



We Demand: Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

Obama's "BiPartisan" Immigration Reform Is A Fraud

APRIL 1 – Phony plans for “immigration reform” are the talk of the town in Washington. The group of Democratic and Republican senators known as the “Gang of Eight” have leaked reports that their “bipartisan” proposal will be unveiled in the next two weeks. Labor and business spokesmen announce they have reached agreement on “guest worker” provisions. President Barack Obama has called for Congressional hearings on immigration this month. Immigrants’ rights groups are hopeful, saying “it’s now or never” for reform that would offer a “path to citizenship.”

Don’t be fooled by the hype. The “reform” they are preparing will not be one to benefit the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, but instead it will serve the interests of the capitalists who profit from their labor. The “anti-reform” underway will deepen the exploitation and intensify the persecution of the millions of workers who perform many of the worst, lowest-paid and most dangerous jobs in the country. In addition, it will involve ominous attacks on civil liberties and labor rights affecting everyone in the U.S.

And it won’t just be because “reformers” are capitulating to the xenophobic, immigrant-bashing right-wingers. The liberal, supposedly “immigrant-friendly” Democrats have unleashed even more repression against the foreign-born than the conservative Republicans ever did. By now its widely known that Obama has deported over 400,000 immigrants a year, *more than double* the numbers expelled by George W. Bush. The vast majority of these deportees are guilty of no crime whatsoever (being present in the U.S. without a “lawful status” is only a civil infraction).

Bush’s high-profile factory raids caught headlines, but the present administration has relied on “silent raids.” Since January 2009, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) division of the Department of Homeland Security has *quadrupled* the number of “I-9” audits of companies for “employment eligibility verification,” causing tens of thousands of immigrants to lose their jobs. This has also given unscrupulous employers an additional tool to avoid paying wages, claiming they have to comply with an audit even when they don’t. Instead of paying workmen’s comp for injuries, insurance companies call ICE and get the injured worker deported.

As for the fabled “path to citizenship,” this will be an extremely rough road littered with obstacles, cost thousands (and in some cases tens of thousands) of dollars per person between punitive fines and back taxes, and take years to travel. Under

Workers’ Struggle Has No Borders



Internationalist photo

Internationalist contingent in New York City 2012 May Day march.

the “bi-partisan” proposal the *shortest* time being contemplated is *13 years*, but it could be much longer, even double that, or never, if (a) the backlog of millions of “legal” applications for citizenship isn’t cleared up first, (b) individuals can’t pay hefty penalties or pass English and civics tests, (c) a commission of governors of border states doesn’t certify the border as “secure.”

In the meantime, the plans call for even greater militarization of the border, with continued expansion of the U.S. Border Patrol (which has already doubled in size since 2005) and extensive use of unmanned “drone” aircraft “spies in the skies.” How long until they start shooting down border crossers from the air, as Pentagon and CIA drones are already doing in a half-dozen countries? A January 2013 study reported that the U.S. already spends \$18 billion a year on immigration enforcement, more than on the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency), ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) *combined*.

As a result, the U.S. has created a *police state for immigrants*. Not only in Arizona are undocumented

workers afraid to walk down the street without being demanded to “show your papers,” like in Nazi Germany or apartheid South Africa. Get picked up for a traffic violation and you could end up in a concentration camp (“detention center”) for months and then be deported, separated from your U.S.-born children. The same goes for a teenager who gets into a fight at school. And now, in the name of “immigration reform” they want to *extend these police state measures to the entire population*.

In order to verify “employment eligibility” they plan a national registry with “nonforgeable electronic means” to establish identity and legal status. This is even worse than a national ID card because it will contain an individual’s employment history. In addition to checking the accuracy of everyone’s job applications, soon enough they will use it to track “scofflaws” for parking tickets, “dead-beat dads” for child support, gun owners and any other category they can think of – probably including *you*. They also call for an “exit-entry system” to track those

entering the country legally – easy enough, just add a miniature tracking chip to the visa.

This is an “immigration reform” Big Brother would love. And that is no accident, for this measure is not being designed to fulfill the needs of immigrants. Its purpose is to use immigrants to satisfy the requirements of capital, in a period in which U.S. capitalism is looking to regiment the population in an increasingly corporate state (education reform, health reform, etc.). In line with that, the “bipartisan” plan calls for greatly expanding the number of H1-B visas for individuals with advanced degrees in science, technology, engineer and math (STEM), no numbers yet but certainly raising the number of new visas to over 200,000 a year.

In addition to STEM visas to supply the “best and brightest” to Microsoft, Apple, Verizon, IBM and a host of small tech firms, American business wants a whole lot of immigrant labor to do the dirty work at the cheapest possible wages. For years this plan for

continued on page 2

Lincoln, Lincoln and the Abolition of Slavery.15
The Emancipation Proclamation: Promise and Betrayal. . .16

Immigration...

continued from page 1

“guest workers” was a stumbling block with the unions, who rightly saw that this would undercut the wages of workers in the U.S. But now the AFL-CIO has apparently signed off on a deal for a new “W visa” that would start at 20,000 a year and go to 200,000 annually, to be paid the “prevailing industry wage” (like \$7.25 an hour for food service workers?).

Supposedly this would be on the basis of determining that there was a labor shortage. This is absurd in current conditions where there are three job seekers for every job opening, and the government disguises the real unemployment level by declaring the long-term unemployed not in the workforce. Who would be most immediately affected by this influx of temporary workers would be the *undocumented workers already in the country*. Moreover, “guest” workers are subject to a form of “*indentured servitude*.” But in the colonial period those servants at least would be free after a certain number of years, where today the “guests” may be sent back.

As for the undocumented immigrants who sign up for legalization under this “reform,” in addition to informing the government of their whereabouts, after going through a background check to weed out “criminals” as well as “others who pose a threat to our national security” and paying a whopping fine they will be placed in a “probationary” status for between eight and ten years before they can even get a green card, during which they have the right to work but little else. Their situation will be very similar to someone on probation subject to control by a court, and anyone who for instance gets caught smoking marijuana could lose all.

So what is emerging is a “reform” that would tell the police where to find the undocumented, could well increase unemployment for immigrants, would lead to an expansion of government police control and at most, for a hefty price, would gain the status of indentured servants or being on probation. Whether the whole thing would go into effect at all would depend on a ruling by a commission in which border state governors like Texas and Arizona would have effective veto power. And if there actually would be a tortuous “path to citizenship” would be up to negotiation with Republicans like Jeb Bush, who changes his position from one day to the next.

This is what the Democrats and “mainstream” immigrants’ rights groups want cheer about. Not us Marxists. *We demand full citizenship rights for all immigrants*. It was bad enough when the left wanted to join with liberals in begging for “amnesty” when there was no crime to begin with. This “reform” effectively treats the undocumented as lawbreakers, and it wouldn’t surprise us

in the least if in the name of “bipartisanship” they ended up making “unlawful” status into a crime. Call it a reform and the ruling class figures it can get away with a wholesale attack on immigrants, labor and civil liberties.

A real fight for immigrants’ rights must be a fight against capital, which profits enormously from the present situation in which millions of workers have no legal rights, and which seeks to garner even greater profits by “legalizing” them. This is a *political fight*, for the anti-immigrant hysteria is a diversion to distract attention from the current capitalist depression and direct workers’ anger against “foreigners,” just as the German Nazis (and homegrown fascists in the U.S.) made Jews into a scapegoat in the 1930s. It must be a *fight against the imperialist war drive*, which has made Arabs, South Asians and all immigrants into the “enemy within.”

It must be a *fight against the phony “war on drugs,”* which is a war on black ghettos and Latino barrios, portraying Mexican immigrants as drug traffickers. It must be part of a fight against Washington’s semi-colonial junior partners in Latin America who have dutifully imposed “free market” policies that have driven peasants from the land and to risk their lives to seek a better life to the north. It must be a fight for *international socialist revolution*. Today immigrant workers often feel atomized and powerless in the face of racist repression. They are not. Without the labor of immigrant and U.S.-born workers, American capitalism would grind to a halt.

The immigrant population in the United States today is higher than at any point since the early 1900s after the waves of European immigration that brought workers to the factories and mines. As of 2011, there were 40 million immigrants in the U.S. While undocumented immigrants are roughly 12.5% of the population, they are 16% of the workforce. In some industries, including agriculture, construction, food preparation, accommodation and household employees, immigrants are well over 20% of the workers. Isolated and without rights, they are prey to wage-gouging bosses, who use them to drive wages down. Joined together with U.S.-born workers, immigrant workers can transform the class struggle in this country.

Several particular aspects of the current wave of immigration deserve comment. One, it is receding. The number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has gone down since 2008, first and foremost because job opportunities are drying up due to the capitalist economic crisis; second, because of massive militarization on the border; and third, because this has facilitated a takeover of immigration by drug and smuggling cartels, who have made border crossing much more expensive (and more dangerous, as migrants are often held for ransom and mas-

sacred). *La migra* and *el narco* are working hand in hand against immigrants.

Two, an unprecedented number of immigrants come from one country, Mexico, in one of the largest migrations in modern history. Until the 1980s, the number of Mexicans in the U.S. was under 2 million; today there are roughly 12 million Mexican citizens living in the U.S., one-tenth of Mexico’s entire population; and when you add their children, that totals *33 million members of Mexican families in the U.S., one tenth of the U.S. population*. (This is in addition to the long-established Hispanic population from Texas to California in their ancestral lands stolen from Mexico.) This constitutes a veritable human bridge for revolutionary struggle on both sides of the border.

Three, immigration to the U.S. has thrown together populations that in their countries of origin are often locked in bloody internecine conflict, but here have common interests. There are 600,000 Dominicans in New York City and 400,000 Haitians; together they constituted 80% of the school bus workers who recently went on strike for a month. The youth of the 200,000 Indians, 70,000 Pakistanis and 60,000 Bangladeshis in the city predominantly see themselves as a common South Asian community of desis. This mixture offers tremendous opportunities for internationalist revolutionaries opposed to fratricidal nationalisms and imperialism.

Four, unlike in past migrations, immigrants are now widely spread throughout the country. In meatpacking plants from Georgia and Alabama to Iowa and Nebraska, running motels from Mississippi to Washington state, cleaning buildings from Los Angeles to New York, and in restaurants and construction sites from coast to coast there are now millions of immigrant workers who perform low-pay and often dangerous jobs, who have no rights, who are despised by reactionaries, and whose labor is absolutely essential to the capitalist economy. But to awaken this sleeping giant of immigrant workers, a key element is necessary: a revolutionary vanguard.

Immigrant workers have often sought to unionize, such as dining hall workers at Pomona College in California, port truckers and construction workers in Seattle, frozen pizza workers in Milwaukee and elsewhere, only to face defeat as ICE immigration cops come to the aid of the employers (see these and other examples in the report of the National Employment Law Project, *Workers Rights on ICE*, February 2013). On the other hand, immigrant workers at a Hot and Crusty bakery restaurant in New York City last fall won a groundbreaking union contract with a union hiring hall after two months on the picket line fighting a lockout.

Two factors have been key to defeat or victory: the pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy and labor solidarity. The present leadership of labor in the U.S. is a parasitic petty-bourgeois

Immigrant Workers Subsidize Baby Boomers and Tea Partiers

The hysteria against “illegal immigrants” whipped up by the racist right wing uses arguments made out of the whole cloth. The undocumented are not a drain on Medicare, Medicaid, welfare or any other social program since they are not even eligible for those benefits. In fact, *two-thirds* of undocumented immigrants pay federal income taxes, and contribute an average of \$12 billion a year to Social Security whose benefits they will never see. All those Tea Party retirees roaming the country in their RVs should realize that their monthly government checks are being subsidized by the “illegals” they love to hate.

Undocumented workers also pay state sales taxes for public facilities and roads as well as property taxes (via their rent) to pay for the schools. A 1997 study by the National Research Council showed that immigrant families on average pay \$80,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits. But more than that, they contribute tens of billions of dollars to the economy. A 2006 study by the Texas State Comptroller found that the 1.4 million undocumented immigrant workers in the state contributed \$17.7 billion to the state’s economy, and paid \$500 million more in taxes than they received in services. A “day without Mexicans” in Texas would cost a bundle.

layer that took control of the unions in the post-World War II “red purge” that threw out the socialists and communists who built them. It is beholden to capitalist law, and thus incapable of organizing workers lacking legal rights. For immigrants to win, this sellout bureaucracy must be driven out of the unions. On the other hand, immigrant workers alone seldom have the power to shut down a whole industry – they need the power of the whole labor movement to back them up, including in *mass mobilizations to stop the deportations*.

Key to defeating the “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class” and to building real union solidarity action is the forging of a revolutionary workers party on a program of independent class struggle against Democrats, Republicans and all capitalist parties and politicians. The idea that “Immigration Reform Can Stop Retaliation and Advance Labor Rights,” as the NELP report declared, is an illusion. Any “reform” legislated by the political representatives of Wall Street and the capitalist corporations which live off of the exploitation of foreign-born workers, any bill which conciliates the anti-immigrant yahoos, will necessarily be an attack on immigrants’ rights.

To hell with the national chauvinism and ethnic hostilities that set workers at each others’ throats while the bosses are laughing all the way to the bank! Communist revolutionaries proclaim, “*Asian, Latin, black and white, workers of the world unite.*” For our class, *workers’ struggle has no borders*. These are not abstract slogans. Our call for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants* has been realized, on several occasions. The great French Revolution of 1789-99, the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian October Revolution of 1917 granted to citizenship to all working people and defenders of the revolution.

The United States is a land of immigrants: everyone here came from somewhere else, some in chains, except the native American population which was decimated by the genocidal policies of colonizers and slave masters. What we are saying is that everyone here should be able to live here with the same rights as everyone else. It’s a simple democratic demand, but it will take a revolution to achieve it. ■

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No to Gun Control: Racist Ruling-Class Ploy to Disarm the Population

Who Controls the Guns?

In the wake of the horrific Newtown school shooting and a shooting spree at a shopping center in Clackamas, Oregon this past December, President Barack Obama and the Democratic Party have joined with Republicans like New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg and the liberal media in launching a drive to tighten gun control laws. The main opposition comes from the National Rifle Association (NRA) and right-wing Republicans, as well as some conservative Midwestern Democrats. But while there is a division among the capitalist rulers over gun laws, they all agree on intensified police repression across the board – as well as U.S. imperialist war in Afghanistan and murderous drone strikes in half a dozen countries.

So-called “progressives” want to further strengthen the repressive apparatus by disarming the population. All historical evidence shows that “gun control” will not reduce violent crime or prevent rampages by deranged individuals. It will, however, embolden racist *police* rampages in impoverished African American, Latino, Asian and immigrant areas. The police are there to “serve and protect” the interests of the capitalist rulers and to keep their victims down. That’s why they want a monopoly on violence. Gun control has *always* targeted exploited populations in order to undercut their ability to resist. In the United States, from colonial times to today, it is an incontrovertible fact that *gun control kills blacks*.

The Internationalist Group says *no to gun control* and other schemes to keep the working class and the oppressed disarmed in the face of a rapacious ruling class and its murderous, racist state. Luckily, the chances of actually outlawing guns for civilians in the U.S., where there are an estimated 300 million non-military firearms for a population of 325 million people, are virtually nil. Nevertheless, the measures presently being prepared in Congress such as intrusive “background checks” are aimed at keeping guns out of the hands of those the bourgeoisie deems to be its enemies, and to put

a leash on the rest – and thus should be opposed by any defender of democratic rights.

With the intense media focus on the shooting of 20 children and six adult staff at the Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, people have rightly begun to question what kind of a society could cause such shocking and brutal violence. But the grief and fear are being used by the White House for a dual campaign of limiting civilian access to guns and increasing the number of police inside of schools. This blatant fear-mongering in order to turn the schools into jails is disgusting, and dangerous. Rather than aiding school safety, it leads to unwarranted and often traumatic arrests of children, including handcuffing and jailing seven-year-olds, as well as imprisoning high school youths for minor infractions. We demand *cops out of the schools*.

For liberals, violence is at the center of the issue, and discussion over gun control becomes a simple equation of more guns equals more violence. But this ignores the fundamental truth that there are two classes in society, the capitalist rulers who assert their “right” to kill whomever they want by gun, bomb or remote control drone, and have a vast apparatus of private security guards, police, military and various other armed government agencies to do it; and the working people who may spend years in prison for shoplifting a stick of chewing gum, or in olden times for the “crime” of picking up dead wood. The exploiters don’t want the exploited to have arms.



Black Panther Party demonstrating at California State House in defense of their right to carry arms, 2 May 1967.

Racism and Gun Control

In the United States, racism is behind gun control laws going back to slavery. Not only were slaves generally prohibited from having weapons, so increasingly were free blacks as fear of slave revolts grew. Following Nat Turner’s Rebellion (1831), Virginia made it illegal for free blacks “to keep or carry any firelock of any kind, any military weapon, or any powder or lead.” Tennessee changed its constitutional clause from “freemen...have a right to keep and to bear arms” to “free white men.” The Supreme Court’s infamous Dred Scott decision (1857), holding that black people had “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect,” laid out the connection between gun control and democratic rights. Granting blacks citizenship:

“would give them the full liberty of speech in public and in private upon all subjects upon which its [the U.S.’] own citizens might speak; to hold public meetings upon political affairs, and to keep and carry arms wherever they went.”

–from Clayton Cramer, “The Racist Roots of Gun Control,” *Kansas Journal of Law and Public Policy* (Winter 1995).

Following the Civil War, the “Black Codes” enacted in Southern states to ensure a labor supply for the plantations also included bans on blacks carrying knives or firearms. When those laws were repealed under Reconstruction, former Confederate soldiers formed vigilante terror squads such as the Ku Klux Klan to seize guns from blacks, intimidate them from voting and drive them off their land. Later, under Jim Crow segregation, racist laws were couched in racially neutral terms, but as a state supreme court justice said of Florida’s 1891 ban on cheap handguns, it “was passed for the purpose of disarming the negro laborers,” “was never intended to be applied to the white population and in practice has never been so applied.”

Following World War II and throughout the 1950s and ’60s, armed self-defense in black neighborhoods in the U.S. South

was the only thing between black families and their would-be murderers. Beginning in 1946 in Monroe, North Carolina, ex-Marine Robert F. Williams and other African American veterans gathered 40 black men with rifles who backed off an armed Klan motorcade which threatened the funeral of a local black sharecropper who had been executed for killing his white landlord (from Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* [University of North Carolina Press, 1999]).

Later, Williams, by then head of the Monroe NAACP, organized a black armed guard, with a charter from the NRA, that in a 1957 campaign to integrate a public swimming pool held off a KKK motorcade with sandbag fortifications and gunfire. The following year he gained fame in a nationwide tour publicizing the infamous Monroe “kissing case” (of a nine-year-old black boy sentenced to 14 years in jail because a seven-year-old white playmate kissed him on the cheek). And in 1961, Williams rescued a white couple driving through the black community as a racist mob was beating up student Freedom Riders in downtown Monroe (Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns* [1962]). For this he was charged with kidnapping and forced to flee the country.

But black self-defense continued. In Bogalusa, Louisiana, the Deacons for Defense and Justice were formed in 1965 to guard civil rights marches and patrol black neighborhoods against KKK and other racist vigilantes during a campaign to abolish all segregation laws, open up local restaurants and integrate the local high school (see “Bogalusa 1965: Deacons for Defense,” on p. 21 of this issue). Next door in Alabama, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) formed the Lowndes County Freedom Organization to run candidates for local office under the symbol of the black panther. When they were met with evictions and death threats, SNCC told its supporters

continued on page 20

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For a Nationwide Strike to Smash Capitalist Education “Reform”! Mexico: Labor Cop Gordillo Busted to Crush Teachers’ Resistance

Translated from the upcoming issue of *Revolución Permanente No. 2*, newspaper of the *Grupo Internacionalista/México*.

MARCH 4 – At dusk on February 26, Elba Esther Gordillo, “president for life” of the corporatist National Union of Education Workers (SNTE by its initials in Spanish) was arrested at the airport in Toluca on orders of Mexico’s attorney general. The headlines shouted, “Elba Esther Toppled!” “Elba Prisoner,” “Elba’s Empire has Fallen.” She was arrested in a military operation involving undercover agents posted in San Diego, California and various airports across Mexico; two Navy aircraft tailed her private jet and after her arrest transferred the leader of the SNTE to the hangar of the Attorney General’s office [in Mexico City], where a caravan of ten armored vehicles awaited her. With the streets blocked off by security forces, they took her to the Santa Martha Acatitla women’s prison in Mexico City. With this spectacular show of state power, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto put government agent Gordillo, a faithful servant of Mexico’s capitalist governments for over three decades, behind bars. The charges: money laundering, misappropriation of SNTE funds and organized crime. In other words, corruption.

