This programme in all its iterations is entirely compatible with the current trade union bureaucracy, whether right-wing or left-wing. What is rejected is the struggle for a socialist leadership *today* which not only champions the cause of *all* the oppressed but aims to put an *end* to their oppression by overthrowing capitalism. Economism does not lead to gradual improvement but to betrayal by the pro-capitalist bureaucracy and obviously no progress at all towards socialism.

For the trade union bureaucracy and fake socialists, advocating women’s liberation in the context of the NHS strikes would be “divisive” because some workers (and certainly the bureaucrats) think it is too radical. Fighting for black, Asian and immigrant liberation, which is also absolutely central in the NHS, would also for the same reason be considered “divisive.” Similarly, it was to avoid “division” that when the Queen died, avowedly “republican” union leaders cancelled strikes and the RCN suspended its strike ballot. In fact, it is economism which divides the workers movement.

The ruling class constantly bombards the working class with all sorts of prejudices with the specific purpose of setting workers against each other and keeping them loyal to the capitalists. For socialists to water down their programme in the face of backward consciousness means trampling on the interests of the most oppressed in society, presenting the fight for their liberation as “divisive.” This fosters identity politics among the oppressed, who rightly feel betrayed or left out, further drives reactionary social polarisations and divides workers. Only if the struggles of *all the oppressed* are united under *a common socialist banner* can the workers of the world overcome the myriad divisions fostered by the ruling class.

This perspective is antithetical to every other left organisation in Britain. However, we hope to be proven wrong in this regard and would be glad if other socialist groups join us in fighting for the NHS unions and the entire labour movement to inscribe on their banners: *For women’s liberation!* ■



VAAP; International Institute of Social History



**Left: Women’s demonstration in Petrograd, 19 March 1917. Banner reads: “As long as the woman is a slave, there can’t be freedom—long live women’s equality.” Near left: Soviet poster from 1920: “What the October Revolution gave to women workers and peasants.” Woman points to library, cafeteria, workers’ club, school for adults and “house for mother and child.”**

working class should have fought for all social resources to be mobilised to respond to the emergency. New hospitals, care homes and other health facilities should have been built urgently. The housing stock should have been redistributed to ease overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions. NHS wages and staffing levels should have been doubled. These are only a few examples of basic measures which should and could have been taken to address the pandemic. They would also have had a beneficial long-term effect on the health of the population and the state of the healthcare system.

The obstacle to taking any of these measures is the fact that most resources are in the private hands of a small number of families. Requisitioning the assets of the capitalists (and royals) is obviously a big red line for a government whose entire purpose is to defend the interests of those very people. So instead, it shut everything down, pumped money into the pockets of Tory donors and squeezed NHS workers to the breaking point. The RCN and other NHS unions entirely bought into the national unity, “We’re all in this together” propaganda, submitting to the government. Rather than fighting for improved social and working conditions, they begged for more lockdowns. The outcome of these policies is clear. It was a catastrophe during the pandemic and it pushed the NHS into the shambles it is today.

The lesson should be just as clear. Leaving healthcare in the hands of a capitalist government can only lead to disaster. Healthcare workers should be in charge of running healthcare. A first basic step towards this would be for unions to push back against the ever-encroaching bureau-

to see the light and be reasonable. Such fairy tales undermine even the most minimal fights for better wages and working conditions. Instead of well-planned and determined struggles, they lead to half measures, compromise and capitulation.

Whether it is working conditions, public services or the status of women, it is crucial to understand that incremental and constant progress is impossible within capitalism. The NHS itself, while a crucial gain, was not a step towards socialism. It was part of the measures taken to shore up collapsing British imperialism after WWII. Attlee and arch-reactionary Churchill broadly agreed on such measures at the time. Since then, the NHS has been under constant attack. As the whole social fabric of the country is hollowed out by the ruling class, the only prospect for the future under capitalism is decline and misery.

In contrast, a workers government which would expropriate the capitalist class would be able to take immediate and long-term measures to increase the quantity and quality of public services. With productive forces used rationally and planned on an international level, more and more of the burden which today rests on the family can be taken on by society as a whole: cooking, cleaning, healthcare, education, child-rearing. As this progresses, the social role of the family will gradually wither away and with it the oppression of women.

### Trade Unionism and Women’s Oppression

The crisis in this country is crushing working people in every aspect of their lives. The ruling class is in perpetual crisis

and revolution only to then support various non-revolutionary leaderships of the working class.