To anyone knowing the first thing about Mexican politics, this was obviously a settling of scores at the highest levels of power. For misappropriation of funds and obscene corruption you could arrest nearly the entirety of the country’s ruling politicians, high-level bureaucrats and military and police commanders. The representatives of capital couldn’t care less that *La Maestra* (“The Teacher”) Gordillo led a gilded life at her palaces on San Diego’s Coronado Island with extravagant shopping sprees (US\$2 million in two years, which works out to an average of \$3,000 a day) at the luxury Neiman Marcus department store and her constant plastic surgeries. Elba Esther Gordillo was the perfect target in order to promote Peña Nieto’s privatization agenda. You couldn’t miss the fact that her detention took place one



Elba Esther Gordillo and Enrique Peña Nieto when they were allies, at the dedication of the offices of Section 36 of the SNTE, November 2010.

day after the coalition government of the PRI, PAN and PRD,¹ formalized in the “Pact for Mexico,” promulgated the infamous education “reform” law that was passed in record time by the obedient national Congress and state legislatures. The *Elbazo* was intended to crush any resistance by the teachers.

Gordillo’s corruption was legendary, but it was protected and even sponsored by successive governments as payment for her services, which ranged from fixing the elections

¹ PRI: the Institutional Revolutionary Party of president Peña Nieto, which governed Mexico for seven decades and recently returned to power. PAN: the clerical-rightist National Action Party of ex-president Felipe Calderón. PRD: the bourgeois nationalist Party of the Democratic Revolution, whose former standard-bearer and recurrent presidential candidate was Andrés Manuel López Obrador. “AMLO” left the badly tarnished PRD in September, but this does not signify any fundamental change in his old party or his new bourgeois political vehicle, MORENA (Movement of National Regeneration).

of senators, governors and even presidents to suppressing rebellions of teachers. We of the Grupo Internacionalista have repeatedly pointed out that the SNTE is not a workers union, but like the other corporatist labor bodies in Mexico, a state institution, a labor police agency whose purpose is to prop up the regime and regiment the workers. Now “the boss” has outlived her usefulness and it was decided to dispense with her. Nevertheless, we also warn that the initial gleeful reaction by many teachers to the news of her arrest is profoundly mistaken. Dissident currents among the teachers, particularly the CNTE (National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers), have made a monumental error in cooperating with, and even egging on, the attorney general’s “investigation.” The demand of class-conscious teachers must be: *Peña Nieto, hands off the teachers!*

Only the most gullible could think that the PRI president would act in defense of union rights, or to safeguard union dues, as

he alleged in his statement on the case that was broadcast the next day on every radio and television station in the country. His action was intended to reinforce corporatism, not to promote union democracy. What we have here is a governmental crisis, which was made clear when Peña Nieto called an emergency meeting at Los Pinos, the presidential mansion, of all 32 state governors (29 attended), some of whom owed their positions to

La Maestra. Education Secretary Emilio Chuayffet, who as secretary of government (interior minister) under president Ernesto Zedillo in 1994 was responsible for the horrendous Acteal massacre – of 45 indigenous members of the religious collective “Las Abejas” (The Bees) who were murdered as they prayed in Chenalhó, Chiapas – is not an ally but a sworn enemy of the workers, who has declared that the only educators who will have a say in his “reform” will be those selected by the government.

All of Gordillo’s crimes – and they are much worse than the official charges – were extolled by, or committed in the service of, the same criminal state that now wants to try her. Gordillo’s detention is a cover for the drive by the new PRI regime to tighten the screws of government control over the teachers. The response of the workers to the fireworks around the arrest of the SNTE’s *capo* must be to break the corporatist shackles, expel the *charro*² bureaucracy imposed by the capitalist state, organize an independent union of the entire education sector and break politically with all the capitalist parties, from the tripartite governing coalition of PRI-PAN-PRD to the minor parliamentary parties (Party of Labor [PT],³ Citizens Movement [MC], and AMLO’s MORENA).

Elba’s Empire

La Maestra Gordillo is a murderer of teachers who has been placed in the dock by the bourgeois rulers who installed her as general secretary of the SNTE in 1989, a year of roiling teachers struggles that shook the country over and over with half-million-strong strikes. She herself said to reporters in 2006, “I came to the union by way of a decision by the Mexican State... In difficult situations like that... the executive is what counts” (*Proceso*, 2 March). As we wrote in 2006:

“The president of the national ‘union,’ the SNTE, Elba Esther Gordillo, was appointed by the Secretary of Government at an all-night meeting in the secretariat, after her predecessor (Carlos Jonguitud, also a PRI flunkey) had been ‘resigned’ hours earlier in a meeting with President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Between them, Gordillo and Jonguitud are responsible for ordering the assassination of more

² *Charro*: corporatist “union” official. Literally: cowboy. In an anti-communist purge of the Mexican railroad workers union in 1948, the government installed a new leader, Juan Díaz de León, who liked to dress up in cowboy outfits. Accompanied by the Mexican army and police, Díaz de León’s forces stormed the union’s headquarters and arrested the union’s president. This was quickly followed by *charrazos* (the imposition of government-designated leaders) in other unions, marking the watershed in the transformation of Mexico’s formerly left-led unions into agencies of the capitalist state.

³ The PT has never been any sort of working-class party but was a phantom party set up by former PRI president Carlos Salinas de Gortari to compete with the PRD for workers’ votes.



March of dissident teacher unionists in Chiapas on March 4. Altogether about 200,000 Mexican teachers stopped work for 48-hour strike against education “reform” and the imposition of a new corporatist “union” leader by the government of Enrique Peña Nieto.

Peña Nieto: Hands Off the Teachers!

**Break the Corporatist Shackles! Drive Out the Entire SNTE Bureaucracy!
Build an Education Union Completely Independent from the State!**

**PRI-PAN-PRD Capitalist Government Is Enemy of Public Education!
Break with the Bourgeoisie! Build a Revolutionary Workers Party!**

than 150 SNTE dissidents. Lately, with the PRI's power eclipsed, Gordillo transferred her institutional allegiances to the [Vicente] Fox regime, and set up a new 'party,' the PANAL (National Alliance Party), to support the PAN candidate [Felipe] Calderón."

—"GEM: Caboose of the Mexican Popular Front", *The Internationalist* No. 25, January-February 2007

The state that employed the murderer Gordillo, which is responsible for over 90,000 deaths in the past six years, which is an enemy of the militant teachers, has no right to judge its agent. Those who should judge this criminal are the colleagues and families of the teachers who fought against the corporatist control embodied by Carlos Jonguitud Barrios and later by Gordillo herself, and who because of this were shot, tortured and disappeared at the express orders of the *charro* clique (the misnamed "Revolutionary Vanguard") of the SNTE. The most famous case is that of the teacher Misael Núñez Acosta, murdered in January of 1981 by three judicial police officers of the state of Mexico,⁴ who were contracted for that purpose by Ramón Martínez Martín and Elba Esther Gordillo, who at the time were General Secretary of the SNTE and its Secretary of Labor and Conflicts in Preschool Education of Section 36 in the Eastern Zone of the Valley of Mexico, respectively.

The crime against Misael Núñez was followed by the *killing of more than 150 teachers* in the subsequent two decades under the patronage of Gordillo in conspiracy with the government and the party which have cast her out of office and imprisoned her. Gordillo's culpability for the murder of teachers extends up to the present day. At the end of the convulsive struggles in Oaxaca led by the dissident Section 22 of the SNTE, affiliated to the CNTE, Gordillo created a Section 59 made up of scabs and hired killers to help the government of Vicente Fox (of the PAN) to fight Section 22. In the subsequent years death squads of "Section 59" have killed CNTE teachers again and again. Only a few examples:

- On 28 August 2009 the teacher Artemio Camacho Sarabio was gunned down in San Pedro Jicayán, a town in the Costa region of southern Oaxaca, when a contingent of teachers tried to retake the bilingual school "Libertad," which was occupied by PRI loyalists and members of Section 59.
- In May 2009 Leonor Ortiz Barriga, the president of the Parents Committee of a middle school in San Pedro Totolapan, 50 miles southeast of Oaxaca, who took part in the struggle of Section 22 to retake schools taken over by Section 59, was murdered.
- On 4 April 2011, the teacher of indigent education Luis Quiroz Quiroz was assassinated. He also took part in a mobilization to retake a bilingual school.

⁴ The state situated around the national capital, Mexico City, which is in the Federal District.

Now with the arrest of Gordillo, the SNTE, just as corporatist as ever, remains an arm of government control. *La Maestra's* anointed successor, Secretary General Juan Díaz de la Torre, was installed as president by amending the statutes in the early morning hours after the president's arrest. But before he could take on his new office in the national council meeting in Guadalajara, according to *La Jornada* (28 February), he travelled to the capital: "the agreement to keep Díaz de la Torre was sealed in a negotiation with the government of Enrique Peña Nieto, after which the [SNTE] leader travelled to Mexico City, where he met with the secretary of government, Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, who transmitted to him the message of the president." This "decision of Los Pinos" stipulated that the new president of the SNTE would promise "not to interfere in the case of Elba and to reach agreement in the matters of wage negotiations and education reform." Immediately, the new *charro* boss announced his full support for the reform.

The message is clear: as in the past, the SNTE will be instrumental in implementing the bosses' attacks on the teachers that it regiments. In this case, the process of "universal evaluation" of teachers which has now been elevated to "constitutional status" (so that it cannot be altered by union bargaining or laws passed by Congress) will be used as a pretext to fire tens of thousands of teachers. Sections affiliated to the CNTE, a dissident current that has not broken with the SNTE but effectively acts as an independent union, will be under particular scrutiny. The CNTE has organized work stoppages of hundreds of thousands of teachers, and bourgeois governments since the PRI regime of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) have tried to destroy it. Gordillo was a top leader of the PRI, serving as head of its Congressional delegation and general secretary of its executive council for several years. But as leader of a corporatist labor institution her fundamental loyalty was to the state, and thus she also served the PAN governments of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón.

Today it is more urgent than ever to break out of the corporatist straightjacket that binds the teachers to the bourgeois state. With the SNTE decapitated, another boss was imposed within a matter of hours to carry on the job that Gordillo was no longer capable of executing. It is necessary for militant teachers to take control of their destiny by severing all ties to the state. Currently there is a profusion of organizations that claim to represent the teachers. Besides the SNTE and CNTE, there is the National Democratic Executive Committee of the SNTE (CEND), associated with the PRD), a supposed Union of Education Workers led by Carlos Jonguitud Carrillo, son of the former SNTE strongman, and other lesser formations. Those who are in the SNTE must fight to *throw out the entire corporatist bureaucracy that runs it and which is crystallized in thousands of "commissioners."* In every school, in every workplace, education

workers committees should be formed to take charge of expelling these bureaucratic henchmen from the facilities.

The independent currents must reject all state interference in their affairs and in the internal affairs of the workers movement in general. The bosses' government has no right to touch or to regulate the funds contributed by the workers, nor to grant or deny recognition to union leaders (with the arbitrary *toma de nota*) or to register unions, much less to impose or remove leaders at its whim, as it has done since the first *charrazos* after the Second World War, whose purpose was to expel communists and class-struggle union militants of any sort. This is class war, and we do not accept the intervention of the state (whether through its executive, judicial or legislative branches) in the affairs of our class. The goal of class-conscious workers must be, together with unions at the universities like the STUNAM and the SITUAM, *to build a genuine labor union across the whole education sector, completely independent of the state and without the least political tie to any of the bourgeois parties.*

For an Open-Ended National Strike Against the Privatizing Education Reform!

The *Elbazo* of Enrique Peña Nieto aims to obscure the real intentions of the new government: to impose an administrative and labor "reform" on teachers in Mexico that strips them of the rights they have gained and subjects them to a bosses' dictatorship. It is therefore urgent to begin to organize mobilizations of unions in the education sector, with the aid of the whole workers movement, to stop this capitalist attack cold. Already the teachers of Guerrero have been on strike since the end of February and independent sectors have called for a 48-hour strike of teachers nationwide on March 4-5. For these actions to be effective it is necessary for them to transcend the narrow limits of pressure politics to which the leaders of the CNTE would confine them. Even though they recognize that the arrest of Gordillo is a settling of scores among the rulers and they oppose Peña Nieto's education counter-reform, they are offering to cooperate with the government in prosecuting its case against her. This is a suicidal gesture, which the government will shortly use to "investigate" them as well.

In an article in defense of the rural teachers of Michoacán, we recently wrote about the fraudulent "Accord for Quality in Education" presided over by Elba Esther Gordillo and her ally Felipe Calderón:

"With their 'market orientation' from the most elementary grades, the 'education reforms' under this rubric aim to drastically reduce the governmental budget dedicated to primary education and to dramatically diminish enrollment in public higher education. They aim at *training* rather than an education that would contribute to the emancipation of the most impoverished

sectors. What they want least of all is that students should be educated to think critically and be able to express themselves to defend their interests."

— "ACE: Alianza Burguesa Contra la Educación ¡Defender las normales rurales!" (ACE: Bourgeois Alliance Against Education: *Defend the Rural Teacher Training Schools!*), supplement to *El Internacionalista*, November 2012

Peña Nieto's counter-reform and the Pact for Mexico are the continuation of the ACE. Now that the reform is being implemented, it is necessary for teachers in elementary, middle and high schools across the country, and likewise for the university workers unions, to mobilize in defense of their jobs and to make education a real right. The militant teachers of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Michoacán have shown the way with their work stoppages last year that prevented the administration of ACE tests.⁵ Now the need is posed for a national strike of unlimited duration of the whole education sector, with the support of the industrial proletariat, to stop capitalism's educational counter-reform.

The obstacle to this necessary mobilization is a dual one: on one hand, the corporatist SNTE continues to be a labor police force that blocks the mobilization of the teachers in defense of the positions they have gained; on the other hand, the CNTE, the CEND and other unions in the education sector are heavily subordinated to the bourgeois "opposition." The PRD of the *Chuchos* (Jesús Zambrano and Jesús Ortega)⁶ is part of the Pact for Mexico, and in this capacity the PRD not only gave its endorsement to the education "reform," but its chiefs were in the front rank of the "distinguished" sponsors who celebrated the law going into effect. The followers of AMLO's MORENA, for their part, are once again following a "legal strategy," as they have done before with disastrous results, such as in the case of the 44,000 electrical workers fired by Calderón, petitioning the bourgeois courts for individual injunctions. This is being pursued not only by the CNTE but was also the strategy of the SNTE under Gordillo, in a timid show of insubordination that cost *La Maestra* dearly. The strategy of both does not go beyond the limits of pressure politics focused on the bourgeois parliament.

In addition to all the defensive measures and mobilizations there is an urgent need to forge a truly class-struggle, revolutionary leadership among education workers. Such a leadership would insist on total political independence from the bourgeois state and all bourgeois parties and politicians. Only by fighting a revolutionary struggle will it be possible to effectively break the ties that bind the teachers to the bourgeois state. As Leon Trotsky wrote in his unfinished essay "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay" (August 1940): "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 revolution, or, on the contrary, the trade unions can become the instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat."

Break with all bourgeois parties and politicians! Forge a revolutionary workers party! ■

⁵ See "Teachers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil Stop Work to Stop High Stakes Test," *The Internationalist* special issue, Summer 2012.

⁶ *Los Chuchos*: factional opponents of former PRD standard-bearer Andrés Manuel López Obrador who now control the party while AMLO has left to build his new vehicle, MORENA.

Bring Out Workers' Power to Stop "Stop and Frisk" Cold

East Flatbush Police State: Racist NYPD Kills Again

It Will Take Workers Revolution To Avenge Kimani Gray!

Late on Saturday, March 9, plain-clothes police officers patrolling Brooklyn in an unmarked car shot eleven bullets at 16-year-old Kimani ("Kiki") Gray at the corner of East 55th Street and Church Avenue in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Gray was hit by seven rounds, three in the back; he was dead by the time he arrived at Kings County Hospital. This was a "good shooting," said NY Police Department spokesman John C. Cerar. There was "nothing to indicate that this shooting was outside the guidelines," said Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg claimed that Kimani Gray's alleged handgun – which wasn't used on anyone – was illegal. "I'm doing everything I can to keep guns off our streets, as you know, and keep young people away from guns," said the billionaire, as he condemned the "violence" of protesters. Mr. Bloomberg, the only gun that killed anyone belonged to what you boast of as your "private army," the NYPD guard dogs of the city's racist capitalist ruling class.

"Blame Kimani Gray," screamed a headline in the 14 March *New York Post*. And the blame-the-victim campaign is on. The victim, of course, is a young black man in the impoverished West Indian neighborhood of East Flatbush. The capitalist press is smearing Kimani and his brother as "gang members" when it was the *police* who shot a 16-year-old youth in the back.

The two officers who killed Gray, Sergeant Mourad Mourad and Officer Jovaniel Cordova have been named in five federal civil rights lawsuits over illegal stop and searches, false arrest and the like, paying out over \$200,000 in settlements. But you can count on the bosses' press to defend its hired killers to the hilt, especially when their victim is a black man.

Neighbors and friends of Kiki Gray remembered the police execution of *Shantel Davis*, 23 years old, an unarmed woman shot and killed as she fled from NYPD just blocks from the scene of Gray's murder,

on 14 June 2012. We remember *Ramarley Graham*, an 18-year-old unarmed man, executed by NYPD narcotics squad in his bathroom in front of his grandmother, on 2 February 2012; *Sean Bell*, executed in a hail of 50 NYPD bullets on his wedding day, 25 November 2006; *Timothy Stansbury*, 19 years old, executed by NYPD in Brooklyn for opening a door while black, 24 January 2004, and so many others. So who are the dangerous potential killers? Not Kimani Gray.

Police say Kimani pointed a gun at them, which they claim to have recovered. Why, then, was he shot in the back? Why have none of the many witnesses said he was holding a gun? Why has one, hospital clerk Tishana King, who witnessed the shooting from her third-floor window, said she is certain he had nothing in his hands? The cops' story stinks.

And what about the supposed right to bear arms? Gun control is the bourgeoisie's ploy to disarm the population so that their badge-toting gunmen have a monopoly on deadly firepower. This is why we Internationalists are opposed to all gun control laws: **gun control kills blacks!** Who shot and killed an innocent man? Not Kimani Gray.

What gives undercover police the right to stalk and assassinate a black youth on the streets of Brooklyn? Because he – according to official sources in the *New York Times* – "adjusted his waistband in a suspicious manner"? Shades of another NYPD assassination of another young black man – *Amadou Diallo*, 23 years old, executed in the doorway of his home in the Bronx by NYPD on 4 February 1999, as he reached for his wallet.

In fact, the NYPD has at least one program for stalking and harassing black and Latino youth, called the Juvenile Robbery Intervention Program or J-RIP. As the *New York Times* (4 March) approvingly headlined, "Police Trail Youths Before the



Protester among 46 arrested during police assault on March 13 demonstration against cop killing of Kimani Gray.

Crime," with unwarranted home and school visits, persistent street harassment and on-line tracking, including inventing fake Facebook identities to lure the gullible. Is it any wonder that one of the targets of the gang in blue has ended up dead?

Every night throughout the week that followed, hundreds of mourners and protesters gathered at the corner of East 55th St. and Church Ave. On Wednesday, March 13, after the city's autopsy revealed that Kimani Gray had been shot in the back, police attacked a group of 200 protesters who were attempting to march in the direction of the 67th Precinct. The cops arrested some 46 people, shoving marchers to the pavement and assailing marchers and bystanders with pepper spray as police helicopters buzzed overhead. Among the arrested was Gray's sister, Mahnefeh.

We demand: *Drop all charges against the protesters!* The killer cops have turned East Flatbush into an occupied zone. The very presence of these thugs in blue is an imminent danger to the life and liberty of black people and all residents in the area: **All cops out of East Flatbush now!**

At a City Council budget hearing, Democratic Councilman Jumaane Williams, whose district includes East Flatbush, quarreled with top cop Kelly. But after the Wednesday night police assault on marchers, Williams furiously lashed out on his Twitter feed against "adults from OUTSIDE the community who incite our angry young people!!!" So in the face of the cop rampage did Councilman Williams demand that the police from "OUTSIDE the community" get out? Did he at least demand that all 45 arrested protesters be freed and the charges dropped? Not that we have seen.

Williams, a black man of Grenadian ancestry, has himself been the target of

racist treatment by the NYPD, tackled and arrested for the "crime" of walking on a sidewalk during Brooklyn's annual West Indian Day parade in 2011. At the same time, he has voted for every city budget since his election, totaling billions of dollars for the NYPD. While saying the outrage in the community is justified, along with his "outside agitator" baiting Williams said it is necessary to "channel the anger properly." For him and other "progressive" Democrats, that means keeping it confined to the safe channels of pressuring the capitalist party and capitalist state they represent.

The murder of Kimani Gray will amplify the outcry against the NYPD's racist "stop and frisk" policy, as a federal lawsuit over the policy brought by the Center for Constitutional Rights began its trial on March 18. The Internationalist Group demands an immediate, unconditional end to this policy of racist profiling and "random" searches. But as we wrote last summer, "'Stop and frisk' is neither the first nor the most horrendous aspect of racist police-state repression of blacks, immigrants, and other oppressed groups. Cops don't just stop, they murder too" (*The Internationalist Special Issue*, Summer 2012).

And note that the various pressure groups linked to the Democratic Party that claim to oppose stop and frisk *don't even propose to end it*, only to clean it up a little.

The deadly police occupation of the ghettos is not going to be solved by asking sharp questions of cop commissioner Kelly in City Council hearings, nor can it be overcome by the isolated explosions of rage and despair in the ghettos themselves. What's urgently needed to stay the hand of the killer cops is to bring out a force superior

continued on page 7



Internationalist contingent in march protesting cop murder of Kimani Gray, March 24

Portland Unions Denounce FBI Raids, Grand Jury Witch Hunt of Activists

PORTLAND, OR – On July 25 of last year, several homes of activists in the Pacific Northwest were broken into by federal agents who claimed to be seeking evidence for a grand jury investigation. The “crime” being investigated was alleged vandalism of a federal building during May Day demonstrations in Seattle. However, the warrants specifically mentioned “black clothing” and “anti-government or anarchist literature” as items to be seized. The “investigation” was really a fishing expedition designed to force activists to turn over information on their friends and fellow activists under parameters that are so vague that just about anyone ever associated with any of those targeted could be named as a suspect.

In addition to issuing the search warrants, which included as “evidence” political and union literature, the grand jury proceeding seeks to compel witnesses to testify and inform on their associates. Those who refused to testify were jailed while the grand jury proceeds, and could face federal charges that could result in lengthy prison sentences. Three of those targeted in the raids – Matthew Duran, Katherine “Kteeo” Olejnik and Maddy Pfeiffer – heroically refused to testify and were held in the Sea-Tac Federal Detention Center for months. Duran and Olejnik were released on March 7 but Pfeiffer remains in prison.

We join unionists and defenders of democratic rights in demanding that Maddy Pfeiffer be released and any proceedings against anyone targeted in this dragnet be dropped and their records expunged. The federal government of Barack Obama which launched this attack on political dissenters should be held liable for millions of dollars in monetary damages for its wanton abuse of the activists’ rights.

The grand jury resisters were held for over two months in solitary confinement, causing a deterioration of their health. Although they were being held as witnesses and the purpose of the imprisonment was to coerce testimony, federal district judge Richard Jones noted “their resolve appears to increase as their confinement continues.” In ordering release of Duran and Olejnik, the judge ruled that their continued imprisonment was “purely punitive,” yet they had not been charged with criminal contempt (or anything else), and therefore their right to due process was being violated.

In Portland, three homes were broken into, and three activists detained. Although local police claim that they weren’t involved in the searches, a recent reversal of the 2005 decision to become independent from the federal Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) make it unlikely that local authorities were unaware of the investigation. The city of Portland has a long and tortured history of espionage against activists ranging from Quaker peace activists to the Black Panther Party. The notoriously corrupt Portland Red Squad has often sought to intimidate and harass activists participating in a variety of organizing efforts.

With this history in mind, beginning in the late 1990s several unions and com-

munity organizations initiated a struggle to end the city of Portland’s relationship to the JTTF. Finally, in 2005 they won a city council decision making Portland the first (and only) city to pull out of the task force. As a result, for several years city police were not supposed to participate directly in FBI “anti-terrorist” investigations. However, the decision was reversed in 2011, and particularly during the Occupy movement that fall and subsequently, local police were evidently working closely with the feds, no matter how flimsy the pretext for the “investigation.” By July 2012, this included targeting activists based on their alleged association with Mayday activities in Seattle.

Sweeping through homes under the pretense of looking for evidence in a petty vandalism case is a blatant witch hunt designed to intimidate activists. Citing political and union literature as evidence of any kind is persecuting people for thought crimes. Anarchists were the immediate target, but any group considered to be revolutionary by the federal authorities could be next.

Under the old Wobbly watchword, carried forward by the ILWU, that “an injury to one is an injury to all,” supporters of the Internationalist Group in Portland-area unions circulated a resolution calling on labor organizations to denounce the July 25 FBI raids and defend those targeted. The resolution (printed below) was endorsed by the Industrial Workers of the World, Portland Local; International Union of Painters and Allied Trades Local 10; International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Local 28; International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 5 and Laborers International Union of North America Local 483.

Resolution Against FBI Repression

Whereas three homes in Portland, and several others across the Northwest were raided by the FBI on Wednesday, July 25th to collect evidence for a grand jury investigation, and

Whereas the residents of the homes in Portland had their doors broken down, were tear gassed, and handcuffed in the course of executing the search warrants, and

Whereas the “evidence” collected in the July raids included such objects as of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) union literature, and

Whereas the Portland branch of the IWW is a respected labor union which consistently acts in solidarity with other unions, a partner in the planning of Portland’s yearly May Day events, and the union representing workers in three local social service shops providing assistance to at-risk youth and survivors of domestic violence, and

Whereas the right to participate in unions and organize ourselves as workers and freedom of expression and freedom of association are fundamental rights, and

Whereas the FBI has a longstanding history of infiltrating and spying on activists and labor organizations in Portland through the use of the Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) and the Portland Red Squad in order to intimidate,



FBI agents during July 25 raids on anarchist activists in Portland, Oregon.

harass, and dismantle these groups, and

Whereas several unions in Portland have a strong history of resisting FBI repression and the JTTF including a successful campaign for Portland to pull out of an agreement with the JTTF in 2005, and

Whereas the history of FBI and federal repression against union members and their allies include such prominent examples as the Palmer Raids, in which members of unions and labor organizations were targeted because of their actual or suspected affiliation with the Communist Party and the Communist Labor Party as well as actual or suspected membership in the IWW, between 1919 and 1920 which resulted in the arrests of thousands of people and the deportation of upwards of 500, and

Whereas the Portland JTTF, and its counterpart, the Portland Red Squad has been used to spy on workers participating in an organizing drive at Powell’s books in 2000, the IWW over several years beginning as early as 1917, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) throughout the 1930’s and in several instances since then, and

Whereas the most recent July raids are clearly intended to similarly intimidate and

harass activists and union members, and

Whereas the July raids and their associated grand jury proceedings are politically motivated and intended to suppress dissent expressed on May 1st, 2012, during the celebration of International Workers Day, and

Whereas any attack on any union is an attack on all unions, and

Whereas an injury to one is an injury to all, be it therefore

Resolved that we condemn the raids that took place on July 25th and any future raids and defend the people targeted in them, and be it further

Resolved that we will make our best effort to mobilize our membership to support a mass meeting to condemn the attacks on our unions and resist FBI raids and repression and defend our right to participate in unions, and be it further

Resolved that we call for a meeting of union members to discuss next steps in resisting FBI repression and form a network to respond to any future raids.

Endorsed by: IWW Portland Local, IUPAT Local 10, IATSE Local 28, ILWU Local 5, LIUNA Local 483

East Flatbush...

continued from page 6

to that of the repressive apparatus. A class-struggle leadership of the unions, such as the Internationalist Group fights for, would call for a mass mobilization of union *power* along with the millions of oppressed black, Latino and immigrant residents against police brutality and murder.

And that means not just another Sunday parade, but surround City Hall and really occupy Wall Street until the NYPD’s racist “stop and frisk” is stopped cold. It should also demand that NYC officials and employees cease *all* cooperation with the federal ICE immigration police: no more handing over of teenagers in Rikers Island to the racist *migra* for deportation. Any effort in this direction will need to push aside the resistance of the pro-capitalist union bureaucracy, which never lets an opportunity pass to salute the bloody flag of U.S. imperialism and bow to the racist, strikebreaking cops. We say: *cops, prison guards, security guards out of the unions!*

Thousands across New York City and beyond who have felt the heavy hand of racist police violence are crying out for justice. Across the country, even as Barack Obama is the first black president in the White House, cop terror against poor communities and particularly black young men continues unabated. The bitter truth is that black oppression – ranging from rampant prejudice to pervasive police harassment to mass incarceration and modern-day lynching like Kimani Gray – is in the bedrock on which U.S. capitalism rests. It will not be reformed away by cop watches, civilian review boards, civil rights lawsuits or lashing out in desperate acts of impotent rage.

It will take a workers revolution that overturns the foundations of capitalist rule to put an end to what Malcolm X aptly called the “American Nightmare.” There will be no justice for Kimani Gray, or for so many other like him, until the bourgeois rulers and their racist police guard dogs are swept away by the multi-racial, international working class. ■

Scabs Loading Ships – Grain Shippers Declare War on Union

ILWU Locked Out in Vancouver, WA For Longshore Solidarity Actions!

**Defend the Union Hiring Hall – No Concessionary Contracts!
Scab Cargo Too Hot to Handle! For Mass Pickets on the Docks!**

PORTLAND – At 8 a.m. on February 27, the United Grain Corp., owned by Mitsui, locked the members of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 4 out of its Vancouver, Washington terminal and began operating using management personnel and scabs. It was a long-planned move. Armed guards from the Gettier “security” agency have been in the terminal for months. “Replacement workers” were put up in area motels waiting for the call. Scab tugboats were contracted.

This is the first time in decades that a West Coast port facility has worked a ship with scabs. Not since the Inlandboatmen’s Union’s 1987 coastwise strike against Crowley Maritime have the shippers tried. When they did then, longshoremen and boatmen marched on a Redwood City dock in the San Francisco Bay Area to chase scabs off the vessel, never to return. Newspapers reported it as shades of the 1934 Big Strike with the ILWU flexing its muscle.

Already this past December, United Grain and two other members of the Northwest Grainhandlers Association (Columbia and Dreyfus) imposed a contract that includes 12-hour shifts and effectively bypasses the union hiring hall, the key to the ILWU’s power. Those terms had been rejected by 94% of the longshore grain locals, yet the ILWU International instructed the membership to keep working under the imposed contract. This is a threat to the future of the union, the bastion of organized labor on the West Coast, and to its members’ livelihoods.

From the moment the union-busting contract was imposed, there should have been *mass pickets shutting down all the terminals of the grain monopolies*, with the threat to *close every port on the West Coast* – as well as East and Gulf Coast ports – if there was any attempt to operate with scabs. Now that this has happened, a call should go out from the union for *dock workers everywhere to refuse to unload the scab cargo*. All Mitsui cargo ships must be treated as strikebreakers and union-busters!

But you can’t call solidarity actions if Vancouver and other ILWU locals aren’t organizing actions themselves. Union officials have limited picketing at United Grain to three pickets, while filing an impotent legal complaint. Most ominous of all, they negotiated a dangerously concessionary contract with Temco (owned by Cargill) that includes many of the dangerous provisions that the other members of the NWGA are demanding – *and they call this a “victory”!*

Already a year ago, the ILWU tops rammed through a worst-ever contract at the new EGT terminal in Longview, Washington. It gave up union jurisdiction in the port, imposed 12-hour shifts and gave management and scabs the “right”



Troy Wayrynen/The Columbian

Hundreds of longshore workers and supporters came out to March 8 rally in Vancouver to protest union-busting lockout of ILWU by United Grain/Matsui. International labor solidarity is key to victory.

to work behind picket lines and to set up a management-controlled hiring list, bypassing the union hall. It was sold as a “foot in the door,” but longshore militants warned it was a foot in the butt and would backfire when the NWGA contract came due. Sure enough, that’s exactly what has happened.

As we have noted before (see “Bring Out Workers Power to Defend the ILWU,” *The Internationalist*, November-December 2012), the grain shippers are making record profits. And despite inroads at EGT, ILWU power on the West Coast waterfront is still intact. Instead of trying to make nice with the bosses who are hell-bent on destroying the union, it’s high time for the ILWU membership to say *enough!*

On the East and Gulf Coasts, under heavy pressure from Washington, the International Longshoremen’s Association reached a last-minute “partial agreement” with the USMX employers association, whose terms have not been announced. But local agreements over work rules have been held up. The ILWU and ILA should join hands. Powerful *coast-to-coast and international solidarity union action* is needed to **DEFEND THE ILWU before it is too late.**

On March 8, a rally was called in downtown Vancouver to protest the lockout. But the focus is on the fact that United Grain is owned by the Japanese company Mitsui. The call to “End the Mitsui Lockout” complained that the company has refused to reach an agreement “with its American workforce.” It contrasted this to the “collective bargaining agreement with American grain exporter TEMCO.” Yet American-owned Cargill/Temco has one of the *worst* anti-union records in the industry. The rally marched to the United Grain headquarters to deliver a copy of

the Temco contract. Instead, they should have headed to the terminal to set up mass pickets.

This flag-waving has no place in the workers movement, and will get the union nowhere. It sank the Boron workers’ struggle, when the ILWU tops picketed a British consulate instead of having Local 13 refuse to handle scab cargo from the struck plant. It is in flat contradiction to the ILWU’s long tradition of *international labor solidarity*. In fact, now that United Grain is loading ships with scabs, it is vital that dock unions *in Japan* and internationally refuse to work Mitsui ships. On March 15, Doro-Chiba, the Japanese rail union, picketed Mitsui in Tokyo.

In January, the West Coast coordinator of the International Transport Workers Federation boarded a ship at United Grain in Vancouver. The captain and crew, members of the Japanese Seamen’s Union, were well aware of the ILWU’s struggle. They informed the ship’s owner that under a solidarity clause in the JSU contracts, they would honor ILWU pickets. *But there were no union pickets to respect. Nor were there any Local 13 pickets when the ship docked in L.A.*

“Seafarers from around the world are grateful for the ILWU’s solidarity over the decades,” said the ITF delegate, and they “are eager to have the opportunity to support the ILWU” against the global grain merchants (*ITFGlobal*, 21 January). But the ILWU has to take the initiative. And there is reportedly sentiment brewing among longshore workers in Columbia River ports for such action.

On March 13 Portland Local 8 voted a motion calling on “all longshore locals to take immediate action against Mitsui operations on the West Coast to defend the ILWU,” as

well as for solidarity actions by ILA locals and affiliates of the ITF and the International Dockworkers Council.

Already, there has been a fight over the concessionary contract at Temco/Cargill. That “interim agreement,” which would be superseded by any agreement with the other NWGA shippers, includes a clause saying “The Employer has the right to select steady employees and their temporary replacements, five days or longer, for all categories of work except Utility.” If that union-busting provision sticks, it won’t be long before you can kiss the ILWU hiring hall goodbye.

The hiring hall was the key gain of the 1934 strike and has been the linchpin of the West Coast longshore union’s power ever since. When the U.S. Congress tried to outlaw it with the “slave labor” Taft-Hartley Act, part of the post-war purge of “reds” and labor militants from the unions, the ILWU stood its ground and finally forced the bosses and their government to back down. Now the International is prepared to give it up without so much as a whimper.

But not everyone in the ranks is willing to roll over and play dead. The day that United Grain locked out the ILWU, the *Portland Business Journal* reported that the union said that “five of its locals” had ratified the giveback Temco deal. Make that four. Portland Local 8, which with three active terminals is the largest grain port on the West Coast, *voted the “interim contract” down.*

Portland isn’t alone. Also in February, the Los Angeles-Long Beach Office and Clerical Unit *rejected* the settlement that their leaders had agreed to last December, ending a walkout that idled ten of the 14 terminals at that largest port in the U.S. and had the Obama administration panicked. (The OCU eventually knuckled under.) And don’t forget that Longview ILWU Local 21 never voted on the sellout EGT contract, even though they have a right to under the ILWU constitution.

What’s going on here? In recent decades, the top leadership of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union has moved a long way from the union’s militant past. Even under ILWU founder Harry Bridges, the union agreed to “modernization and mechanization” (M&M) contracts that undercut union gains. A “steady man” system was set up that, especially in L.A.-L.B. Local 13, fostered a labor aristocracy. But now they are putting the union itself at risk.

In spite of the rightward shift at the top, on a number of occasions, ILWU militants have been able to mobilize solidarity actions overcoming the opposition and foot-dragging resistance of the International leadership. The

continued on page 20

There Are No Neutrals In the Class War on the Docks

Why We Defend the

ILWU and All Workers

...Including Against the Sellout Labor Bureaucracy

to the defense of the ILWU in this fight. And that defense includes forthrightly *opposing the capitulations and betrayals by the labor bureaucracy* which sells out vital union gains in the vain hope of an impossible “cooperation” with capital, endangering the workers organizations they preside over.

Which Side Are You On, Occupy?

In objecting to the call to defend the ILWU, Little cites a number of betrayals by the ILWU tops. It should be obvious that defending a union, an organization or a movement is not the same as politically supporting the outlook or policies of its leadership. When thousands of union members and workers joined in a pre-dawn mobilization in October 2011 to stop NYC mayor Bloomberg’s cops from evicting Occupy Wall Street, or when tens of thousands marched on the Port of Oakland that November to protest the mayor’s eviction of Occupy Oakland, that did not mean that they necessarily agreed with the politics of the Occupy movement. We in the Internationalist Group repeatedly defended OWS while strongly criticizing the bourgeois populism that was its ideological common denominator. Likewise, it should be ABC to defend labor unions, which are workers’ first line of defense against the boss, despite the sellout policies of the leaderships who aid the employers in controlling labor and blocking the road to the overthrow of capitalism.

Little’s article grows out of a sharp dispute that took place among left, labor and community activists who came together at the end of November just as an ultimatum from the NGA bosses was about to expire and the threat of a lockout was looming. At a public meeting on November 28, Little propounded his thesis that unions were institutions that sometimes did good and sometimes did bad and therefore it was above all necessary to remain “independent” of the unions. A leaflet of the Port Working Group appeared that made no mention of the fight over the grain contract, went on



ILWU protests use of non-union labor at EGT plant then under construction in Longview, Washington, 3 June 2011.

JANUARY 5 – In recent weeks, a showdown has loomed on U.S. docks between the shipping bosses and port workers that has rattled the capitalist ruling class. On the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, the International Longshoreman’s Association (ILA) prepared to strike container shipping on December 30 while the employers United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) threatened to lock out 14,500 ILA members. Over 100 leading business executives called upon President Barack Obama to take “immediate action” to prevent a walkout at all costs, including issuing an injunction under the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act. At the last minute, the ILA and UMX reportedly struck a “partial agreement” on container payments, and extended the contract for 30 days to negotiate other outstanding issues including work rules. Washington and Wall Street breathed a sigh of relief at the reprieve in the midst of the year-end bargaining between Democrats and Republicans over tax hikes and spending cuts in the “fiscal cliff.” But the fight is not over.

On the West Coast, the Pacific Northwest Grain Handlers Association (PNGHA) has been demanding a giveback contract from the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), including no less than 750 changes which would effectively bypass the union hiring hall, slash workers’ vital safety protections and gut union power. This is a make-or-break battle for the ILWU, in which all labor has a vital stake. The shippers, who in this case are the four giant companies that monopolize the world grain trade, threatened a lockout. On December 21, the 3,000 affected ILWU workers in the Puget Sound (Seattle, Tacoma) and Columbia River basin (Portland, Vancouver) locals overwhelmingly rejected the bosses’ “last, best and final contract offer” with 94% voting “no.” A week later, at 6 a.m. on December 27, Columbia Grain, United Grain and LD Commodities imposed their union-busting contract. The union leadership told members to keep work-

ing, but the grain bosses’ arrogance is already provoking resistance: an entire shift reportedly walked out when they weren’t given a lunch break on a 12-hour shift.

The grain monopolies have been gearing up for this battle for months, preparing to assault one of the remaining strongholds of union power. They hired a professional strikebreaking outfit, J.R. Gettier, which reportedly put up “scores” of “replacement workers” (scabs) in motels around the Portland area. They built a new access road (scab alley?) into Portland’s main grain terminal and secured military backing from Obama’s Coast Guard, which declared a moving “safety/security zone” around any grain ship or terminal, with violators facing up to 10-12 years jail time. While ILWU leaders fiddled around with delaying tactics, union militants sought to prepare for a major class battle. Now D-Day has arrived. Facing an implacable enemy, longshore and other port workers can prevail, by adopting a policy of unflinching class struggle and using the key weapon in labor’s arsenal that is more powerful than the union-busting bosses and their government: *solidarity*.