This problem of leadership is highlighted very clearly in relation to the question of women’s oppression and the NHS strikes. Take *Socialist Appeal* [affiliated with Socialist Revolution in the U.S.] for example. They frequently write about women’s oppression. They recently wrote about the disgusting cover-up of a serial police rapist by the Met [Metropolitan Police]. They also

## To save the NHS, fight for women’s liberation!

- One union for all healthcare workers! For a joint strike offensive.
- 50 per cent pay rise, wages pegged to inflation.
- No mandatory overtime. Mass hiring under union control. Scrap agency work and zero-hours contracts. Permanent jobs for temp workers.
- Down with racist discrimination. Full citizenship rights for all immigrants.
- Socialise household duties. For 24-hour childcare, dining rooms and laundry services paid for by the state—available in the workplace and neighbourhoods.
- Scrap the NHS debt. Nationalise the private healthcare sector.
- Build new healthcare infrastructure, schools and low-cost, quality housing. Seize the estates of the monarchy and the church to pay for it!
- Establish a planned economy to reindustrialise Britain. Expropriate the City of London!
- Dump the bureaucrats! For a class-struggle leadership of the unions and a revolutionary workers party.
- For workers governments on both sides of the Irish Sea!





Archivo fotográfico CTM

**1907 textile strike in Río Blanco, Veracruz, precursor of Mexican Revolution. Decisive to determining the course of the revolution was not the size or relative immaturity of the working class but the lack of a communist leadership.**

## Emancipation...

(continued from page 16)

to the use of and benefit from the land, putting an end to large land ownership in the countryside.

The national bourgeoisie did *not* have (and does not have) an independent role; it had to perform a balancing act between the imperialists on the one hand and the insurgent peasants and the entire Mexican people on the other. The U.S. imperialists played an important role in the development of the Mexican Revolution, granting significant material resources to different factions between 1910 and 1920 as it suited them. What they sought to prevent was the formation of a strong nationalist government.

The U.S. government initially supported the [Francisco I.] Madero opposition, since Porfirio Díaz had favored British and French corporations over U.S. ones in the last years of his regime. When Madero proved unable to contain the peasant rebellion that threatened imperialist interests in the country, a coup d'état headed by Victoriano Huerta was organized from the U.S. embassy itself, using the intact structure of the Díaz regime. The U.S. imperialists invaded Mexico in 1914 in support of [Venustiano] Carranza (when Huerta leaned toward British imperialism) and again during the 1916 punitive expedition against Francisco Villa.

Although the U.S. recognized the Carranza government in 1915, diplomatic relations gradually deteriorated to a point of total breakdown in the wake of the Constitutionalist Convention of 1917. The imperialists were hostile at every step to the progressive measures taken by the national bourgeoisie, no matter how partial and timid they were. It was not until 1923, during the government of Alvaro Obregón, that relations between the United States and Mexico were normalized, with the signing of the Bucareli Treaty, which guaranteed that the Constitution of 1917 could not be retroactively applied against U.S. interests.

The capture of Mexico City in December 1914 by the Ejército Libertador del Sur [Liberation Army of the South] and the División del Norte [Northern Division] marked the highest point of the peasant struggle but also the beginning of its decline. Due to the intermediate position of the peasants in society—a product of their nature as a class of small landowners whose interests are not independent of those of the two main classes in society—their leaders were unable to form a central power and develop a program for the transformation of society as a whole.

Although there was a working class in Mexico, it was dispersed and, more fundamentally, did not play an independent role during the revolutionary struggle, being subordinated either to the radical petty-bourgeois peasant program or that of the constitutionalist bourgeoisie. Some atomized workers fought in the División del Norte, while sugar mill workers were an essential part of the Zapatista base in the state of Morelos, and railroad workers helped transport Villa and Zapata's forces in their campaigns. However, the small organized labor sector in the capital was subordinated to the bourgeois wing of Carranza/Obregón through their traitorous leaderships and used to suppress the peasant armies.

Contrary to the objectivist perspective held by the entire Mexican left, including the GEM previously, the fate of the Revolution was not predetermined. A revolutionary Marxist nucleus *could have* radically changed the course of the revolution, mobilizing the proletariat in defense of the land expropriations and calling for the implementation of Zapata's program at the national level. Accomplishing this task would necessarily have posed the expropriation of the imperialist-owned means of production—as well as those of their local lackeys—and the seizure of power: socialist revolution backed by a peasant war. The struggle, *in deeds*, for a workers and peasants government would have sealed the alliance between these two classes without which a social revolution was simply impossible. It would have galvanized the peasant armies by presenting them with a way forward, split the constitutionalist army, wrenched the working class from its anarchist leadership and served as a beacon to the more powerful U.S. proletariat.

Although the peasant rebellion was finally crushed in blood and fire and its leaders assassinated, things did not return to the old status quo; the economic regime of the *hacienda* and the political power of the landlords was broken. Thus, the revolution eliminated some of the obstacles to the modernization of the country, allowing the national bourgeoisie a certain amount of room for maneuver with respect to the imperialists. The 1917 Constitution, promulgated in the aftermath of the defeat of the peasant armies, was perhaps one of the most radical of its time.

Against imperialist interests, it promulgated that the land, water and subsoil were the property of the nation. It also laid the legal basis for significant concessions to peasants and workers, such as agrarian land distribution, public education and labor rights. At the same time, due to its own weakness, growing imperialist pressure and fear of a new radical uprising, the national bourgeoisie found it necessary to resort to a series of bonapartist military caudillos—who claimed the mantle of revolution—to stabilize their regime.