The fate of the ILWU is at stake in this battle with the shadowy, price-fixing grain cartel. A year ago all eyes were on the bitter struggle against union-busting at the Longview, Washington Export Grain Terminal. After months of militant action by the union ranks and facing the prospect of coast-wide mobilization by ILWUers and activists of the Occupy movement against EGT, the union leadership caved under pressure from the bosses and their government and signed a dangerously concessionary contract. At the time, when many on the left (and in Occupy) were hailing the “victory” at Longview we warned that the other grain shippers would soon demand the same concessions. That’s exactly what is happening now. At a time like this, the old refrain from the Harlan

County miners’ song *Which Side Are You On?* is doubly true: on the West Coast docks today, *there are no neutrals*. Yet in the midst of the Northwest grain battle, Occupy Portland activist Peter Little publishes an article, “One Year After the West Coast Port Shutdown,” in *CounterPunch* (21-23 December) vociferously arguing *against the call to defend the ILWU!*

The workers in the ports, he writes, “can choose for themselves whether this struggle will be to defend the union or to fight the union to defend their interests.” Hello? Fight the union? Little’s shameful pseudo-neutrality can only aid the bosses. His article shows no understanding of the nature of unions as mass organizations of the working class: like the liberals, the big business press and the labor bureaucrats, he equates the unions with the pro-capitalist leaders. The article also passes over the whole context of the class struggle pitting port workers against the sinister agribusiness/shipping giants. We say: *All those who stand with the exploited and oppressed must come*



Above: Columbia Grain set up separate access road at Portland’s Terminal 5 in anticipation of scabs. Below: Professional strikebreakers of J.R. Gettier advertise an army of black-shirted scabs and thugs.

MarkDaMan PDX/YouTube

Top: Pete Shaw. Bottom: J.R. Gettier website

about “community control of our public infrastructure” and referred only to workers’ “struggle for democracy in the workplace.” Seeing that the vital question of defending the union against the grain bosses’ union-busting offensive was left out, we in the Internationalist Group put out our own leaflet, “Bring Out Workers Power to Defend the ILWU!” (reprinted in *The Internationalist*, November-December 2012).

This set off a furious response from Occupy activists, including a lengthy e-mail from Little (part of which is reproduced in the last section of his *CounterPunch* article). When he refers to “the language of ‘stand with the ILWU in building mass picket lines’, and ‘Defend the ILWU and its historic gains’,” it is our leaflet he is attacking. IG supporters answered with an e-mail laying out why “In this battle, it is fundamental for working-class militants and their supporters to stand four-square in defense of the union.” We explained that a labor union is a working-class organization, even if is headed by a bunch of sellout misleaders. *The union is the membership*, not the bureaucrats in their cushy chairs finagling deals with the bosses. In fact, the bureaucracy is a parasitical petty-bourgeois (middle-class) layer with different interests than the membership they claim to represent. But supporters of the workers’ side in the class struggle, we wrote, must understand that it is a duty of workers everywhere to stand with the union against the bosses.

“That’s the class line. It’s fundamental to understand this. That’s why, even if you disagree with the union leadership, even if they commit abuses, a class-conscious worker would never go to the bosses’ government or the bosses’ courts against the union. That’s why a class-conscious worker would never cross a picket line.” One thing that is striking in Little’s e-mail and article is the bloated sense of self-importance that ascribes to the Occupy movement almost magical transformative powers. He writes of the Occupy-called December 2011 West Coast port blockade that “our presence in the ports transformed not only our sense of power and possibility, but the sense of what was possible for the workers there.” Or again: “Occupy the Ports shattered the stagnation of decades of union-led struggles with small solidarity mobilizations.” Decades of stagnation?! What about the *May Day 2008 strike against the war* by the ILWU that closed every port on the West Coast? Or the *1999 coast-wide shutdown demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal*? Granting that Occupy activists were “outsiders to the ports,” Little portrays this as a virtue, declaring that “the movement at the gates of the factory transformed the possibilities within the factory in a way in which the inherent limits of the trade union could not.” He asks “whether victories can be won for Port workers ... which do not undermine unity or further divide the working class as a whole,” and opines that longshore workers “if left to determine it themselves, will inevitably find distorted answers.”

What smug arrogance! It is almost as if the opening verse of the second stanza of *The Internationale* – “we want no condescending saviors” – were written expressly for Occupy. He’s flat wrong, besides. Back in July 2011, ILWU supporters occupied the EGT terminal, reportedly ripping down fences and blocking grain trains. Also, “before sunrise on September 8, some 800 union supporters ‘stormed’ the new Export Grain Terminal, as an AP dispatch and every subsequent article in the big business press



ILWU longshoremen protest scab labor, occupy EGT terminal, 11 July 2011.

put it. Media accounts said workers carrying baseball bats broke down gates, ‘overpowering’ security guards, who cowered as 10,000 tons of grain were dumped on the tracks and railroad cars disabled. In short: the workers were taking care of business. That morning more than 1,000 longshoremen refused to show up for work, shutting down the ports of Seattle, Tacoma and Vancouver, Washington as well as Portland, Oregon” (“Showdown on the West Coast Docks: The Battle of Longview,” *The Internationalist*, November 2011). These action by port workers even before Occupy existed had vastly greater transformative power than a couple of hundred radical youth showing up at the docks to win victories for them.

The vitally necessary struggle to raise revolutionary class consciousness will not be produced by some *deus ex machina* of outsiders who aren’t subject to “the inherent limits of trade unions.” Those limits – of fighting a guerrilla war to defend the interests of labor under capitalism, as Karl Marx put it – will be overcome when we have reached the stage of building workers councils that can undertake revolutionary action. What undercuts labor struggle today is rather the stranglehold of a privileged labor bureaucracy that chains the unions politically to the capitalist system (in the U.S. through the Democratic Party) and subjugates them to the bourgeoisie’s anti-labor laws. You can’t sidestep that obstacle, as Occupy pretends to do (sometimes hobnobbing with the bureaucrats they will denounce tomorrow). It is necessary to drive out these labor fakers in order to defend the unions, not destroy them. This requires a revolutionary vanguard fighting for a program of class struggle both within and outside the mass organizations of the working class.

That is something that Occupy with its populist politics claiming to represent “the 99%” and “the people” cannot do. Pete Little, like many anarcho-liberals in Occupy, sees the world through the lens of bourgeois

sociology, talking in sociologese of what “metric” to measure mobilizations by, and referring to the “institution of the ILWU.” In this view, women, immigrants, blacks, the unemployed and unorganized, sexual minorities, etc., are separate constituencies alongside the unions and other “institutions” within society, divided by varying degrees of oppression and privilege. For Marxists, the liberation of all sectors of the population oppressed by bourgeois society is bound up with the working class, the only social force with the power to bring down capitalism. The contradictory character of the unions is not that they are “institutions” that sometimes do good or bad, but that these workers organizations are chained to capitalism by a parasitic petty-bourgeois bureaucracy. These are the treacherous misleaders so aptly described by American Socialist Daniel De Leon as “the labor lieutenants of the capitalist class.”

Little claims on the one hand that the December 2011 West Coast port blockades were “led by Longshore workers” – which is nonsense, only a handful of longshore workers were actively involved. He simultaneously asserts that Occupy “maintained a fierce independence of the union” – also a distortion, unless one equates the union with the bureaucracy (as he repeatedly does). As we pointed out last year, contrary to the claims of the union tops who opposed the shutdown, it was successful where there was at least some support from ILWU members and a flop where there were few or no contacts. Don’t get us wrong: against social-democratic academic Cal Winslow, writing in *CounterPunch* (5 December 2011), and others who opposed the port blockade and covered for the bureaucracy screaming “substitutionism,” we wrote:

“The fact that Occupy protesters, however contradictory their politics, are taking up the cause of labor should be greeted. Many who have never before been on a demonstration are experiencing, ‘up close and personal,’ the hard realities of

American capitalism. Although coming from the outside, and despite the yelps from the bosses and their kept media, from the Democrats and sellout labor bureaucrats, the December 12 West Coast port blockade aided the workers’ class struggle against the exploiters.”

–“Longshore Workers, Truckers: Shut the Ports, Coast to Coast!”, *The Internationalist* (28 December 2011)

We added that “the basic problem with the December 12 port blockade is not that super-radical adventurist-substitutionist Occupiers ran roughshod over the unions, but rather that with their liberal/reformist/populist outlook, Occupy non-leaders are *too soft* on the union bureaucracy.”

The lack of a Marxist class perspective colors the entire article, sometimes leading to bizarre conclusions. Little’s argument for “Why Ports, why the Pacific Northwest, why Now?” is that more grain is being shipped through the Northwest because “the Mississippi River is at the lowest stage of flow in over 50 years,” and grain prices have shot up because of drought due to climate change while grain companies are “shipping massive amounts of grain (wheat, soy, corn) to China to fuel its artificially stimulated economy.” So should China, a bureaucratically deformed workers state, suffer from an economic depression like the capitalist world? And if last week’s Midwest snowstorm raises the level of the Mississippi, will that dampen the West Coast class struggle? This nutty anti-Communist meteorology explains nothing. About the fact that employers are on a union-busting tear nationwide, with lockouts at an all-time high, not a word. Why not? Because anarcho-liberals *refuse to defend the unions*. That is the crux of the matter.

Little is clueless about the class struggle. He writes that “The ‘Defend the ILWU,’ position will not likely rally the thousands in Occupy,” which may be true, because many in the heavily petty-bourgeois Occupy movement don’t understand the first thing about unions. He says “it is not the role of those of us who are not Longshore workers to decide whether or not to defend the ILWU, nor is it for us to decide when its time to strike or not to strike.” What is that supposed to mean? If scabs tried to cross an ILWU picket line in a strike or lockout, or a picket line in support of the ILWU, should defenders of labor say “it’s not up to us to decide, let the scabs decide for themselves”? Hell no. ILWU members and supporters would try to convince them, but failing that, they would stop them. Picket lines mean don’t cross, period. They are collective actions by the workers, and they must be enforced. Ultimately, this liberal argument is about refusing to defend union picket lines on the grounds of “self-determination” for everyone.

Little writes of the port truckers, who are largely immigrant and non-white, including in the Pacific Northwest many East Africans and South Asians. Yes, their struggle to unionize has been shamefully ignored and even stymied by the ILWU International. The bureaucracy has also fostered exclusionary practices and chauvinist attitudes in the ranks. These policies have been opposed by militants in the union who have called to organize the port truckers ever since their unions were broken in the late 1990s due to the deregulation policies of the Democratic Clinton administration. At last year’s May Day rally in Portland, ILWU Local 8 militant Jack Mulcahy passionately argued that port truckers were key. But Little



ILWU contingent in San Francisco May Day march in conjunction with West Coast port shutdown against war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. First-ever strike by U.S. unions against U.S. imperialist war was pushed through over resistance from union tops.

argues that organizing port truckers “means independence from the union itself, and it may even mean a struggle against the union” in the name of “unified struggles.” Struggle against the ILWU? If it weren’t for union power on the docks, port truckers would find it a hell of a lot harder to unionize. In fact, in May 2008 ILWU militants who led the West Coast port strike against the war worked together with port truckers who held a work stoppage, mainly of Sikh and Latino drivers, four days later in Oakland.

In polemicizing against the call to defend the ILWU, Little cites the EGT concessionary contract as an example of where unions are bad. He doesn’t mention that we and longshoremen who defend the ILWU against the grain bosses denounced this sellout while Occupy (echoing the bureaucrats) initially hailed it as a victory! (See “Occupy and ILWU Declare Victory as Contract Finalized with EGT” portlandoccupier.org, 14 February 2012). Some “fierce independence” from the union that was! If those in Occupy who oppose defending the unions against the grain cartel are ultralefts, they are pretty opportunist ones. Little also cites the disruption of the 6 January 2012 Seattle forum in solidarity with Longview longshore by ILWU bureaucrats and hangers-on. In contrast to the International Socialist Organization, Socialist Workers Party, Spartacist League and others who excused or even supported this attack on workers democracy, we denounced it. Moreover, in the Internationalist video of that attack (which Little’s article links to) you can see the five ILWUers on the stage and many in the audience chanting “ILWU, ILWU,” defending the union against the bureaucratic disrupters.

Class-Struggle Trade Unionism

As we wrote in our recent leaflet, “*This is class war: there are no neutrals here.*” When Pete Little calls for “independence from the union” and “a struggle against the union,” saying workers may have to “fight the union,” he places himself on the side of the bosses. His are not off-hand remarks but reflect a program which labels unions institutions of capitalist domination. Speaking at the 2007 U.S. Social Forum – a confab of foundation-financed NGOs (“non-governmental organizations”) with some leftists tagging along – Little (then with the now-defunct Bring the Ruckus) called for “making a full break with the

existing institutions of domination, be they unions, foundations, or parties themselves and to develop new forms of organization.” Likewise, supporters of the Seattle-based anarchist Black Orchid Collective argue that “Unions play a role in maintaining labor power as a commodity and in ensuring some level of discipline at the workplace” (BOC website, 29 February 2012). Little, the BOC and other Occupy “anti-capitalists” ascribe this to the nature of unions, not to the policies of the pro-capitalist leadership.

To be sure, not everyone in what is left of the Occupy movement is necessarily anti-union, nor are many anarcho-syndicalists in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), for example. On the other hand, the populist pot pourri of Occupy also contains downright pro-capitalist elements, who have been prominent in New York. Occupy Sandy, for example, worked together with the NYC mayor’s office, the New York Police Department and the National Guard during its recent relief efforts (see “Class, Race and Hurricane Sandy,” *The Internationalist*, November-December 2012). But the politics put forward in Little’s *CounterPunch* article and by anarchists and semi-anarchists in the Portland Ports Working Group, while posing as ultra-left, if actually carried out would aid the employers who are hell-bent on destroying ILWU union power on the waterfront. And by blaming sellouts on the nature of unions they are letting the bureaucrats off the hook. These are the fundamental class realities in this fight.

Yes, as the Communist International under Lenin and Trotsky noted, there will come a time during a revolutionary upsurge when the limits of trade unions will be a fetter that must be burst by forming workplace-level workers committees and regional workers councils as the organizational form for carrying out workers revolution. But to pretend that the U.S. today is even remotely near such a level of struggle is a fantasy, or a cynical ploy. But, some may legitimately ask, is it possible to struggle inside the unions for revolutionary, class-struggle policies given the entrenched pro-capitalist bureaucracy and the string of defeats? We in the Internationalist Group answer, “yes.” We point to the example the immigrant workers at the Hot and Crusty bakery in New York City who after being locked out and spending 55 days on the picket line were able to win a union contract with a union hiring hall, something unheard of in the restaurant industry and exceedingly rare anywhere in

led to the founding of the ILWU, West Coast longshoremen were part of the ILA, whose president Joe Ryan was every bit as reactionary, pro-capitalist and submissive to the bourgeoisie’s labor laws as any union bureaucrat today. San Francisco dock workers, led by supporters of the Communist Party, were able to overcome the resistance of the sellout leadership by massively organizing the ranks and refusing to bow down to cops, courts and capitalist politicians. When San Francisco police attacked strikers on July 5, “Bloody Thursday,” killing two strikers and a strike supporter, the workers’ response was a general strike that shut down S.F.

The situation was similar in the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strike and Toledo Auto-Lite strike, which together with S.F. dock workers laid the basis for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) soon after. All three strikes faced sabotage by union bureaucrats, all three were met by massive state repression, and all three won because they were led by “reds.” Of course, Communist Party supporters in the ILWU soon dropped their militancy, supporting Roosevelt and the Democrats in the name of the “popular front.” The Trotskyists who led the Minneapolis truckers faced down the arch-conservative Teamsters bureaucracy led by Dan Tobin, but were later jailed by the government (egged on by the CP) for their effective organizing of over-the-road drivers and their revolutionary opposition to the second U.S. imperialist world war. After WWII, the CIO unions were purged of communists with the aid of the Taft-Hartley “slave labor” law which also outlawed the closed shop, secondary boycotts and other powerful labor tactics.

Unlike most of labor officialdom, the ILWU resisted Taft-Hartley, defended the union hiring hall and successfully challenged the anti-communist exclusion clause in the courts. But even as the government repeatedly tried to deport ILWU leader Harry Bridges, he and the union bureaucracy he headed negotiated “mechanization and modernization” contracts that undercut the union’s power. Still, the ILWU today is a far cry from what it was in the past, with the top leadership now following policies little different from other “business unionists.” If under pressure from the ranks, top leaders like ILWU president Bob McEllrath take a stand and are arrested for blocking trains to stop EGT union-busting, the union lawyers are hard at work to prevent a repeat. And meanwhile, Coast committeeman Leal Sun-

recent decades. They were prepared to fight to the end, and their steadfastness won support from many NYC unionists.

The history of the formation of industrial unions in this country, and of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union in particular, also bears this out. As we noted in an earlier article on “The Left, Labor and Occupy” (*The Internationalist*, May 2012), at the outset of the last big depression in the early 1930s, unions were in even worse shape than they are now. At the time that they launched the 1934 Big Strike that

det is a former labor relations official for the employers’ Pacific Maritime Association! As we have written before, he was serving the bosses then and he’s serving the bosses now.

Sundet said of the EGT agreement, which he negotiated, that it was “key to standardization of the grain export industry on the West Coast, particularly with respect to labor costs,” and that this “brings stability for everyone!” Now we are seeing what this “standardization” and “stability” means: endless givebacks. Longshore militants are asking, where will it stop? When the ILWU leaders, faced with the PNGHA’s threat of a lockout, instructed the ranks to work under the imposed contract, they earned praise from the bourgeois media: “Calmer Heads Prevail in Port of Portland Disputes” editorialized *The Oregonian* (29 December). The business press speculates that the union may intend to file an unfair labor practices suit against the employers before the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Far from being “smart tactics,” all such maneuvers by the ILWU’s legal beagles assume that the NLRB, or the courts, or the Labor Department are somehow favorable or at least neutral, whereas *they are all part of the capitalist state whose job is to subjugate labor.*

The union tops may offer terms such as a purported deal with Temco (owned by Cargill). But this would be based on huge concessions to the shippers. Yet the grain cartel is making money hand over fist. If the PNGHA companies claim they are at a competitive disadvantage because of the concessions granted to EGT (as we and militant longshoremen warned they would), the ILWU could “level the playing field” by striking EGT: there are plenty of health and safety violations to justify a walkout. But the union bureaucracy plays by the bosses’ rules, which means they are guaranteed to lose – the only question is by how much. Faced with intransigent shippers, the two U.S. longshore unions should join hands to prepare a powerful nationwide ILA-ILWU dock strike against union-busting. Strike committees should be elected to organize an all-out struggle, other unions should be appealed to for support, efforts should be made to enlist backing from and aid port truckers, approaches should be made to black, Latino, Asian and white working-class communities. That’s how to win a real *class* battle.

We can talk until we’re blue in the face about how longshore workers did just that and won in ’34, and no doubt many will respond: that was then, and this is now. But what was key then and what’s lacking now is class-struggle leadership. Our job, and that of any who seriously intend to sweep away capitalism, is to build that leadership. That is a political fight, for the independence of the union from the capitalist state and the capitalist parties, and for a workers party that fights for a workers government.

In his article and earlier e-mail, Pete Little asked rhetorically, “If workers in the grain elevator wildcat and the ILWU withholds support and orders them to return to work – relative to what occurred in Longview – will we still defend the ILWU?” The answer of any class-conscious worker must be emphatically “yes!” If port workers are being sold down the Columbia River, in standing with those who would fight we defend the ILWU against the shippers and against the misleaders whose betrayals jeopardize the union. Refusing to defend the ILWU in this hour of mortal danger can only aid the union-busting bosses and their labor lieutenants. ■

Hot and Crusty Workers' Victory Celebration A Rousing Success

On February 16, a victory party and benefit was held for the Hot and Crusty workers' triumphant unionization campaign. After a year-long effort and 55 days on the picket line, these courageous immigrant workers won a solid labor victory, including a union hiring hall. (See "Hot and Crusty Workers Win with Groundbreaking Contract," *The Internationalist*, November-December 2012). Held at the Brecht Forum in downtown Manhattan, the party – sponsored by the Hot and Crusty Workers Association, the Laundry Workers Center and the Hot and Crusty Workers Solidarity Committee – was a big success.