### Cardenismo: Obstacle to National Liberation

Despite the achievements of the Mexican Revolution, its fundamental tasks of agrarian revolution and national emancipation were not resolved. The masses

of workers and peasants could see that and continued to seethe. The distribution of land and other beneficial measures granted by the populist governments of Obregón and [Plutarco Elías] Calles were not enough to contain the struggles and aspirations of the masses. The interests of the masses clashed with imperialist domination and the national bourgeois regime.

This situation, aggravated by the Great Depression, led to an upsurge of the workers and peasants during the government of Lázaro Cárdenas [1934-40]. He took



Archivo Histórico de la UNAM

**Emiliano Zapata (center) promulgated the Plan de Ayala in 1911, which called for the destruction of the large estates through redistribution of the land to peasants. Like Trotsky in 1939, we communists raise the call: Finish Emiliano Zapata's work!**

advantage of this national context to expropriate the oil industry from the hands of the imperialists, in addition to carrying out a massive agrarian land distribution as never seen before in the country's history. The antagonism between the U.S. and British imperialists, the imminence of World War II and, particularly, the intensification of the class struggle in the U.S. (which led to the formation of the CIO union federation in 1935) gave Cárdenas considerable room for maneuver to implement these measures.

The Mexican bourgeoisie balances precariously between the two decisive elements in the national economy: imperialist finance capital and the proletariat at home. The collision between these two forces determines the actions of the national

bourgeoisie. Cárdenas carried out truly progressive measures, while resorting to semi-totalitarian methods to contain and discipline the masses. Trotsky explained:

"We see in Mexico and the other Latin American countries that they skipped over most stages of the development. It began in Mexico directly by incorporating the trade unions in the state. In Mexico we have a double domination. That is, foreign capital and the national bourgeoisie, or, as Diego Rivera formulated it, a 'sub-bourgeoisie'—a stratum which is controlled by foreign capital and at the same time opposed to the workers; in Mexico a semi-Bonapartist regime between foreign capital and national capital, foreign capital and the workers.

"Every government can create in a case like this a position of oscillation, of inclination [tilting or leaning] one time to the national bourgeoisie or workers and another time to foreign capital. In order to have the workers in their hands, they incorporated the trade unions in the state."

—"Latin American Problems: A Transcript" (November 1938)

Because of its intermediate position, the national bourgeoisie must rely on the masses to try to push back the imperialists. The more it tries to keep foreign finance capital at bay, the tighter its control over the masses must be so that they do not threaten its regime. Thus, Cárdenas created a corporatist structure to secure

a base of support against the imperialists and reaction, while at the same time regimenting the workers' and peasants' organizations, which ended up integrated into the bourgeois Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM). Corporatism brought relative stability to the Mexican bourgeois regime, not only containing the outbreaks of discontent within limits acceptable to the capitalists, but ensuring, above all, that the national bourgeoisie kept in its hands the leadership of the struggle against imperialist capital.

The main lesson of the Cardenista period is precisely the need for a different leadership of this struggle, that is, *a communist leadership*. While the Mexican bourgeoisie is oppressed by the imperialists, it is tied to them by thousands of threads. Although the nationalizations of the oil and railroads—and other progressive measures—infuriated the imperialists, the bourgeoisie cannot challenge imperialist hegemony without challenging the basis of its own class domination: capitalist property. Its interests in the maintenance of private property make it incapable of completing the tasks of the Mexican Revolution: national emancipation and agrarian revolution.

The national bourgeoisie's leadership of this struggle is, by the same token, fearful and limited, and will ultimately lead to betrayal. Liberating Mexico from imperialist oppression requires the working masses to wage struggle for their own interests, which would drive the national bourgeoisie into the arms of the imperialists. What Trotsky wrote about China in 1927 was and is also relevant to Mexico:

"Really to arouse the workers and peasants against imperialism is possible only

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Gustavo Casasola

**Red Constitutional Battalions, 1915, formed by anarchist-led Casa del Obrero. Traitorous anarchist leaders subordinated workers to Carranza and Obregón, who incorporated these workers into their forces to smash the peasant revolt.**

# Emancipation...

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by connecting their basic and most profound life interests with the cause of the country's liberation.... But everything that brings the oppressed and exploited masses of the toilers to their feet inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists. The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants is not weakened, but, on the contrary, it is sharpened by imperialist oppression, to the point of bloody civil war at every serious conflict. The Chinese bourgeoisie always has a solid rearguard behind it in imperialism, which will always help it with money, goods, and shells against the workers and peasants."

—"The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin" (May 1927)

Class collaboration cedes the leadership of the struggle against the imperialists to the national bourgeoisie—a reactionary class. Those who advocate a return to Cardenismo are condemned to repeat the betrayal of the CTM union federation and the Partido Comunista Mexicano, which subordinated the exploited and oppressed masses to the national bourgeoisie, chaining them to the corporatist system and the PRM, in what Trotsky called the popular front in party form.