Over 100 supporters joined Hot and Crusty workers at the celebration, including a group of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1181 school bus workers, whose month-long strike had just been ended, as well as activists from AFSCME DC 37, Transport Workers Union Local 100, the Immigrant Workers Justice and 99 Pickets groups, the Professional Staff Congress-CUNY and other labor and community organizations. The Internationalist Group, CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Class Struggle Education Workers participated very actively in building and helping staff the event.



Rosanna Rodríguez of the Laundry Workers Center speaks along with Mahoma López of the Hot and Crusty Workers Association.

After greetings from organizers of the victorious campaign, live music and dancing were a highlight of the event. Los Skar-

roñeros, a ska-punk band from Brooklyn, sang about immigrant workers' struggles, international class struggle and the fight against capitalism. ATU 1181 members Dennis Jackson and Michelle Sylvester (Honey Boy and Honey Girl) performed their school bus strike anthem "EPP" (about the fight for "employee protection provisions") and other songs. The Felicito Tapia Sonido Montana disk jockey crew pitched in, and documentary filmmakers Rachel Lears and Robin Blotnick previewed scenes from their documentary on the Hot and Crusty struggle.

The party concluded with Hot and Crusty workers and their supporters joining to sing the "Corrido de Hot and Crusty," an epic ballad in the traditional Mexican style recounting the workers' long struggle and eventual triumph. Highlighting the need and potential to organize the unorganized, particularly super-exploited immigrant workers, the victory has already begun to inspire others in New York's food industry (like those in midtown Manhattan's Dishes restaurant, who recently launched a campaign) with its powerful example. ■

Right: Honey Boy and Honey Girl sing their ATU strike song, "EPP."

Below: the Orquesta Skarroñeros playing "Bella Ciao."



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The Betrayal of the NYC School Bus Strike

Needed: A Class-Struggle Union Leadership Fighting for a Workers Party

On Friday, February 15, the month-long strike by the 8,100 school bus drivers and matrons of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1181 was called off by the union leadership. There was no vote by the membership – the decision was announced in a 45-minute teleconference call. The next day the labor-hating *New York Post* crowed, “Union Strike Busted.” The liberal *New York Times* proclaimed the outcome a “Win for New York Mayor” Michael Bloomberg, who issued a statement gloating that “special interests” – which is how the capitalists and their politicians refer to unions – “have never had less power than they do today.” Racist right-wingers on the Internet blasted the largely black and Latino strikers as “greedy union thugs.”

Although relieved to be earning a paycheck again after weeks of watching bills pile up, many strikers were angry about being sent back to work with empty hands. ATU leaders said in “suspending” the strike they were honoring the request of the five Democratic mayoral candidates who signed a joint letter calling on workers to return to their jobs in exchange for a pledge to “revisit the school bus transportation system and contracts if elected.” (Four of the five call-off-the-strike Democrats were previously endorsed by the Working Families Party.) Local 1181 president Michael Cordiello said the letter gave him “great confidence” that the next mayor would be “far more sympathetic.” But many bus workers *The Internationalist* spoke with said they didn’t trust the Democrats one bit.

The candidates made sympathetic noises, but they pointedly did not pledge to uphold or restore the Employee Protection Provisions (EPPs), the central issue in the strike. Relying on the Democrats will not defend union gains – they represent the interests of Wall Street and corporate bosses no less than do the Republicans. Currently, Democratic president Obama is leading the union-busting attack on teachers, while New

York Democratic governor Cuomo vetoed a bill that would have guaranteed EPPs. But in fact the letter was requested by the ATU International in order to give the union tops what amounted to a face-saving way to call off the strike. The ranks did not buckle, the leaders did. They had no program to win the battle, so they threw in the towel.

When they went back to work the following Wednesday, February 20, more than 300 strikers were told their jobs were gone. When we arrived at the Reliant yard on Zerega Avenue in the Bronx at 5:15 a.m. that morning, drivers and matrons were being refused entry by management, which said it had hired 120 “replacement workers,” or scabs. Cops (and even a couple of “white shirts”) had been called in against the angry workers, but eventually the union got the company to back off. In Red Hook, Joey Fazzia of Boro Wide Buses announced the company had shut down and all hundred-plus matrons were out of a job. Most but not all are now back. However, citywide more than 100 strikers are still fired, particularly at Rainbow/All American in Astoria. The union’s response has been to threaten legal action for unfair labor practices.

The school bus strike was the biggest strike in New York City since the 2005 transit strike, which for three days brought traffic in Manhattan to a virtual standstill. The ATU strikers stuck it out in the bitter cold, in isolated areas of the city, for weeks. Picket lines stayed strong, and two-thirds of the bus routes were shut down (the other third were non-union or Teamsters Local 584, which shamefully did not go out). But the strikers could not by themselves shut down the schools or seriously affect commerce in the city – that required solidarity *action* by the rest of labor, the United Federation of Teachers first and foremost, and that didn’t happen. The UFT, Central Labor Council and the rest of labor officialdom left the strikers twisting in the wind.



Internationalist photo

ATU strikers kept up fighting spirit throughout. On February 14, the day before union tops called off the strike, hundreds turned out to jeer Bloomberg.

From the first day of the strike, we called in leaflets, on picket signs, and in a special tabloid strike supplement of *The Internationalist*, close to 3,000 copies of which were distributed to strikers, to “Mobilize Labor’s Power to Win NYC School Bus Strike.” But while 5,000+ ATU members came out for the February 10 march over the Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall, almost none of the rest of labor did. Delegations ranged from a handful to less than 50 for the UFT (with a membership of over 100,000 active school personnel in the city). As we noted, the march was deliberately held on a Sunday so it couldn’t possibly disrupt anything, and was addressed by a parade of Democratic politicians, who a few days later issued the requested back-to-work letter.

It was all part of Operation End the Strike. In the aftermath, a leaflet by Class Struggle Education Workers (“Who Knifed NYC School Bus Strikers in the Back?”) that was distributed to hundreds of returning strikers on February 16 stated: “It would have taken the combined determination of the whole NYC labor movement to break Bloomberg’s union-busting. But labor leaders didn’t ‘walk the walk,’ they barely mumbled the talk.” While “salut[ing] school bus drivers and matrons whose brave month-long strike inspired us all,” the CSEW leaflet warned that “Labor tops’ reliance on Democrats leads to defeats” and concluded: “Victory requires a new, class-struggle leadership and a workers party.”

The NYC school bus strike was a signal event for labor. Instead of just lying down and taking it, as so many unions have done, workers were fighting back. The defeat of the strike is a bitter pill for the workers to swallow. Yet while the battle was lost, the war is not over. For the union leadership, which was

not prepared to wage class war – and didn’t even know how to when it had to – this is a meaningless cliché. For union militants, both in the ATU and elsewhere, it underlines the need to draw the lessons of this strike, in order to prepare a battle plan for victory in the future. The key for that is a struggle within the mass organizations of labor for a revolutionary program to wage and win all-out class war, which is what we are facing.

Michael Bloomberg knows he is waging a war on labor, and he is prepared to go to the limit. He cynically used special needs children as pawns, reveling in the hardship families were facing, in order to blame the union. Luckily most parents weren’t taken in by the lies of the haughty billionaire mayor, who during Hurricane Sandy told New Yorkers to kick back and watch TV (not so easy when you have no power). Bloomberg represents the *enemy*, the Wall Street financiers and corporate moguls who live off the wealth that working people produce. The *obstacle* we face in fighting them is the labor misleaders, who religiously follow the capitalist laws and support the capitalist parties. They’re playing softball when Bloomberg & Co. are playing hardball. But as history has shown over and over, if you play by the bosses’ rules you’re sure to lose.

V.I. Lenin referred to strikes as a “school of war” – class war. So what are the lessons to be learned here? First of all, said the Russian revolutionary leader, “a strike teaches workers to understand what the strength of the employers and what the strength of the workers consists in.” Bloomberg and his class have all the money, obviously, but it is the workers who make the system run. Second, a strike “opens the eyes of the workers to the nature, not only of the capitalists, but of the government and the



Internationalist photo

Internationalist contingent in February 10 march on City Hall. ATU leaders embraced Democrats, heading their “request” to end strike.

laws as well.” So in the school bus strike we not only saw the police penning in strikers, we saw the mayor lying about a 2011 court decision, calling the strike illegal, and then blithely ignoring an NLRB ruling that the strike was legal. For the bosses, “the law” is just an instrument of their class rule.

To win, it was necessary to understand that this was no isolated strike. School bus workers were up against a concerted union-busting drive by the capitalist rulers nationally and internationally. It was not just over dollars and cents, at stake were workers’ jobs. If Bloomberg wins, bus drivers’ pay will likely be cut in half (to the starting wage of \$14.50 an hour), hours reduced to part-time (as is already the case for ATU 1181 members on Long Island) and everyone’s benefits slashed to the bone. It’s impossible to get by on that, much less retire with dignity, in this most expensive city in the U.S. It’s not just that the bosses are “destroying the middle class,” as the labor tops say. The war on the unions aims at impoverishing all workers. This is a battle for survival.

The bus drivers and matrons were ready and willing to fight. Even a day before the strike was called off, hundreds turned out to jeer the mayor at his “state of the city” speech at the Barclay Center in Brooklyn. But the union leaders went about it as if this was the same old same old. They begged Bloomberg to join the talks, to delay bids on bus routes, they offered to help cut costs, they sought support from “elected officials,” they asked for mediation, to no avail. They made no attempt to stop scab buses or to picket out the Teamster Local 584 companies. OMG, that would be a “secondary boycott” under the slave-labor Taft-Hartley law, which they wouldn’t dare defy. Above all, they didn’t seek solidarity *action* by teachers, students, parents, transit workers and all NYC unions to *shut the city down*. That is what it would take to win.

In the face of this severe setback, there will inevitably be some demoralization among strikers who fought hard and have nothing to show for it. Union militants know that things would be even worse if they hadn’t fought, and workers gained a lot of experience during the strike, the first by NYC school bus workers since 1979. But in order to prevail the next time around, the key is leadership. The present local leaders are mostly the continuation of the previous regime that the feds went after for mob ties. There have been opposition groups in 1181 before, such as Members for Change, which won several positions and almost took the local presidency in 2009, backed by many Haitian and Hispanic drivers and matrons who make up 70 percent of the membership.

But a more representative leadership running on a program of union democracy will not in itself be sufficient to defeat a powerful opponent in a knock-down, drag-out fight. In fact, groups like the “Association for Union Democracy” have played a sinister role over the years by tying union opposition groups to the *bosses’ government*, far and away the biggest enemy of the working class. The key lesson of the strike must be the need to build a class-struggle leadership to fight for total independence from the capitalist state and the capitalist parties. So long as labor is tied to the Democrats, it is bound to lose. We need a fighting workers party, and we need it now. It’s up to us, to those working people and our class allies among the oppressed who have drawn the lessons of past defeats, to lead the way. ■

A Test for the Left

The NYC school bus strike was also a test for the left which claims to support the cause of labor. The Internationalist Group, Class Struggle Education Workers and CUNY Internationalist Clubs were active in support of the strikers from the start. We leafleted and went in groups to picket lines almost daily in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx. The CSEW held a forum on the strike in late January where striking drivers and affected parents spoke, along with representatives of ATU Local 1181, TWU Local 100 and the IG. We distributed thousands of copies of a strike supplement to *The Internationalist* and marched in a contingent over the Brooklyn Bridge on February 10. Our focus throughout was on mobilizing the power of NYC workers in action, because it was clear from the outset that bus drivers and matrons couldn’t win on their own.

For the most part, however, not only did NYC unions *not* bring out their hundreds of thousands of members, most socialist groups were also AWOL, nowhere to be seen.

Teachers were the most directly affected by the strike, and the UFT leadership predictably cold-shouldered the strikers, despite repeated efforts by a delegate who is active in the CSEW to get the union to act. But the reformist opposition inside the UFT also did next to nothing. The International Socialist Organization published an account, “A Bitter Setback for NYC School Bus Drivers” (*Socialist Worker*, 19 February), which was breathtaking in its sheer arrogance. The article stated, “It’s unfortunate that Local 1181 didn’t reach out to the Movement Of Rank-and-file Educators (MORE) within the UFT.” A typical response of would-be bureaucrats: We didn’t do anything because no one asked us to.

But on top of the arrogance we get mendacity, which is a fancy word for lying. The article states: “MORE was eventually able to push the UFT to publicly support the bus workers in the strike’s waning days....” Nonsense. MORE didn’t put the heat on the UFT tops. Some phone calls to UFT officials don’t amount to anything (we did that too, but also went to the executive board and put forward a motion in the delegate assembly calling for a mass rally). Aside from a token presence of a few caucus members who acted honorably, MORE was MIA. Barely a handful of its supporters showed up at the February 10 march, and in the one case where MORE put out a call to join the picket line at the DOE, almost none of them even bothered to show up.

The Progressive Labor Party, to its credit, did show up on the picket lines with some students on several occasions. Naturally, PL did it in their Stalinist fashion, ordering students not to take copies of *The Internationalist* and making them give the paper back. *Challenge* (13 February) also crudely removed the “Internationalist Group” signature from a sign in its front page photo. You can’t teach old Stalinists new tricks. Even as *Challenge* poses as a “revolutionary communist” newspaper, it has nothing in common with Lenin’s *Pravda*, which means “truth.” PL’s opportunist twists and turns can be mind-boggling, calling to “actively participate in Obama’s campaign” only to turn around and label his policies “fascist.” They figure no one will remember.

Workers World Party’s intervention in the strike was mainly in supporting Parents



What’s disgusting? Union-busting! School bus strikers needed power of NYC unions to win. But not only was organized labor MIA, most of the socialist left was AWOL as well.

to Improve School Transportation (PIST), and bringing supporters from the Boston school bus drivers union (USW Local 8751) to a February 2 caravan and rally at Zerega Avenue in the Bronx. A wrap-up article, “Lessons of the NYC school bus strike: Was it worth it?” (*Workers World*, 7 March) is basically an apology for the ATU leadership, with a *pro forma* criticism of the Democrats, saying that the whole experience “lays the basis for the next stage of the struggle.” This kind of sugar-coating can only disorient strikers who are seeking to lay the basis for winning next time by understanding what went wrong this time.

On the other hand, the World Socialist Web Site of the Socialist Equality Party positively encourages and feeds on demoralization as a result of the defeat of the strike. The SEP is a dubious outfit of anti-union, reformist political bandits. Dubious, because its main leader is the owner of a non-union (scab) printing plant in Michigan. Anti-union, because they actively try to get workers to leave unions, and side with employers in telling workers not to vote for unions in representation elections. Reformists, because they pretend that the aim of a workers government should be “ending the rule of the financial oligarchy and the reorganization of economic life to meet human needs, not private profit” (WSWS, 18 February). What’s needed is not simply “reorganizing economic life” to sideline the bankers but a socialist revolution.

The SEP writes (WSWS, 23 February) that in this strike, “The union itself was fighting for interests that were separate and hostile to those of ordinary workers.” This is a fundamental falsehood. Like the media and the union leaders themselves, they equate the union with the bureaucracy that sits atop it and feeds off it. Yet the basis of the union is the membership, and the ranks of drivers and matrons were out there on the picket line desperately fighting for their interests. When they chanted “ATU 1181” they were referring to themselves. The union tops reflected different interests and a different agenda not in calling the strike but in calling it off.

The labor bureaucracy, what American socialist Daniel DeLeon called the “labor lieutenants of the capitalist class,” is a contradictory layer that seeks to act as a buffer

between the bosses and the workers. They support the capitalist parties and imperialist wars. The bureaucrats are an *obstacle* to workers’ struggle, which must be swept out in order to win; the bosses are the *enemy*. Failing to understand this crucial difference would spell defeat for workers. The task that faces us is not to get rid of the unions, but to oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and all capitalist parties, and build a class-struggle leadership fighting for a workers party on a program for a genuine workers government that can put an end to the capitalist system of war, racism and poverty and open the road to a socialist society of abundance for all. ■

Wildcat?

We saw on the Internet a flyer by a semi-anarchist group, Fire Next Time, titled “Flashpoint 1979: Wildcats, Workers’ Power and Lessons for Today” (22 January). The leaflet argues that the 1979 school bus strike was a “wildcat” (unauthorized) strike and that’s why it won. But although the papers referred to it as a “wildcat,” the ’79 strike wasn’t an initiative of rank-and-file workers independent of and against the union leadership. The ATU tops claimed the walkout wasn’t officially sanctioned, but this was just a convenient fiction, as was its later *pro forma* call on strikers to comply with a back-to-work court order. Union officials led the bargaining throughout. In fact, as the *New York Times* (27 February 1979) wrote:

“Both the union and the major bus company – Varsity Transit ... – say they have not sanctioned the wildcat strike. But both have been in sympathy with the striking drivers....”

What was true was there was plenty of militant action by strikers in the face of legal threats and relentless union-bashing propaganda from the media and repulsive racist mayor Ed Koch. As *Workers Vanguard* (No. 226, 2 March 1979) wrote at the time, when it was the voice of revolutionary Trotskyism:

“At this point many unions, faced with tear-jerking stories of home-bound wheelchair-confined children, would have buckled under. But the Amalgamated Transit Union Locals 1181 and 1061 refused to budge.”

When Koch started his Operation Kiddie Lift, at first trying to corral city chauffeurs to drive kids to school, the ATU got the chauffeurs’ union (DC 37) to refuse. Koch then used prison vans and some buses from Long Island, whose tires were soon slashed.

Mythologizing wildcat strikes and “direct action,” as many anarchists and syndicalists do, is part of a broader program of counterposing the spontaneous consciousness of rank-and-file workers to the struggle for revolutionary leadership. In particular circumstances, when the membership is solidly united against a hated union leadership in cahoots with the bosses (as with South African miners last August), a wildcat strike can succeed. Most wildcat walkouts lose, however, and the toll in lost jobs can be high. What was key in the 1979 NYC school bus strike is that the strikers courageously stood their ground and repeatedly defied the cops, courts and capitalist politicians. That kind of determination and a *class-struggle program and leadership to fight the capitalist rulers politically*, “connecting the dots” between union-busting attacks here and imperialist wars – and the war on workers around the globe – is urgently needed today. ■

Lincoln, *Lincoln*, and the Abolition of Slavery

Lincoln, the movie, was billed as Hollywood's Great Movie of the season. It had everything that the motion picture moguls love: an illustrious director (Steven Spielberg), a renowned scriptwriter (Tony Kushner), an accomplished lead actor (Daniel Day-Lewis) who gave a sterling performance (and looked like Lincoln's double), plus historical heft and plenty of flag-waving paeans to American "democracy." But in the end, it lost out in the Academy Awards to two flicks lauding the dirty work of the CIA: *Argo* (anti-Iran) and *Zero Dark Thirty*, which celebrates torture and the assassination of Osama Bin Laden. The Academy wants its patriotic gore to be crude and contemporary these days.

Lincoln has been called a history lesson in film by various reviewers, and the movie certainly comes off that way. Dealing with the formal abolition of slavery, it was timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The problem is that history is a casualty of war in *Lincoln*. At bottom, the film is a political tract billing the United States as an eternal beacon of freedom, and hailing Obama-style liberalism and compromise. *Lincoln* is really all about Obama, whom screenwriter Kushner described as "Lincolnian" for giving up the "public option" in order to enact the "affordable health care" act, a huge cash giveaway to the health insurance companies.

Barack Obama is no 21st-century Abraham Lincoln, but even less so was Lincoln a 19th-century Obama, as portrayed in the film, intent on compromising to achieve the will-o'-the-wisp of bipartisanship. Works of art often take liberties with historical details in order to dramatize a point, but the important historical inaccuracies in *Lincoln* go to the heart of its message. Most striking is the near total absence of African Americans, except for a handful in peripheral roles, and in particular of black slaves fighting for freedom from bondage.¹ "Where was Frederick Douglass," the black abolitionist and

¹ Northwestern University associate professor of history Kate Masur objected in the *New York Times* (12 November 2012) that "Mr. Spielberg's 'Lincoln' helps perpetuate the notion that African Americans have offered little of substance to their own liberation."

relentless fighter for enlisting black soldiers for the Union army, many have asked.

Where indeed? It is almost impossible to tell the story of the events leading up to the passage of the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery and involuntary servitude without referring to Douglass. In a revealing interview with Bill Moyers on PBS (21 December 2012), Kushner justifies the absence of important black characters in the film by disingenuously arguing that "Lincoln didn't know any black people." Yet Lincoln met twice with Douglass, first in 1863 where they talked of equal treatment for black soldiers, and again in 1864, when the foremost African American champion of abolishing slavery sought assurances that emancipation would not be sacrificed in any peace negotiations.