In contrast, Trotsky fought to forge a Mexican section of the Fourth International capable of competing with the national bourgeoisie for the leadership in the struggle against the imperialists. This meant both fighting to play the leading role in the defense of Mexico against the imperialists and accentuating at every step the clash between the national aspirations of the masses and the interests and role of the bourgeoisie, exposing how the bourgeoisie is an obstacle. To carry forward this perspective, it was vital to fight for the political independence of the proletariat, for revolutionary leaderships in the unions and for its complete independence from the capitalist state. It is by applying the lessons of this struggle by Trotsky to our present reality that we will be able to act as a revolutionary pole.

## Populism Paves the Road to Reaction

One of the central lies pushed by the populists is that Mexico's current devastation is due solely to neoliberal governments. Cárdenas and previous governments had to lean heavily on the masses, containing their struggles at every turn and breaking their momentum. The zigzagging of the national bourgeoisie is determined by the forces acting on it. It relies on the masses to push back the imperialists and put itself at the forefront of popular discontent. It relies on the imperialists to subjugate the masses and attract foreign capital. The alternation between neoliberal and populist governments does not represent a fundamental opposition. In fact, every Mexican government combines populist and neoliberal tendencies. The tendency that dominates in a given government is the one considered most appropriate to maintaining overall stability given the objective forces acting on the Mexican bourgeoisie.

With the capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union in 1991-92, the U.S.



Massive demonstration in support of oil expropriation, March 1938. Vicente Lombardo Toledano (left, in inset, with Lázaro Cárdenas), leader of CTM union federation, was instrumental in subordinating working class to Cárdenas, leaving leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle to the bourgeoisie.

emerged as the undisputed hegemonic world power, allowing it to pursue its interests around the world with little resistance. Even earlier, amid the reactionary climate of the anti-communist Cold War II of the 1980s, after decades of subordination of the working class and provocation of the Mexican debt crisis [that began in 1982], the imperialists pushed for greater incursions and openness to their predation. Thus, the U.S. imperialists imposed "neoliberal reforms" that destroyed unions, privatized most nationalized industry, attacked public education and the public health and pension system and eliminated previous protectionism. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)—which came into effect in 1994—meant the unrestricted pillaging of Mexico and brought about the devastation of the countryside and national industry.

The majority of the ruling PRI worked hand in hand with the imperialists and implemented these attacks, undermining the corporatist structure on which the stability of their regime had rested. This paved the way for the election of the right-wing PAN, thus fulfilling what Trotsky predicted regarding oil nationalization: "Military or even purely economic pressure from abroad, together with an unfavorable international relationship of forces for Mexico, that is, defeats and retreats of the world proletariat, may force this country to take a step backward" ("Ignorance Is Not a Revolutionary Instrument" [January 1939]).

Throughout more than three decades, the attacks on the historic conquests of the Mexican masses generated outbursts and mobilizations. The populist bourgeoisie, first under Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (who split from the PRI when it made its neoliberal turn [to found the PRD]) and later under AMLO (who split from the PRD when it abandoned its populism), took the lead in these struggles, making sure that the masses did not challenge the regime and the imperialists. To defeat the attacks, a confrontation to the death with the imperialists and their local lackeys was necessary—for example, occupying the plants

and refineries against the privatization of oil—which would have posed pointblank the need for the working class to take the reins of the country. Instead, the populist bourgeoisie channeled the discontent toward "peaceful civil resistance" and voting in the elections as the way forward, for which they counted on the invaluable

8 July 2020: López Obrador celebrating with Trump right after the USMCA trade agreement went into effect. The Mexican president characterized this U.S.-imposed treaty of imperialist pillage as "a great achievement benefiting the three countries and our peoples."



Evan Vucci/AP

help of the union bureaucracies.

Once again, the lesson of this period is that the program of the populists paralyzed the struggle against the imperialists and that even to defend the most elementary gains a communist leadership counterposed to the dead end of populism is essential.

## The Struggle for Communist Leadership Today

AMLO's victory in 2018 was, on the one hand, a product of the discontent of the proletariat, the peasantry and all the oppressed after decades of neoliberal attacks, as well as a distorted reflection of their aspirations for social and national emancipation. At the same time, the dominant U.S. position in the world is under pressure, and the U.S. imperialists have for a while had their attention focused on Russia and, primarily, China. In this context, the U.S. has so far avoided a major conflict with the Mexican government. This gives the populists some room to maneuver, and "anti-imperialist" rhetoric comes cheap.

One of the most pernicious illusions is that AMLO represents a step in the right direction. But what has his role really been? While López Obrador has been very effective in controlling discontent and the social outbursts are not like those faced by Cárdenas, this bourgeois government similarly relies on the proletariat and oppressed masses to increase the degree of autonomy of the Mexican bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the imperialists. Thus, it has carried out measures in favor of the modernization of the country and in defiance of imperialist subordination, such as the nationalization of lithium, the construction of the Dos Bocas refinery, the purchase of Deer Park [refinery in Texas], etc., and the granting of support to the peasants, students, the elderly and other sectors.