Answering Moyer's reference to "some criticism that the film presents blacks simply as faithful servants waiting for white males to liberate them," Kushner elaborated:

"I don't accept the idea that the only thing to tell about emancipation is that the victims of oppression are always the authors of their own emancipation because it's not the case. Frequently people that are severely put upon and severely oppressed don't have the means. They're ordinary people and they don't have the means to rise up and destroy it on their own...."

Lincoln the movie deliberately excludes the role of blacks in the struggle to crush the slave system. Showing Frederick Douglass would have made it harder to ignore the 200,000 black soldiers who signed up to fight against the slavocracy – and whose contribution was termed "indispensable" to Union victory and emancipation by Lincoln the man – as well as the more than 50,000 among them who gave their lives on the battlefield or in Confederate captivity in this cause.

Lincoln is a narrowly-focused film. It is not even about Lincoln so much as about the politicking behind the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which dragged on from February 1864 until January 1865. The film pretends that the abolition of slavery was a formalistic legal process, initiated by Lincoln and carried out by the all-white U.S. Congress. But



Matthew Brody/National Portrait Gallery; David James/DreamWorks II

Abraham Lincoln and actor Daniel Day-Lewis

even within that constrained framework, little sense is given that slavery was being destroyed in a great war outside the halls of Congress. In order to sell its message about the wonderfulness of compromise in politics, and "surrendering" some of the "romance of revolution," the film engages in a string of lies and distortions.

The movie invents dissension among the Republicans about the amendment which did not exist. In reality, the party was united behind this measure and pushed Lincoln to champion it.² According to the film, Lincoln was in "a race against time" to push this measure through before the end of the war, when the returning Southern states would attempt to block it. Again, there is no evidence for this. It is not even true that it was vital that the lame duck Congress meet in January 1865. If it had failed to ratify the amendment, Lincoln

² James Oakes – a professor of history at the City University of New York and author of *Slavery and Freedom* (1990) and most recently, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* [2012] – commented: "Most troubling of all is the fabrication of a division among Republicans over the Thirteenth Amendment. There was no such division. From the moment their party settled on the amendment in early 1864, they formed a solid, virtually unbroken bloc in support of it" (PSC *Clarion*, February 2013).

could have called a special session of the new Congress in March, in which the Republicans would have had a two-thirds majority. And so on and so forth.

The overriding concern to get bipartisan support is Kushner's, not Lincoln's, and it is linked to his virulent denunciation of Radical Reconstruction. Since conciliation is wonderful, Kushner explained in an interview with National Public Radio (15 November 2012):

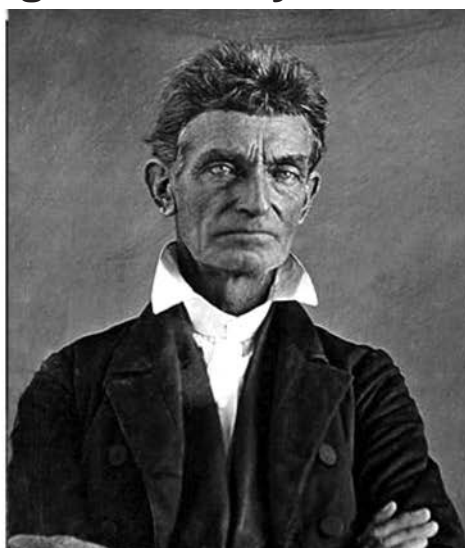
"The inability to forgive and to reconcile with the South in a really decent and humane way, without any question, was one of the causes of the kind of resentment and perpetuation of re-alienation and bitterness that led to the quote-unquote 'noble cause,' and the rise of the Klan and Southern self-protection societies. The abuse of the South after they were defeated was a catastrophe, and helped lead to just unimaginable, untellable human suffering."

Outrageous! The Reconstruction period, when the South was under military occupation and former Confederate officials and officers were deprived of political rights while the mass of former slaves were enfranchised, was one of the few interludes in the history of American capitalism when there was a semblance of democracy for the oppressed.

The problem with Radical Reconstruction was not that it was too hard on the former slave masters, but not hard enough. The plantations should have been expropriated and the land handed over to the former slaves. Kushner's attack on Reconstruction is an outrageous excusing of the rise of Jim Crow segregation. "Southern self-protection societies" were night-riders for white supremacy, sowing terror. Such claims are not even *Gone with the Wind*, Hollywood's nostalgia for the slavocracy of the Old South as the plantations were burning, but more *Birth of Nation*, D.W. Griffith's glorification of the KKK lynchings (which was praised by another Democrat, Woodrow Wilson). For shame!

Abraham Lincoln indeed played a revolutionary role in the U.S. Civil War, one of the most revolutionary events of the 19th century. But the ruling-class figure as agent of salvation is a recurring theme in Spielberg's political films. *Schindler's List*
continued on page 19

Missing from Hollywood's *Lincoln*



Smithsonian, Boston Athenaeum, New-York Historical Society

Heroic fighters for the abolition of slavery: Harriet Tubman, John Brown and Frederick Douglass.

The Emancipation Proclamation: Promise and Betrayal

The 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation – by which President Abraham Lincoln unilaterally freed more than three million slaves in the Confederacy on 1 January 1863 – went by with as little public acknowledgement as possible this year. This was to be expected. In his first inaugural speech, Barack Obama had managed to avoid mentioning “dangerous” topics such as race, racism, integration or civil rights in any way, shape or form. His second inaugural address, this past January, was larded with snippets from Lincoln and Martin Luther King.

But Obama evoked the Civil War only to declare: “We made ourselves anew, and vowed to move forward together.” Really? What about lynching and Jim Crow segregation? One hundred years after the Proclamation, the nation was again being shaken by the Civil Rights movement – the struggle to regain elementary formal democratic rights such as the right to vote in the South. Even Lyndon Johnson had to declare in 1965, “A century has passed since the day of promise, and the promise is unkept.”

This “wasn’t-it-tragic” dismissal of the Civil War, burying not only the question of slavery but also of on-going racial oppression, has been the official ideology of American capitalism at least since the end of Reconstruction in 1877. Today Obama’s platitudes have as their backdrop the presidentially-ordered drone assassinations, his quota-driven deportation of millions of immigrants, and a “debate” about gun control in which both sides agree on stepped-up racist police terror.

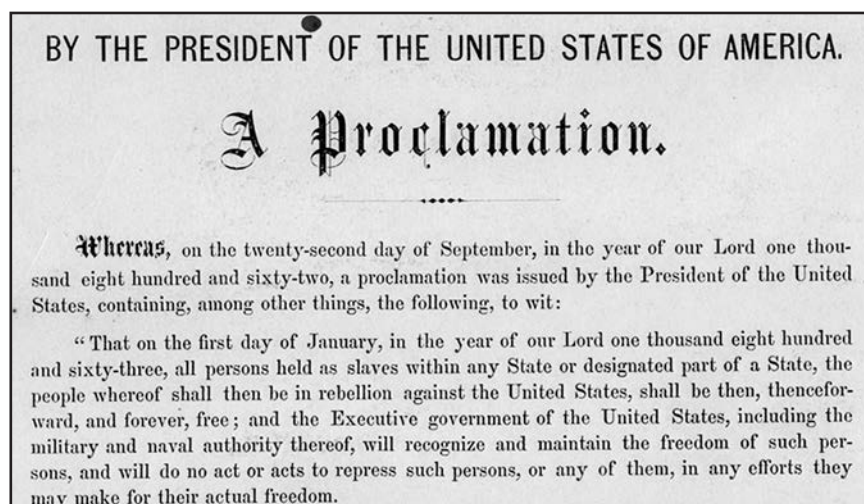
Disappearing a Revolution

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, unlike the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, was never going to be a holiday in racist, imperialist America. The first bourgeois-democratic American revolution involved simple political separation from Great Britain and was not fought over fundamental social issues. If anything, it only reinforced the power of the slaveholders in the South. (In some places, the British freed slaves belonging to rebels against the Crown.)

Only a few voices were raised urging the extension of the rights claimed in the Declaration of Independence to the colonists’ human property. The great black abolitionist Frederick Douglass could thus bitterly ask, in his 1852 speech, “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” Likewise, Marxists today do not join in the patriotic celebration of American independence.

The second American Revolution – the Civil War – was quite another matter. It involved a struggle against a type of exploitation of labor created by a previous form of merchant capitalism (“primitive capitalist accumulation”) which was proving a barrier to the consolidation of industrial capitalism based on wage labor. Although it did not consummate a social revolution overthrowing capitalist rule (at the time industrial capitalism in the U.S. was poised for a vast expansion, while the workers movement was in its infancy), in smashing slave relations of production the Civil War went beyond political rights to pose questions of *property*.

Just as the French bourgeoisie cannot simply renounce the French Revolution



The promise: “thenceforth, and forever, free.” But soon subjected to wage slavery, lynching and denial of fundamental democratic rights.

without renouncing the whole framework of bourgeois democracy, the U.S. bourgeoisie cannot simply denounce the struggle against slavery without standing naked to the world. But it can and does revile the Nat Turners and John Browns and ignore or trim down other abolitionist fighters, just as the French bourgeoisie denounces the “excesses” and “fanaticism” of its Revolution and the egalitarian aspirations it awoke.

In the U.S. rulers’ campaign of historical amnesia, the issue of how slavery was abolished tops the list of events to be mystified. Beyond all the references to the political genius of Lincoln, at bottom it was a conflict of two very different forms of capitalism. Karl Marx recognized from the outset:

“One sees, therefore, that the war of the Southern Confederacy is in the true sense of the word a war of conquest for the spread and perpetuation of slavery... “The present struggle between the South and North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, the system of slavery and the system of free labor. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other.” –Karl Marx, “The Civil War in the United States” (November 1861), reprinted in the Internationalist Group Class Readings, *Marx on Slavery and the U.S. Civil War* (second edition, April 2009)

Frederick Douglass reached a strikingly similar conclusion:

“The American people and the Government at Washington may refuse to recognize it for a time; but the ‘inexorable logic of events’ will force it upon them in the end; that the war now being waged in this land is a war for and against slavery; and that it can never be effectively put down till one or the other of these vital forces is completely destroyed.”

–Douglass’ *Monthly* (May 1861), quoted in James McPherson, *The Negro’s Civil War* (Ballantine Books, 1991)

Abraham Lincoln was a towering historical figure, as the leader of one of the great bourgeois revolutions. But he was able to fulfill that role because the contradiction between two variants of capitalism – those based on slave labor and “free” wage labor – had come to a head, and a showdown could no longer be postponed. As Marx underlined in his famous “Address of the International Working Men’s Association to Abraham Lincoln” (November 1864):

“...the working classes of Europe understood at once, even before the fanatic partisanship of the upper classes for the Confederate gentry had given its dismal warning, that the slaveholders’ rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor, and that for the men of labor, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic.”



The abolition of slavery was achieved by victory on the Civil War battlefields, where the recruitment of black soldiers was the turning point.

Millions of Americans are taught the fiction that Lincoln abolished slavery with a stroke of the pen. That, of course, leaves out the fundamental issue – the Civil War – which made slave emancipation necessary for Northern victory. It is true that the Proclamation exempted the slaves in the Border States such as Kentucky which were not in open rebellion and even some major slaveholding centers occupied by the Union such as New Orleans. Yet this Proclamation and the enrolling of 180,000 ex-slaves in the Union army marked the turning point, after which the slaveocracy was doomed – not because of a perfect law but as part of a revolutionary struggle.

Steven Spielberg’s contribution to the anti-revolutionary rewriting of American history, *Lincoln* (see accompanying article), came out last fall in anticipation of the Proclamation’s 150th anniversary. The movie edits out Lincoln’s revolutionary deeds by focusing solely on the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which formally and definitively did away with slavery, reducing even the passage of this amendment to a series of sordid backroom deals in the process. Ignoring or distorting the role played by slaves themselves, by the abolitionists and even the Union army to concentrate on Lincoln as a solitary figure is a huge falsification of history.

It does not even do justice to Lincoln himself, for the Proclamation represents a break with his previous views, which anticipated the freeing of the slaves state-by-state, with compensation, some time in the future. In the first year of the Civil war, Lincoln refused to proclaim emancipation and allow the recruitment of black troops. He finally relented to pressure from abolitionist leaders, Radical Republicans, and Union officers, announcing his intentions in September 1862 before actually issuing the Proclamation. This marks the official beginning of a flowing black tide into the Union forces.

At the same time, the freeing of the nearly 4 million slaves meant *expropriation without compensation* of more than \$3.5 billion worth of property, more than the entire worth of U.S. manufacturing, railroads, ships and banks combined! In terms of the share of the gross national product at the time, this would be the *equivalent of over \$10 trillion in the U.S. economy today*.

Furthermore, the Emancipation Proclamation, the 13th Amendment and the “Reconstruction Amendments” – the 14th Amendment (1868, granting citizenship to all those born in the U.S.), and the 15th Amendment (1870, granting black men the right to vote) – were the outcome of real, armed struggles. From John Brown’s victory over pro-slavery terrorists in Kansas (1856) to the great battles of the Civil War to the military-political actions of the Reconstruction period, not a single essential right was won, truly won, through the passage of a law.

Reforms, as Lenin pointed out, are often the partial outcome of determined *revolutionary* struggle; reformism as a strategy for the oppressed is self-defeating. None of the civil rights laws of the 19th century ultimately protected blacks from subjection to the sharecropping system, nor from the complete denial of their democratic rights

The Internationalist

MEN OF COLOR TO ARMS! TO ARMS! NOW OR NEVER

This is our golden moment! The Government of the United States calls for every Able-bodied Colored Man to enter the Army for the

Three Years' Service!

And join in fighting the Battles of Liberty and the Union. A new era is open to us. For generations we have suffered under the horrors of slavery, outrage and wrong; our manhood has been denied, our citizenship blotted out, our souls seared and burned, our spirits cowed and crushed, and the hopes of the future of our race involved in doubt and darkness. But now our relations to the white race are changed. Now, therefore, is our most precious moment. Let us rush to arms!

FAIL NOW, & OUR RACE IS DOOMED

Outside the soil of our birth. We must now awake, arise, or be forever fallen. If we value liberty, if we wish to be free in this land, if we love our country, if we love our families, our children, our home, we must strike now while the country calls; we must rise up in the dignity of our manhood, and show by our own right arms that we are worthy to be freemen. Our enemies have made the country believe that we are craven cowards, without soul, without manhood, without the spirit of soldiers. Shall we die with this stigma resting upon our graves? Shall we leave this inheritance of shame to our children? No! We will rise! The alternative is open to us. Let us rather die freemen than live to be slaves. What is life without liberty? We say that we have manhood; now is the time to prove it. A nation as a people that cannot fight may be passed, but cannot be respected. If we would forever silence the tongue of Calhoun, of Phillips, of Sumner, let us rise now and fly to arms! We have seen what Valor and Heroism our Brothers displayed at Fort Hudson and Milliken's Bend, though they are just from the gallant, pioneering group of Slaves they have started the World by the most exalted heroism. If they have proved themselves heroes, cannot WE? PROVE IT! NOW! YES!

ARE FREEMEN LESS BRAVE THAN SLAVES

More than a Million White Men have left Comfortable Homes and joined the Armies of the Union to save their Country. Cannot we leave ours, and swell the Ranks of the Union, to save our Liberty, vindicate our manhood and preserve well our Country? MEN OF COLOR! the Englishmen, the Irishmen, the Frenchmen, the Germans, the Americans, have been called to save their Country, and to appear in freedom and a manly character. The day that has seen an equal free Irishman, White American and other Slaves, we can show it now. An opportunity has come. If we are not lower in the scale of humanity than Englishmen, your Slaves, by all your regard for God and humanity, by all your desire for Citizenship and Equality before the law, by all your love for the Country, to step at us and strike, then to nothing that shall deter you from joining for the Army. Come forward, and at once enroll your Names for the Three Years' Service. Strike now, and you are freemen and freer Freemen!



Left: Frederick Douglass' March 1863 speech, "Men of Color to Arms!" was used by African American leaders for recruiting poster to enlist black volunteers to join the army to fight against slavery. Right: "A Negro Regiment in Action." Engraving by Thomas Nast, from *Harper's Weekly*, 14 March 1863, depicts the battle of Island Mound, Missouri. The troops of the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry, most of them escaped slaves from Arkansas and the Oklahoma Territory, fought off a charge by Confederate cavalry on 29 October 1862 in the first engagement in which black troops were used in the Civil War.

in the period between the defeat of Reconstruction (1877) and the Civil Rights and black liberation movements of the 1960s. And now even those limited gains are being systematically rolled back.

Slavery and Capitalism

Slavery in the U.S. was a *bourgeois* institution – entirely a part of the U.S. and world capitalist system. As early as 1847 Marx wrote in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, "Direct slavery is as much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery, credit, etc." He would later define the contradictory nature of the slave regime in the *Grundrisse*, his notes in preparation for *Capital*: "The fact that we now not only call the plantation owners in America capitalists, but that they are capitalists, is based on their existence as anomalies within a world market based on free labor."

The slaveholders' power was enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and their male children formed the greater part of the officer corps of the U.S. Army. In the first half of the 19th century, this oligarchy extended its slaveholding empire across the Mississippi as far north as Missouri through the Louisiana Purchase. It then moved into Texas and was instrumental in launching the invasion of Mexico in 1845. That sordid and conquest ripped away from Mexico (where slavery was illegal) an area that is now the western U.S., from Texas to California.

Marx explained, however, that as the manufacturing economy based on wage labor grew in the United States, with its concomitant small-holder farms, the leaders of the agricultural South based on slave labor became increasingly alarmed and belligerent. While the rice, tobacco, and cotton produced by the slave economy were destined for the capitalist market, the "oligarchy of 300,000 slaveholders," as Marx called them, began to clash with Northern society.

In a series of letters written in 1861-62 to *Die Presse* in Vienna, Marx laid out the essential economic and political logic of the slave system's expansionism:

- First, the 300,000 slaveholders also lorded over a mainly poor white population of five million, which had little material interest in the continuation of slavery (although often economically dependent on

and ideologically subservient to the slave masters). To keep this restless and hungry white population in thrall, the slavocracy promised the poor whites new land and even possible eventual status as new slaveholders. Only with new slave states and territories could this promise be fulfilled.

- Second, the production of export crops (cotton, tobacco, sugar) by the slave system was threatened due to soil depletion in Virginia, Maryland and even South Carolina. The slavocracy's profits in these states were coming more and more from *slave raising* and the provision of slaves to other slave states. The market for slaves in the other states was limited, and so the expansion of slavery into other areas where extensive cultivation could be undertaken was imperative. (Thomas Jefferson had foreseen this problem long ago, and as governor of Virginia in 1780 organized military expeditions to exterminate the native population and push the borders of his state westward.)

- Third, the slavocracy needed more slave states to maintain its political power in Washington. While the American political system had always favored the slaveholders, Northern capitalism was forging ahead. The political power deriving from it would soon overwhelm that of the South, despite the odds, unless this was checked by the addition of new slave states. While the House of Representatives, based proportionally on the white male population, would remain in Northern hands, the Senate (where the better part of U.S. legislative power resides) was and is non-proportional – every state no matter its population was (and still is) given two senators. Accordingly, parity (at least) between slave and free states had to be maintained there.

Abolitionism, Pacifist and Militant

The outcome of the Mexican War had doubled the size of the United States, and the slaveholders were gaining in their design of creating a slaveholding continent. The Fugitive Slave Law was passed in 1850 and enforced by Federal troops (so much for "states rights"). The slavers threatened also to expand their system into every new territory and state in the United States, no matter how far west or north. Twenty years of pacifist appeals to the slaveholders'

"Christian consciences" by William Lloyd Garrison and his reformist abolitionist followers were completely wiped out. Any abolitionist with eyes to see realized that further pacifism would be useless now.

The answer came from Kansas, a disputed territory with an election nearing that would determine whether it would be slave or free upon entering the Union as a state. A campaign of terror was waged against the Kansans, who were mostly against slavery, by racist gangs from neighboring Missouri known as the "Border Ruffians." Then in 1855 John Brown arrived. He brought with him a disciplined multiracial battalion of revolutionists that included "Red 48ers" – veterans of the defeated 1848 revolutions in Germany and Italy. Under Brown's political and military direction, the settlers were armed and trained. They proceeded to beat back the racists in several bloody battles and Kansas was soon free. It was a powerful demonstration of what it would take to overthrow slavery.