However, the López Obrador regime

does not pose a fundamental challenge to the imperialists, as can be clearly seen with its support for the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). At the same time, the regime has politically subordinated the workers movement, exploiting illusions in a populist alternative, and has sought to regiment it in various ways: strengthening state control over the unions with labor reform, advancing the militarization of the country and taking advantage of the pandemic to further subordinate the masses to the interests of the bourgeoisie.

What is needed is a revolutionary leadership capable of taking the struggle against imperialism beyond the limits imposed by the populists. A concrete example of how to fight for this leadership is presented by the electrical reform proposed by López Obrador. This sought to give Mexico an advantage in electricity generation and marketing over the imperialists, drawing furious opposition from the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys in Mexico. A year ago, the reform was defeated in [the Mexican] Congress; now the Mexican government seeks to implement it through a "plan B," by buying thirteen power plants from Iberdrola, which would give the CFE [Federal Electricity Commission] a majority of the output.

If this purchase is carried out, it would be a de facto nationalization with compensation of these plants. In response, the imperialists have issued an ultimatum for Mexico to open its energy market and

accept greater oversight, in accordance with the USMCA, or else they will impose millions in tariffs, threatening to reverse the purchase. Leaving this fight in the hands of the populists calls the nationalization into question and leaves it to their vacillations.

We Trotskyists must fight to mobilize the working class to implement AMLO's reform and to defend it against the imperialists, while preserving our political independence and agitating to carry it out through revolutionary methods of class struggle. This reform is minimal and clearly not our program, but it is beneficial to the national sovereignty of Mexico. The masses see in López Obrador and the Morena party the force that can carry out this type of measure. The union leaderships (SUTERM [electrical workers], SNTE [education workers], etc.) support AMLO politically, making sure that workers do not overstep the limits imposed by him, and mobilize them under his leadership.

Because of their role in holding back the working class, the populists are an obstacle to fighting even for this limited measure of national emancipation. At the same time that we fight for this reform, we must warn that AMLO will sabotage the struggle for national emancipation at every turn, just as he did a year and a half ago when he kowtowed to the imperialists and their lackeys in Congress. Besides, AMLO wants to make the workers and peasants pay these thieves. We say: Nationalization without compensation! Not a single peso to Iberdrola!

Against the imperialist threats, this reform must be secured: the working class must take over the plants until this happens! If AMLO gives in to the U.S. campaign, it will clearly show the bankruptcy of populism. If carried out, the question is raised: Why accept USMCA's imperi-



March 18 demonstration commemorating 1938 oil expropriation features placards with images of López Obrador and Lázaro Cárdenas. AMLO is playing a reactionary role, like Cárdenas in his time, by containing the working class, the only class capable of achieving national emancipation.

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The pressure of imperialism on backward countries does not, it is true, change their *basic* social character since the oppressor and oppressed represent only different levels of development in one and the same bourgeois society. Nevertheless the difference between England and India, Japan and China, the United States and Mexico is so big that we strictly differentiate between oppressor and oppressed bourgeois countries and we consider it our duty to support the latter against the former. The bourgeoisie of colonial and semicolonial countries is a semiruling, semioppressed class.”

—“Not a Workers’ and Not a Bourgeois State?” (November 1937)

*Espartaco*’s line necessarily required repudiating the Leninist distinction between oppressor nations and oppressed nations, and thus repudiated the distinction between the nationalism of the oppressors and the nationalism of the oppressed, which is an ideological reflection of the daily oppression and humiliation at the hands of the imperialists. It is deeply reactionary to deny this distinction. In the oppressed countries, nationalism has a progressive character insofar as it impels the working masses to struggle against imperialism; it also has a reactionary character insofar as it is used to subordinate these masses to the populist national bourgeoisie, as supposedly the only fighter for national liberation.

But we denounced every manifestation of resistance to imperialism as a bourgeois-nationalist deviation from the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. In a centrist manner, we wielded seemingly orthodox formulas, such as “proletarian internationalism” and the “dictatorship of the working class,” as battering rams against the nationalism of the oppressed, betraying their national aspirations and renouncing, in deeds, the anti-imperialist struggle.

This means, in the final analysis, renouncing the revolution. It is Menshevism disguised with red phraseology: starting from the proposition that the nation-state in all its manifestations is reactionary, that our struggle is for world socialism, we would yield in a perfectly natural way the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle to the national bourgeoisie, thus capitulating also to populism. This is completely counterposed to Trotskyism:

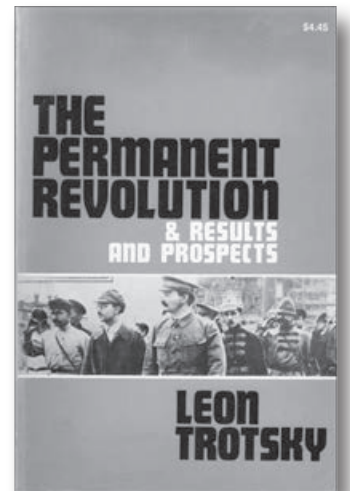
“The Mexican section of the Fourth International is in competition with the national bourgeoisie before the workers, before the peasants. We are in permanent competition with the national bourgeoisie as the only one leadership which is capable of assuring the victory of the masses in the fight against the foreign imperialists.”