Against this backdrop, the Republican Party, newly formed on the basis of the former Free Soil Party, pledged itself to blocking the expansion of slavery entirely. The first Republican candidate for president, in the 1856 elections, had been the open abolitionist General John C. Frémont. Though he lost to Democrat James Buchanan, an apologist and abettor of slavery who ran as a "moderate," Frémont made a strong showing.

By 1860, the 300,000 slaveholders intended to turn the U.S. presidential elections into a referendum on rebellion – the only rebellion in modern history, Marx pointed out, whose rallying cry was "*slavery!*" As a moderate Republican, Lincoln was opposed by the Radicals (who initially favored William Seward). Nonetheless, Lincoln's decisive victory in the general election against a divided pro-slavery opposition became the signal for the slavers' rebellion. The slaveholding cabal forced each Southern state, one by one, to disclaim the Union. They formed their "Confederate States of America" as an armed camp, seizing Federal property, especially forts, ships and arms. The poor white population, hesitant in many areas, was mobilized around "Southern honor" and "states' rights" to fight to the death for slavery and white supremacy.

Secession and All-Out War

In office, Lincoln attempted to retain the loyalty of the slaveholders in the so-called Border States (Kentucky, Delaware, Maryland), and refused to proclaim the overthrow of slavery. He even re-imposed slavery in Missouri in 1861 after Frémont, then commander of the district, issued an order of emancipation. Nonetheless, Lincoln did not recognize a right of secession and insisted that the United States retained possession of all the rebel territory. And even with the original, limited war aims, recovery of the South required dislodging the slavocracy, which meant all-out Civil War.

Even as the rebellion armed, the U.S. was ill prepared for war. The tepid quality of the initial Northern war effort was incarnated by General George B. McClellan. McClellan owed his position to pressure from the pro-slavery Democrats and sought to preserve the Union "as it was" (i.e., without touching slavery), while he and his staff were close to the rebel officers of the Confederacy. In response to the string of Union defeats, Marx remarked in a letter to Friedrich Engels of 10 September 1862: "In regard to the North's conduct of the war, nothing else could be expected from a *bourgeois* republic, where swindle has been enthroned for such a long time."

As Union losses mounted, Lincoln's resolve, bolstered by the increasing resolve of the Northern workers and farmers who were doing the fighting, hardened around the understanding that no compromise could be made with the slavocracy and a Northern victory required smashing the slave system. In "A Criticism of American Affairs" (9 August 1862), Marx observed:

"New England and the Northwest, which have provided the main body of the army, are determined to force on the government a revolutionary kind of warfare and to inscribe the battle-slogan of 'Abolition of slavery!' on the star-spangled banner. Lincoln yields only hesitantly and uneasily to this 'pressure from without,' but he knows that he cannot resist it for long...."

"So far, we have only witnessed the first act of the Civil war – the *constitutional* waging of war. The second act, the *revolutionary* waging of war, is at hand."



“Contrabands” (escaped slaves) crossing the Rappahannock River in Virginia to reach Union lines during the second battle of Bull Run, August 1862.

Lincoln ultimately secured competent military leadership in generals Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman who, like Lincoln himself, adopted a more revolutionary approach to waging the war out of pure pragmatism.

Lincoln’s attitude was summed up in a 22 August 1862 letter to Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune*:

“My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.”

Yet even as he wrote that, Lincoln had concluded that freeing the slaves and enlisting black troops (both free and ex-slave) was decisive to winning the war. He already had a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation in his desk drawer. One month later he released it.

Emancipation and Radicalism

The announcement of the impending Proclamation had an electrifying effect on the abolitionist movement that had fought for it. Frederick Douglass wrote that “the proclamation . . . is the most important of any to which the President of the United States has ever signed his name” (“Emancipation Proclaimed,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, October 1862). Likewise, Karl Marx wrote, in *Die Presse*, 12 October 1862, that “his most recent proclamation – the Emancipation Proclamation – [is] the most significant document in American history since the founding of the Union and one which tears up the old American Constitution.”

Douglass’ immediate demand was to “let the black man have an arm as well as a heart in this war, and the tide of battle which has thus far only waved backward and forward, will steadily set in our favor.” Marx recognized this also, and argued (in a letter to Engels of 7 August 1862) that the organization of even a single black regiment “would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves.” In fact, black recruitment had already begun. Lincoln’s proclamation meant that history’s tide had turned and slavery was doomed.

This was understood by Douglass and all the “Radicals” – a loose term then referring to all those within and outside the Republican Party who were well aware that slavery was at the center of the conflict and were advancing a program for its complete destruction and for full political rights and economic well-being for the liberated blacks. While Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner and other Radicals in Congress

fought to pass the enabling legislation, they knew that abolition would be won on the battlefield. Douglass, closely allied with Sumner, thus waged a furious campaign to organize more and more black regiments.

Nearly 200,000 blacks served under arms, comprising over 10 percent of the Union Army; nearly 50,000 fell during the war, and a higher number were wounded. Black soldiers were under constant sentence of death. Official Southern policy was to treat them as fugitive slaves rather than as prisoners of war. If captured they could be tortured or executed by the virulently racist rebel army, as at Fort Pillow, Tennessee in 1864 when hundreds of black troops were massacred while trying to surrender by rebel forces under future KKK marauder Nathan Bedford Forrest.

But they marched with Sherman in Georgia (against Sherman’s initial opposition) and were with U.S. Grant as he cornered the rebel army at Appomattox in 1865. In retrospect, Lincoln wrote that without the black soldiers, “we would be compelled to abandon the war in three weeks.”

Uncounted African Americans, including women, also performed non-combat duties in construction, transport, supply, commissary and, crucially, reconnaissance and espionage. The great abolitionist and leader of the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman, became an unofficial Union battle commander, leading interracial raiding parties of Union soldiers to liberate slaves; on one raid she rescued 700 slaves from approaching rebel forces. Many of the slaves liberated by “General Tubman,” as John Brown had called her, went on to fight in the Union army or navy.

Victory and Reconstruction: “Forty Acres and a Mule”?

The fundamental questions posed by the Second American Revolution of 1861-1865 converged around land to the tiller and the arms to defend it. The formerly enslaved population needed land for cultivation and armed defense against the defeated but resurgent white supremacists. Otherwise, they would inevitably be prey to the former slave masters. This was well understood by the leadership of the Radical movement – from Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass to Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner. Paradoxically, General William T. Sherman, who was no abolitionist and refused to accept black troops, issued the order to compensate former slaves in some areas with “forty acres and a mule,” which was later adopted by Stevens as the core of Radical Reconstruction.

In 1864, as Grant surrounded the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, Sher-



Because slaves were freed without land, many were soon subjected to “wage slavery” ... or worse. Sharecropping in Lowndes County, Alabama in 1936.

man’s western armies dislodged the rebels from Atlanta and began their “March to the Sea.” Lincoln was initially opposed to Sherman’s strategy, but Sherman explained that it was necessary to scour out the plantations of the Deep South, which had been the engines of the slaveholders’ rebellion. With Grant’s endorsement, he took Atlanta in September, which was key to Lincoln’s reelection against the Democrat McClellan that November. Then on the heels of the elections, Sherman slashed through Georgia and South Carolina, expropriating food, burning barns and plantation houses and freeing an estimated half-million slaves from bondage, effectively destroying the South’s economic reserves and breaking the Confederates’ will to fight.

In the wake of Sherman’s army came tens of thousands of black refugees; partly to reduce their numbers, courts were sometimes improvised on liberated plantations, with land divided among the freed slaves. In January 1865 Sherman issued his “Special Field Order No. 15,” which granted coastal lands to thousands of former slaves, from Florida to South Carolina. Sherman appointed General Rufus Saxon, a leading abolitionist and organizer of black troops, to direct the settlement of blacks on their new land. Shortly after, Congress passed the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery and in March 1865 the Freedmen’s Bureau was created and authorized to divide up some confiscated lands into 40-acre plots to be distributed to ex-slaves.

After Lincoln’s assassination on 15 April 1865, only five days after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, his successor, Andrew Johnson, soon showed himself to be a friend to the defeated slaveholders. He revoked Sherman’s field order and returned land to previous owners. He abolished the Freedmen’s Bureau and appointed proslavery governors in the Southern states under military occupation. He opposed extending the vote to newly freed black men, claiming this was up to the states. “Black Codes” which sought to bind the ex-slaves to the plantations throughout the South were imposed in 1865 and 1866 and accompanied by racist terror. In response to these outrages, abolitionists, Union officers and Radical Republicans rose up in resistance.

In Washington, control of Reconstruction was torn from the Johnson Administration and, with the Army’s help, put in the hands of Congress. The 14th Amendment (1868) and 15th Amendment (1869) were passed and some Union troops, including black troops were activated throughout the South. Ten states of the former Confederacy were put under martial law. The Freedmen’s Bureau was reestablished and began foster-

ing a system of free universal public education. New state governments were elected in which blacks played large and sometime majority roles. More black voters registered throughout the former rebel lands than whites. Union troops now gained the upper hand in the struggle against racist terror.

However, the land question was not resolved, at least not in favor of the former slaves. Radical Congressman George Julian fought to amend the second Confiscation Act to permit the permanent seizure of Confederates’ land. Without land, he argued, freedmen would find themselves reduced to “a system of wages slavery.” In September 1865, Thaddeus Stevens put forward a plan to seize 400 million acres from the Southern oligarchy, provide 40 acres to each freedman and sell the rest to the highest bidder (i.e., Northern investors). But as leftist historian Eric Foner notes:

“Yet to most Radicals, land for the freedmen, though a commendable idea, was not nearly as crucial to Reconstruction as black suffrage.... It is hardly surprising that many Radicals proved reluctant to support a program that so contravened the sanctity of property as confiscation....”
–Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (Harper & Row, 1988)

As a result, the former chattel slaves were reduced to wage slavery or worse, sharecropping and debt peonage. The struggle for emancipation had run into the limits of a bourgeois revolution.

The former slaveholders, led by mass murderer Nathan Bedford Forrest, met in Nashville in 1867 to enlarge the Ku Klux Klan set up by former Confederate soldiers at the end of 1865 and put the program of these death squads on a more professional military basis. As the Klan and other gangs renewed their terror campaign, President Johnson did all he could to prevent a Radical-led military response. He blocked the dispatch of troops to suppress the new rebellion and even attempted, unsuccessfully, to remove the Secretary of War, the Radical Edwin Stanton. The Radicals then successfully impeached Johnson, but fell one vote short of conviction.

Blacks armed themselves as best they could. They were given limited help by the Freedmen’s Bureau and some U.S. troops. But massacres of blacks and battles with the racist gangs continued unabated through 1868 and beyond. In the presidential elections of that year, the Radicals backed Grant, who owed his victory to the 700,000 black votes he received. During his two terms in office (1869-1877), he did attempt to fight the white supremacist movement, which had grown insurrectionary. His Radical-backed



Punishment in forced labor camp in Georgia, 1930s.

policies achieved some success against the KKK and other gangs, but not enough resources were deployed to turn the tide. Meanwhile, the bourgeois rulers were growing uneasy at the prospect of freed blacks and labor joining forces against capital, especially after the Paris Commune of 1871.

Defeat and Counterrevolution

In 1876 it seemed as if the promise of “forty acres and a mule” were a dream. The Freedmen’s Bureau in particular had never been empowered by its designers to suppress the racist gangs and carry through a black agrarian revolution. As historian Henry Steele Commager flatly stated during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, “the Government... failed the Negro. At a time when Congress set aside millions of acres for homesteaders in the West and gave over a hundred million acres to the railroad corporations, it could not summon up the generosity or the vision to give land to the freedmen” (*New York Times Book Review*, 13 Sept. 1964).

While Radical resolve had secured the black vote and the presidency for Grant in 1868, KKK terror played a key role in swinging the 1876 elections to the Democrat Samuel Tilden. Some white supremacists wanted to insist on Tilden becoming president, but most were willing to compromise with the Republicans. A deadly deal was worked out then, whereby the Republican Rutherford Hayes would be seated as president in exchange for the formal end of Reconstruction and the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from the South. Blacks were now forced back onto the plantations. The Democrats and Republicans united and got down to the problems of the postwar capitalist order: subjugation of black labor, extermination of the Native Americans on the plains, restriction of the Chinese immigrant workers in California, and, from sea to shining sea, assistance to the bosses in smashing the workers movement – which broke out in an insurrectionary general strike in 1877.

Ultimately, once permanent confiscation and distribution of the land to ex-slaves was excluded, Reconstruction became an unstable situation in which the ex-slaveholders retained economic domination while being excluded from actual government. And the goal of the Northern bourgeoisie in the Civil War had not been to eliminate the exploitation of blacks in the agrarian South, but rather to eliminate the excessive *political* power of the slaveholding class and to ensure that the fruits of this exploitation flowed into its coffers rather than those of the British.

The promise of black freedom was thus betrayed by the Northern bourgeoisie, which sacrificed Reconstruction on the altar of profit and “national reconciliation.” The

counterrevolution against Radical Reconstruction was then justified in national myth: the cause of thorough-going emancipation and racial equality was buried under layers of lies so thick that generations of schoolchildren were taught – by liberal and rightist historians alike – that Reconstruction had been a terrible mistake, and even that slavery was not the underlying issue of the Civil War.

The need to fight for black liberation through socialist revolution is highlighted by the fact that the betrayal of Reconstruction meant that the Southern rulers could not only rewrite the story to suit their interests, but roll back a large part of what Reconstruction had achieved, as they pushed social relations as far back as possible towards slavery-like conditions.

A number of recent works have appeared documenting just how far they were able to go in their attempts to re-subjugate black labor. Among these is Douglas A. Blackmon’s *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (Doubleday, 2008), which shows just how massive was the use of black prison labor and other forms of coerced black labor – not only in the road-construction chain gangs depicted in innumerable films but in agriculture, coal mining and other vital parts of the Southern economy. As Blackmon observes, the judicial/prison system was configured in ways that deliberately criminalized huge sectors of the black population, while debt served as a new and very tangible shackle.

This should not suggest that the Civil War achieved nothing for the oppressed: far from it, the abolition of chattel slavery was a momentous achievement. What this does show, as we have written, is that American capitalism has racial oppression in its DNA, and whenever one form of subjugation was eliminated, a new way was soon found to deprive black people of their rights. After slavery and the democratic interval of Reconstruction, eventually the system of Jim Crow segregation was instituted in the South. And when that was formally eliminated in the 1960s, within a few years a new system was instituted of constant police-state occupation of inner-city neighborhoods and massive jailing of African American and Latino youth.

In this respect, wide attention has been drawn to the social and political functions of the vast criminalization/imprisonment system in today’s racist USA – which has the highest incarceration rate in the world – by Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New Press, 2010). Reformists hope to address this through a “new civil rights movement” acceptable to liberal Democrats in the “age of Obama.” But the fact that American capitalism seeks one way after another to subjugate, chain and disenfranchise the black population points in the opposite direction: only the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system can clear the path to all-sided, real and enduring liberation.

In this task, the building of a revolutionary workers party as a champion of all the oppressed is key, in which the descendants of the slaves who fought arms in hand to crush the slaveocracy will play a central role. ■

Lincoln...

continued from page 15

(1993) focuses on the “good Nazi,” who initially only wanted to be a war profiteer but ended up defending his Jewish workers. *Amistad* (1997) starts with the story of an uprising on a Spanish slave ship, but spends the bulk of the film on the legal case which was argued before the Supreme Court by former U.S. president John Quincy Adams. The film misleadingly suggests the court decision was against slavery, rather than just against the slave trade. As imprisoned black journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal pointed out :

“For Africans born in the U.S., however, it brought them no closer to freedom. Unlike the captives of the *Amistad*, international law did not apply to their wretched condition, and for them, as well as those shackled Black millions in Cuba, there was little to celebrate with this decision.”

Still, *Amistad* graphically showed the horrific conditions aboard the slave ship, and the rebellion with the Africans as protagonists – which *Lincoln* does not. If Spielberg is just a paternalistic liberal propagandist, Kushner is ostentatiously backing away from his recent radical criticisms of U.S. capitalism and imperialism. These were laid out in his 2011 play, *The Intelligent Homosexual’s Guide to Capitalism and Socialism*, which was favorably reviewed in the pages of this newspaper. At that time, Kushner was facing a witch hunt by vicious anticommunist “neocons,” including a member of the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (CUNY), who sought to deny him an honorary degree.

Whether lured by Hollywood’s big bucks or Obama’s electorally timed acceptance of gay marriage, Kushner has evidently moved on. His adulation of the Democrat in the White House goes hand-in-hand with denouncing “the abandonment by the left of the possibility of radical change through democracy” following the Vietnam War. And in having Lincoln assert unlimited presidential war powers in the *revolutionary* Civil War, Kushner echoes the Obama administration’s brief for running a reactionary *imperialist* Murder Inc. with drone strikes. For Kushner, “progressive people” have a “complicated job” of figuring out how “this terrifying new weapon” is “to be used responsibly.”

Curiously, Spielberg and Kushner have found defenders among purported socialists like the International Socialist Organization. A piece on the ISO website titled, “The great uncompromiser” (*Socialist Worker*, 29 November 2012) by Alan Maas opines that “Probably a bunch of reporters heard the press-kit description that *Lincoln* was about how the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery was passed by a divided and partisan Congress, and they decided it must be a fable about Washington today....” No, actually, the author of the screenplay *says* that’s what the film is about. But this is par for the course from the ISO reformists, who always position themselves one step to the left of the Democrats (and

from someone who thinks the super-patriotic *Saving Private Ryan* is an “anti-war film”).

Another member of the *Lincoln* fan club is the “World Socialist Web Site” of David North’s Socialist Equality Party. Its web site is so drenched in references to defending the heritage of the revolution of 1776 that you can almost see them turning up in Paul Revere costumes. So it’s no surprise that “Steven Spielberg’s *Lincoln* and the historical drama of the Civil War” (WSWS, 12 November 2012) not only fulsomely praises the film but also swallows some of the falsifications hook, line and sinker, merely demurring, “Yet the role of the masses in history is minimized; the conception of politics as horse-trading is privileged.” That’s putting it mildly.

But again, what else could be expected from an outfit that sides with the capitalists against the unions, and reviles any reference to the special oppression of black people as “identity politics,” including the simple mention of the fact that African Americans are targeted for incarceration by the capitalist state’s racist drug war. Or that the vigilante slaying of Trayvon Martin was racist murder. The historical distortions of *Lincoln*, along with liberal lies of a “post-racial America,” are right up the alley of these viciously “color-blind” scab “socialists.”

There are those defenders of *Lincoln* who moan that nobody could make a film encompassing the entire Civil War. Granted. But *Lincoln* presumes to be about slave emancipation, while deliberately ignoring the key role the slaves themselves played in achieving it. In this vital aspect, it is a historical lie. But this is all you will get in this day and age when the Supreme Court is debating rolling back the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and anti-immigrant racists are campaigning to abolish the 14th Amendment, which granted citizenship to all those born in the United States.

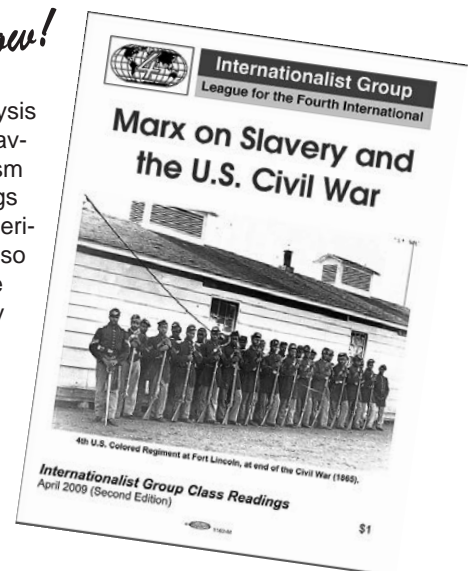
It has been nearly a quarter-century since the only film dealing halfway truthfully with black soldiers in the Civil War (*Glory* 1989). It’s no accident there have been no Hollywood movies about Frederick Douglass (or John Brown, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, or Denmark Vesey). For the arbiters of what’s fit for mass consumption, the true history of the second American Revolution and the fighters who brought it about is too hot to touch: at most you’ll get a sanitized liberal treatment in the rarified ether of PBS. It will take a new, socialist revolution to give these champions of black freedom their due. ■

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Robert F. Williams heroically fought off KKK mobs in Monroe, North Carolina.

Who Controls...

continued from page 3

to arm themselves in self-defense.