—Leon Trotsky, “Latin American Problems: A Transcript” (November 1938)

In 2002, at the urging of comrade Jim Robertson [the late central founder of the International Communist League], we repudiated the slogan for Mexico that “The main enemy is at home!” Yet, the content of that struggle was to uphold the essence of that slogan. When the late



Postcard based on photo by N. Alexeyev



**V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, leaders of 1917 October Revolution. The Bolsheviks led workers, peasants of Russia to victory after breaking them from reformist and bourgeois leadership on basis of a communist program linking the struggle for democratic tasks with the struggle for socialism. By applying the lessons of this revolution, the ICL will be able to struggle for the liberation of colonial and neocolonial peoples—and the entire world—from the imperialist yoke.**

comrade Ed C. made the obvious assertion that in Mexico “the main task...[is] leading the nation in struggle against imperialist domination,” the leadership of the International, particularly in the U.S., was up in arms against him.

Symbolic of the social-imperialist character of the ICL’s line, it was the SL/U.S. Political Bureau that codified that struggle through a motion stating: “Regarding Mexico, a workers party that is not guided by a revolutionary, internationalist, proletarian perspective but instead embraces as its main task ‘leading the nation in struggle against imperialist domination’ would be a party that shrinks from fulfilling its proletarian program—i.e., it would be at least tacitly Menshevik.” Who’s the Menshevik? Contrary to the SL/U.S. PB’s assertion, the fight against imperialism means a constant and protracted struggle to wrest the leadership of the worker and peasant masses from the hands of the bourgeoisie, the struggle to demonstrate in practice that we are not only the best but, in fact, the only consistent fighters for national liberation by exposing at every step the vacillations and capitulations of the national bourgeoisie. This is the only way to break the influence of populism and bourgeois nationalism on the Mexican working masses.

The articles “A Marxist Analysis of the Mexican Revolution of 1910” (*Espartaco* No. 12, Spring-Summer 1999) and “Break with *All* the Bourgeois Parties: PRI, PAN, PRD!” (*Espartaco* No. 14, Fall-Winter 2000), considered seminal documents of the section, spit on the aspirations of the masses for national emancipation and presented the Mexican Revolution as an orgy of reaction. The *Espartaco* No. 12 article affirms that “the nationalism encouraged by the bourgeoisie, which seeks to tie the exploited to their exploiters, intoxicates the masses.” It denigrates even the Independence of Mexico as an event that “had a distinctive smell of counterrevolution” and *denounces* the Cardenista land redistribution as “a way to deactivate workers struggles, offering pieces of land so that dissatisfied workers could become small peasant landowners.”

character insofar as it is directed against the imperialists, it also serves to pit the Mexican masses against all Americans, depriving workers and the oppressed of a crucial lever in their struggle against U.S. domination: the powerful working class north of the Río Bravo/Rio Grande.

Unity of the oppressed Latin American peoples with the proletariat of the imperialist centers is impossible under the leadership of AMLO and the other representatives of the Latin American national bourgeoisies, who are agents of foreign capital. This unity is only possible under the banner of a reformed Fourth International. As Trotsky explained:

“In *South America*, where belated and already decaying capitalism is supporting the conditions of semifeudal, that is, semislavish existence, world antagonisms create a sharp struggle of comprador cliques, continual overturns within the states and protracted armed conflicts between the states. The American bour-

The *Espartaco* No. 14 article states: “Ever since the Mexican Revolution, the bourgeoisie has used nationalism, opportunist anti-clericalism and a socialist-tinted populist rhetoric as an ideological weapon in consolidating its power against competing factions and justifying its repression of workers’ struggles and peasant insurrections.” Thus, it rants against the nationalism of the oppressed and the separation of church and state and presents the populism that emerged from the Mexican Revolution as purely reactionary and nothing more than an ideological ploy to “repress” the workers and peasants. It also totally denies the contradictions of populism and that populism is also directed against the imperialists.

Both articles denounced Cárdenas because his “intention was to modernize the country for the benefit of the Mexican bourgeoisie” and because his legacy “was the consolidation of the Mexican bourgeois regime.” Far from being reactionary, these measures were historically progressive insofar as they were directed against the imperialists. One can only deny the progressive character of Mexico’s national development if one rejects the struggle of the workers and peasants against imperialist oppression.

To give an air of authority to our reactionary position, we misrepresented a quote of Trotsky:

“Under the conditions of the imperialist epoch the national democratic revolution can be carried through to a victorious end only when the social and political relationships of the country are mature for putting the proletariat in power as the leader of the masses of the people. And if this is not yet the case? Then the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses.”

—*The Permanent Revolution* (1930)

Certainly, the Mexican Revolution ended in a bloodbath of the peasants, and Cárdenas subdued the working masses. The problem with *Espartaco* is not that it denounced the reactionary outcome of such processes, but that it used this quote to oppose the progressive measures and objectives that Trotsky himself emphatically defended during his stay in Mexico. The real content of this quote is that the

actual crime and expression of the reactionary nature of the national bourgeoisie are to suppress at every step the only force capable of achieving national liberation.

Only the proletariat, at the head of the poor peasantry, can realize this goal in an uninterrupted struggle leading to its own dictatorship and, ultimately, through a whole series of revolutionary convulsions at the global level, to the abolition of social classes themselves. Insofar as the national bourgeoisie maintains its hegemony, then, as Trotsky wrote, “the struggle for national liberation will produce only very partial results, results directed entirely against the working masses.” By repudiating the anti-imperialist struggle, *Espartaco* contributed to perpetuating the hegemony of the national bourgeoisie.

This line was maintained until the last issue of *Espartaco*. The article “Permanent Revolution vs. Bourgeois Populism” (*Espartaco* No. 51, April 2019) is a long denunciation of nationalism that draws a sterile line against the national bourgeoisie while rejecting the progressive character of the struggle for national emancipation. Not only did we go back to the Cárdenas period to present the same reactionary arguments against AMLO, but we went so far as to denounce any reform directed against the imperialists, however limited; and, at least implicitly, we denounced the Cardenista oil nationalization by writing:

“Previous governments had preferred to auction off to the highest bidder, foreign or domestic, the nationalized energy industry, while participating in a gigantic network of gasoline theft. López Obrador and a wing of the Mexican bourgeoisie prefer to develop and extract as much as possible from the little that remains of the national oil industry, knowing the juicy profits that can be extracted from it.”

Given that the entire programmatic basis of every article on Mexico that appeared in *Espartaco* was contrary to Trotskyism, we ended its publication. We are launching as of today a new publication under the masthead *El Antiimperialista* with the slogan “For workers’ and national emancipation!” which evokes in a condensed form genuine permanent revolution. As Trotsky stated, the anti-imperialist struggle is the key to liberation. ■

alist supervision? In either case, populism is exposed as an obstacle and the need for communist leadership in the struggle against imperialism is posed: To hell with the dispute resolution panels! Mexico out of USMCA! Abolish the debt! For the expropriation of the entire energy sector under workers control!

The fight against the imperialist oppressors demands an internationalist program that jointly mobilizes the working class and oppressed in Mexico—and those in the rest of Latin America—with their class brothers and sisters in the U.S. against their common enemy: U.S. imperialism. The oppressed peoples can achieve their emancipation only through the revolutionary overthrow of imperialism; this task requires an alliance between the world proletariat and the neocolonial peoples. The anti-Yankee nationalism of the populists is an obstacle to this perspective. While this nationalism has a progressive

geoisie, which was able during its historic rise to unite into one federation the northern half of the American continent, now uses all its power, which grew out of this, to disunite, weaken and enslave the southern half. South and Central America will be able to tear themselves out of backwardness and enslavement only by uniting all their states into one powerful federation. But it is not the belated South American bourgeoisie, a thoroughly venal agency of foreign imperialism, who will be called upon to solve this task, but the young South American proletariat, the chosen leader of the oppressed masses. The slogan in the struggle against violence and intrigues of world imperialism and against the bloody work of native comprador cliques is therefore: the *Soviet United States of South and Central America*.”

—Trotsky, “War and the Fourth International” (June 1934)

**Reforge a Mexican section of the ICL that Trotsky would recognize as his own! For the victory of the anti-imperialist struggle through a workers and peasants government! ■**

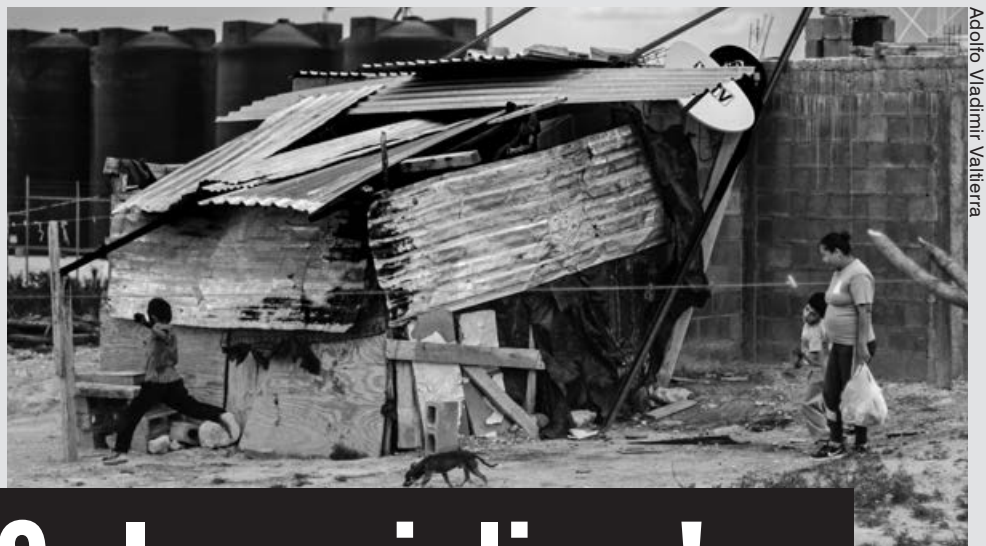
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# WORKERS VANGUARD

## Mexico: Trotskyism vs. Populism

# For Workers' and National Emancipation!

Jean Luis Arce/Reuters



Adolfo Vladimir Valterra

## Down With U.S. Imperialism!

U.S. company Newmont today exploits Peñasquito gold mine in northern Mexico (left), leaving the local community impoverished and without water. The imperialists' plunder of Mexico arrests its national development, strengthens their hand to squeeze working class at home and abroad.

Printed below is a translation of the lead article from *El Antiimperialista No. 1* (May 2023), the new press of our comrades of the Grupo Espartaquista de México. It is an edited version of the main motion voted at the GEM's Ninth National Conference, which refounded the GEM on the authentic Trotskyist program of permanent revolution.

The main task of communists today is to forge, in opposition to the populists, a revolutionary leadership of the struggle against imperialism that is capable of leading it to victory. This is the essence of permanent revolution in Mexico. To carry out this task, we must show that only by breaking with the bourgeois-nationalist leaderships, particularly Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), will the working class be able to advance the struggle for its national and social aspirations. This requires destroying the lie that the national bourgeoisie—since it is also nationally oppressed—is a vehicle for achieving emancipation from the imperialist yoke and upholding the interests of the workers and peasants. With this deception, the trade-union bureaucracies and their left tails subordinate the workers movement to the bourgeoisie, leading it to one defeat after another.

To destroy this illusion, we have to show that the fundamental contradiction that characterizes AMLO's populism is that despite the progressive reforms historically carried out by the bourgeoisie, it and its state have remained the main obstacle to social progress and the attainment of national emancipation. The central betrayal of the nationalist bourgeoisie has been to restrain the proletariat, the only force capable of achieving

national liberation, in order to maintain its hegemony. What has been lacking throughout Mexican history, and what is lacking today, is a Trotskyist party that acts as a revolutionary pole in counterpo-

sition to the populist leaders of the working class. Such a pole can only be built by seeking to organize and push forward the struggle for the national and social emancipation of the country, showing at every

step how populism stands as an obstacle to the liberation of the masses. The task of this national conference will be the refounding of the Mexican section with this perspective.

IPOR LA EMANCIPACIÓN OBRERA Y NACIONAL!  
**EL ANTIIMPERIALISTA** 

## GEM Refounded on a Trotskyist Basis

Printed below is a translation of the article on the refounding of the Grupo Espartaquista de México from *El Antiimperialista No. 1* (May 2023). Espartaco, the GEM's previous newspaper, has ceased publication.

In the colonial and semicolonial countries, the struggle for national emancipation against imperialism is not just another aspect of the revolutionary program; it is the fundamental strategic question for the revolution. However, the GEM's program since its founding has been the opposite: a capitulation to U.S. imperialism, on the basis that the main task and strategic objective for Marxists in a country plundered and devastated by imperialist predation is the struggle against bourgeois nationalism and that the main enemy is the Mexican bourgeois-

sie. By rejecting the fact that the whole country, including the national bourgeoisie, is oppressed by the imperialists and by rejecting the strategic nature of the struggle for national liberation, the GEM basically took sides with imperialism. This line, "Made in U.S.A." and imposed on the GEM, was an absolute repudiation of the Trotskyist program of permanent revolution in the service of social-chauvinism. As Trotsky explained:

"The internal regime in the colonial and semicolonial countries has a predominantly bourgeois character. But the pressure of foreign imperialism so alters and distorts the economic and political structure of these countries that the national bourgeoisie (even in the politically independent countries of South America) only partly reaches the height of a ruling class.

*continued on page 15*

### Lessons from the Mexican Revolution

Today's Mexican society, the workers movement and the divisions between the wings of the bourgeoisie have been shaped to a large extent by the Mexican Revolution of 1910 and the subsequent regime of Lázaro Cárdenas. Thus, it is essential to draw the right lessons from these events in order to understand and provide a revolutionary solution to today's tasks and challenges for the proletarian vanguard.

The Mexican Revolution was a great peasant insurrection, which raised pointblank *in a fundamental way* the resolution of the agrarian question, as well as national emancipation and other burning democratic tasks. This rebellion of the dispossessed peasants was the result of social discontent accumulated after more than 30 years of the bloody dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. It initially converged with the interests of the powerful northern bourgeoisie—which sought regime change, but also the disappearance of the *hacienda* that was a brake on the development of capitalism in the countryside—and those of the asphyxiated petty bourgeoisie, linked to an internal market that could not flourish under the economic growth model promoted by Díaz. However, in very short order their interests clashed with those of the insurrectionary peasant masses, who fought for the egalitarian right

*continued on page 13*