And in Oakland, California the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was formed, inspired by Williams, which carried out armed neighborhood patrols on the lookout for police violence. When a state assemblyman introduced a bill to prohibit publicly carrying guns, Bobby Seale led an armed Panther detachment into the state house where he read a statement declaring the bill an attempt “at keeping the black people disarmed and powerless at the very same time that racist police agencies throughout the country are intensifying the terror and repression of black people.” The gun control bill was passed, signed into law by Governor Ronald Reagan; FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover declared the BPP “the greatest threat to the internal security of the country,” and over the next few years 38 Panthers were killed by the police and hundreds arrested.

Meanwhile, as civil rights laws were passed to formally abolish Jim Crow segregation in the South, the Northern black ghettos exploded in anger over poverty and rampant police brutality. As liberal journalist Robert Sherrill wrote, a panicked Congress passed the Gun Control Act of 1968 to “shut

off weapons access to blacks ... since they probably associated cheap guns with ghetto blacks” (*The Saturday Night Special* [1973]). And when the 1994 assault weapons ban was passed under the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton, it was part of a broader law, sponsored by now-vice president Joe Biden, which created 60 new federal death penalty offenses and funded the hiring of 100,000 more police. This was followed up by the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, which sharply curtails the right to appeal death sentences.

Today, the search for “illegal guns” is the excuse used by gun control zealot Mayor Bloomberg to justify the massive “stop and frisk” dragnet which has subjected New York City residents *more than 5 million* times, overwhelmingly (87%) against blacks and Latinos, to police inspection for no reason. That this is obvious racial profiling was proven by a tape recording presented in a lawsuit by the Center for Constitutional of a police commander in the South Bronx telling officers to go after “male blacks,” and more specifically “male blacks 14 to 20, 21” (*New York Times*, 22 March). Such stops have nothing to do with firearms (guns are found in only 0.12% of searches) and everything to do with intimidation and criminalizing young black men.

ILWU Locked Out...

continued from page 8

most notable recent example was the May Day 2008 West Coast port strike against the war on Iraq and Afghanistan, an overtly political strike, defying Taft-Hartley. It was the first time U.S. unions had struck against a U.S. imperialist war.

But as the *Journal of Commerce* (13 February) noted, “Since the 2008-09 recession, the ILWU dockworkers have been working closer with waterfront employers as well as with West Coast ports to shed the union’s image of being a militant and unreliable work force.” So, the maritime bosses’ paper wrote, for the union leadership, the contract rejection by the OCU was a “Black Eye,” which the International is still smarting over.

Like the Wall Street financiers who have shamelessly continued their looting and speculation that touched off the current depression, the worst since the 1930s, the West Coast grain shippers are playing for keeps. They smell blood. They sense that the legalistic union leaders are

ready to cave. In fact, the ILWU leadership under International president Bob McEllrath and coast committeeman Leal Sundet think like labor contractors rather than union defenders.

When Sundet negotiated the EGT contract last January, he declared it was “key to standardization of the grain export industry on the West Coast, particularly with respect to labor costs” and that it “guarantees profit throughout the market chain.” That comes straight from the ILWU *Dispatcher* (January 2012). Read it and weep. It’s no accident that Sundet used to work for the employers’ Pacific Maritime Association. Seems like he’s still working for the bosses.

The ILWU leadership is surrendering before the employers’ offensive. Over the past three decades, labor leaders everywhere have repeatedly capitulated to hard-nosed bosses, even to the point of sacrificing the union’s existence. Why is that? It is because they are a privileged layer, a bureaucracy, which tries to mediate between capital and labor. They are *incapable* of fighting the union-busting

Gun Control and State Repression

In short, gun control laws have always been part of a broader offensive to increase state repression, which always has targeted the poor, the black, the most exploited and oppressed sections of capitalist society, and are used in particular against those who are seen as “hostile” by the ruling class. It is no accident that the most restrictive gun laws in the United States are in Washington, D.C., because that is where the political rulers reside and because at the time they were enacted (1975), Washington was the first large majority black city in the country. Internationally, Nazi Germany and apartheid South Africa had draconian gun control laws, and when the Greek colonels took power in 1967, they immediately sought to disarm civilians.

In fact, there are striking parallels between the handgun ban in the Gun Control Act of 1968 and the 1938 Weapons Law of Nazi Germany, and not by accident. During the hearings on the 1968 bill, Democratic senator Thomas Dodd asked that the 1938 Nazi law be translated by the Library of Congress, using the German text which Dodd (who had been part of the prosecution team in the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal) supplied. The German law introduced handgun control, restricted gun ownership to “trustworthy” citizens, barred Jews from businesses involving firearms, and in a clause added on 10 November 1938 (the day after the *Kristallnacht* pogrom against Jews) barred Jews from owning any weapons, even knives and clubs.

While the 1960s laws restricted cheap handguns (“Saturday night specials”) in a racist move aimed at the black poor, the current uproar has focused on so-called “assault weapons.” The justification given is that the Newtown killer used an AR-15 rifle, a semi-automatic version of the M16 automatic rifle which is standard issue in the U.S. military in its wars and occupations such as Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, relatively few murders, robberies and other violent crimes against persons are committed with rifles. The government’s real objection is to having anything approaching military-grade weapons in the hands of the population so that they could respond in

drive because their fundamental allegiance is to capital.

Does that mean that union struggle is hopeless? Not at all. It does mean that a real fight against the union-busters will require a new, militant leadership with a program of sharp class struggle instead of this belly-crawling class collaboration that threatens the survival of the ILWU. It will take hard work building an opposition within the union that stands on the best traditions of international solidarity and labor militancy that built the ILWU and are key to defending it today.

What’s needed is a leadership that can unite all waterfront workers, including the terribly exploited immigrant port truckers. A leadership that can stand up to the bosses, their anti-labor laws and their capitalist politicians – in particular the Democrats, right on up to Obama in the White House, who sent the Coast Guard to defend EGT’s scab operation. Instead of flag-waving for the American bosses, we need a workers party to fight for a workers government, here and internationally, and a union leadership that says that loud and clear. ■

self-defense when attacked.

This concern goes back through the ages. In the feudal Edo period in Japan, long swords were restricted to an aristocratic warrior caste, the samurai; when firearms were introduced in the 17th century, they too were limited to the samurai. But when feudalism was abolished under the Meiji Restoration beginning in 1868, feudal estates were taken over, samurai were banned from carrying swords, and a police force and standing army were created, as in almost all capitalist countries. In Mexico today, when the military and police seek to occupy areas of indigenous rebellions (Chiapas, Oaxaca) or regions dominated by drug traffickers, they arrest anyone with “arms of exclusive army use.”

Under capitalism, as in all class-divided societies, the rulers seek to keep their subjects at a qualitative military disadvantage. “Democratic” and dictatorial regimes alike claim a monopoly of “legitimate” force in order to suppress revolt. On the opposite side of the class divide, those fighting for revolution to sweep away the bourgeois social order of exploitation, poverty, racism and war oppose any restrictions on the acquisition of means of self-defense. The working class will never match the enormous firepower of the U.S. bourgeoisie, which doesn’t hesitate to kill millions in its imperialist wars. But a revolution will only occur when the army itself is divided or paralyzed, and leading up to that the working class will have to deal with fascist bands and other scum.

In any case, a disarmed population would have great difficulty resisting the attacks of capital, which is why the capitalists seek this. The key obstacle to the struggle for socialism in the U.S. today is the lack of revolutionary, and often even of class consciousness on the part of American workers. The central task facing communists is overcoming that obstacle. But the fact that the American working class has arms, and is not likely to give up its guns without a fight, is a definite plus.

Gun control seeks to take that away. “Background checks” allow the police to decide who qualifies and who doesn’t. Black, Latino and white working people will find it far harder to get approval than wealthy whites. Under New York’s 1911 Sullivan Law, permits to carry concealed weapons, around 2,500 at last count, are limited mainly to retired cops (who not infrequently shoot their spouses, partners in crime and each other), celebrities, capitalists and cronies. Permit holders have included *New York Times* publisher (and gun control pusher) Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, filmmaker Robert DeNiro, pundit William Buckley Jr. and moguls Donald Trump, Donald Trump Jr., Ronald Lauder and David, John, Lawrence and Winthrop Rockefeller.

Naturally, billionaire mayor Bloomberg is hot for gun control and doesn’t want “guns on the streets.” After all, as he boasted in 2011, “I have my own army in the NYPD, which is the seventh biggest army in the world.” If you don’t think this constitutes a private army, try demonstrating in front of his Upper East Side mansion. And if he ever leaves office, he’ll just surround himself with hired guns. If you are Joe or Jane Schmo or one of the *hoi polloi* (common folk), on the other hand, and you want to get a pistol permit in New York City, you can bet your last lottery ticket the answer is *fuggedaboutit*.

Bogalusa 1965: Deacons for Defense

In 1919, Bogalusa, Louisiana made the national news when white members of the Carpenters union were murdered by company gunmen and racist vigilantes for taking up arms to defend black union members (see “Bloody Bogalusa, 1919: When Four White Unionists Died Defending Their Black Comrades” at www.internationalist.org). In 1965, Bogalusa again was in national headlines. An armed self-defense organization had been formed the previous year by blacks in Jonesboro, Louisiana to protect civil rights activists from the Klan and other racist vigilantes. The Jonesboro group then organized a chapter in Bogalusa, Louisiana led by Charles Sims, which publicly surfaced in February 1965 as the “Deacons for Defense and Justice.”

Bogalusa was a company town. By 1965, the Great Southern sawmill had closed down and was replaced by a paper mill, then owned by Crown-Zellerbach (today by International Paper). At that point, the black community in Bogalusa was poor and isolated, with many living in shanties. It was also Klan country. The mill employed a dwindling number of blacks, concentrated in the worst, low-paying jobs. Yet the experience of union activism had a lot to do with the rise of the Deacons, which was a distinctly working-class organization. In Bogalusa, it took shape from a new leadership of the local Voters League around A.Z. Young, who for several years led the black local of the Pulp and Sulphite Workers Union, along with fellow paper mill worker Robert Hicks.

Lance Hill, in his book *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004), wrote that “The first meeting of the Bogalusa Deacons took place ...at the Negro Union Hall,” where they met weekly thereafter. As clashes with the KKK grew, leadership passed to Charles Sims, who had been a sergeant with the army in Europe during World War II. Hill notes that in addition to



Bettman/Corbis

Charles Sims of the Deacons for Defense and Justice in Bogalusa stands defiantly on courthouse steps holding Klan hoods.

the core group, the Bogalusa chapter of the Deacons had scores of supporters, “perhaps numbering nearly two hundred, [who] were mostly paper mill employees who were willing to help with security as needed.”

The Deacons guarded civil rights marches and patrolled black neighborhoods with radios, walkie-talkies, pistols and M-1 rifles. By the end of 1966, the group had grown to 17 chapters in the South. The Bogalusa Deacons were not only involved in shoot-outs with the local Klan, but also had stand-offs with the police as well. In large measure, the armed presence of the Deacons forced local officials and business leaders to agree to abolish all segregation laws, provide equal protection for protesters, open up city government hiring and provide sewers, paved streets and lights for black neighborhoods in May 1965. The formal desegregation of the local high school meant renewed confrontations with the Klan. Even in 1967 blacks who dared to

enter restaurants now allegedly open to them still needed to be escorted by the Deacons.

The Deacons were fighting for an end to formal Jim Crow. They did not explicitly challenge the turn-the-other-cheek pacifism of Martin Luther King, Jr. and initially served mainly as a support group to organizing efforts by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) which at that time was equally committed to non-violence. But they pragmatically understood not only the role of the local cops as accomplices of the Klan, but also of the federal government, since the Deacons were subjected to surveillance and harassment from the FBI from their inception. Sims, for example, was equally skeptical about the use of federal troops, correctly seeing that their presence would merely freeze the racist status quo.

It was quite symbolic for the Deacons that one of their members kept a derringer pistol in a hollowed-out bible. As a report by then-Trotskyist Spartacist League noted at the time, there was a duality to them: “on

the one hand, highly militant, paramilitary tactics are used to protect their struggle; on the other hand, comparatively mild, anti-discrimination politics relying heavily on the 1964 Civil Rights Act characterize their political perspectives” (*Spartacist* No. 5, November-December 1965). A July 1967 report by the Louisiana legislature’s “Committee on Unamerican Activities” on “The Spartacist League and Certain Other Communist Activities in South Louisiana” as well as FBI files released later showed that local, state and federal police closely monitored the SL’s activities in support of the Deacons and the latter’s armed self-defense of civil rights struggles in the South.

Towards the end of the group’s existence (the Deacons had largely disappeared by 1968), individual Deacon spokesmen became more explicit in upholding the right of self-defense as against King’s moral suasion. But although they were courted by both the Black Muslims and the black nationalist Revolutionary Action Movement inspired by Robert F. Williams, the Deacons never went beyond vague calls for “black power.” As a group which had carefully and successfully organized primarily against white vigilante groups, efforts to set up locals in the urban North, where racist violence was mainly the work of the police, proved unsuccessful. It was to be the Black Panthers who championed armed black self-defense directly against the bourgeois state, and were met with murderous repression.

The Deacons lasted as long as formal segregation. Yet today black people in allegedly “post-racial” America are still a race-color caste segregated at the bottom of U.S. capitalist society. The struggle for social liberation urgently requires the leadership of a revolutionary workers party that will achieve genuine equality for blacks and all the oppressed by the only means possible – sweeping away bankrupt, racist American capitalism through international socialist revolution. ■

The story of black armed self-defense in Bogalusa is portrayed in the excellent film Deacons for Defense (2003) starring Forest Whitaker.

Regimenting the Population for War

The push for gun control, along with ubiquitous police surveillance (CCTV cameras everywhere, drones in the sky), stepped-up police provocation and police clampdown on protest are part of an overall drive to regiment the population. For what? For war. Since the anti-Soviet Cold War ended in imperialist victory, we’ve had the “war on drugs” (in reality a war on black ghettos and Latino barrios, as well as Mexico and other Latin American countries), and since 11 September 2001 the “war on terror” (which is really a war to terrorize the peoples of the world into submission the dictates of Washington and Wall Street). There’s also trade war, currency war, and if U.S. hegemony is seriously challenged, shooting war against U.S. imperialism’s rivals.

This regimentation means a full-scale assault on civil liberties. Under current background check laws, individuals prohibited from buying guns include anyone involuntarily committed by a judge, those declared incompetent and those convicted of any drug offense, including misdemeanor possession of marijuana. But gun

control legislation being pushed by the Obama-Biden White House would require disclosure of all medical records concerning mental health and all criminal records. The FBI would be required to obtain and keep these records in their NICS (National Instant Criminal Background Check System) database. This would effectively make medical professionals, therapists and pharmacists spies for the feds. If history is any indication, this surveillance will be used for more than just gun control. Count on it.

But whatever the current slogan, the working class is the ultimate target of the capitalist rulers. As the class struggle sharpens, workers have been and will be faced with the need to form workers defense guards and workers militias. From the 1892 Homestead, Pennsylvania steel strike, with its pitched battle between strikers and Pinkerton security guards, to the 1914 Ludlow, Colorado massacre of striking coal miners, to the 1917 strike of copper miners in Butte, Montana (where IWW organizer Frank Little was killed), to the 1921 battle of Blair Mountain in Logan County, West Virginia where 10,000 armed coal miners fought it out with an army of cops, finks and scabs, workers fought valiantly but were outgunned.

In the 1930s, the rise of the industrial unions of the CIO was prefigured by a series of citywide strikes in 1934 of longshoremen in San Francisco, truck drivers in Minneapolis and auto parts workers in Toledo. In each case the victorious strikers were led by “reds” and had to fight off attacks by police and National Guard troops. In Minneapolis, the Trotskyist-led Teamsters later set up a Union Defense Guard to fend off threatened attacks on the union hall by fascist Silver Shirts. In the 1941 sedition trial of 28 union activists and leaders of the Socialist Workers Party (18 of whom were eventually jailed) over their revolutionary opposition to the imperialist WWII, the U.S. declared the defense guard to be

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Threatened by Silver Shirt fascists, in August 1938 the Trotskyist-led Minneapolis truck drivers Local 544 formed an official Union Defense Guard (above). The U.S. later used this in charging them with “sedition” for their revolutionary opposition to the imperialists’ World War II.

an overt act of arming workers in order to overthrow of the government.

The drive for gun control is a frontal assault on the right to black armed self-defense against racist vigilante and police attacks, and for the right of workers to arm themselves. Yet some reformist social democrats such as the International Socialist Organization join in. An article by Danny Katch, “Sticking to their Glocks” (*Socialist Worker*, 17 January) is shot through with bourgeois liberalism, portraying opponents of gun control as “crazy” NRA spokesmen, “billionaire libertarians” and “trigger-happy racists.” After spending a few sentences on the inequality of New York gun control laws, Katch’s main complaint about gun control legislation is that it will only be “a symbolic statement against violence, and a shallow one at that” – in other words, it won’t go far enough.

Piously intoning that “Leftists like myself traditionally oppose gun control” and claiming to “really believe in all that self defense stuff,” Katch adds:

“But the United States of 2013 is a country with a vast arsenal and surveillance apparatus. Let’s face it: the revolution won’t be purchased in the sporting goods department of Wal-Mart. So it doesn’t make sense to oppose gun control chiefly on the basis of any future armed rebellion.”

Nor does he oppose it on any other basis. Not a word about the black militants who fought off racist lynch mobs, arms in hand. On the contrary, Katch attacks Florida’s “Stand Your Ground” law as do liberal Democrats like Jesse Jackson in their attempt to use the vigilante murder of Trayvon Martin to build support for gun control (see our article, “Lynch Law U.S.A.: The Racist Murder of Trayvon Martin,” *The Internationalist*, May 2012). Even more telling is a reader’s call for socialists to “think through how people’s genuine outrage and disgust over gun violence and crazy massacres can be channeled toward exposing and damaging the political right” by “banning of gun shows” (“Why the Right Wing Clings to Its Guns,” *Socialist Worker*, 22 January).

Other reformist outfits such as Solidarity and the red-white-and-blue Communist Party U.S.A. (which regularly calls for votes to Obama and just about any Democrat) join left liberals such as *Mother Jones* and *The Nation* magazines in going whole hog for gun control. So, too, do a number of unions. A March 27 demonstration in Harlem billed as “against gun violence” included representatives of Local 1199, SEIU 32BJ, CWA Local 1180, TWU Local 100, the United Federation of Teachers and Professional Staff Congress of CUNY. News accounts didn’t report any mention of the recent NYPD murder of Kimani Gray, nor the fact that handguns have already been outlawed for almost everyone in NYC for over a century.

If the Cops Have All the Guns...

So if reformist left, labor leaders and bourgeois “progressives” along with big city mayors got their way and guns in the hands of civilians were somehow banned, what would the result be? The police then would have free rein. This is supposed to be reassuring? According to a 2011 U.S. Department of Justice study covering 2003-2009, every year around 700 civilians die “in relation to an arrest,” over 400 of them classified as “homicide by law enforcement.” Taking a specific area, officers the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department (LASD) in 2010 fired on 260 people on the “perception” that they might have a gun. However, in 61 percent of the cases, the suspect turned out to be unarmed (Police Assessment Resource Center, *30th Semi-Annual Report*, September 2011, cited in “Shoot First, Ask Questions Later,” *Reason*, January 2012).

One example of this pattern of wanton police shooting stands out. Amid the hysteria around gun violence, in early February Los Angeles police launched a manhunt for ex-officer Christopher Dorner. Denouncing rampant racism and corruption within the department, Dorner declared war on the LAPD, allegedly killing three (two police and a relative). The LAPD went wild, assigning 500 cops to the case. It sent out an all-points bulletin to be on the lookout for a black man driving a dark-colored pickup truck. Clearly this was a shoot-to-kill order, and within hours T-shirts and signs appeared on vehicles saying “Not Dorner, Don’t Shoot.” Soon bumper stickers with the message were available on the Internet. People feared for their lives.

The concern was justified. On the morning of February 7, police shot three people, including two slight Hispanic women (one of them 71 years old) delivering newspapers. The pattern of the more than two dozen bullet holes in the ladies’ vehicle focusing on the driver makes it clear that the fusillade was an intended execution. Then when they finally tracked Dorner down in a cabin near Big Bear, the police deliberately burned the place down. “We’re going to go ahead with the plan, with the burner,” said a San Bernardino County Sheriff’s deputy on the police radio. Several seconds later another said, “Seven burners deployed. And we have a fire” (*Los Angeles Times*, 14 February). They then let the fire burn for a long time. Clearly the cops wanted Dorner dead, not talking to the media.

It was a replay of the Waco, Texas massacre 20 years earlier of the Branch Davidian religious group by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, ordered by the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton. The alleged reason for the initial February 1993

as they knew it would.

Ardent advocates of gun control should love the 1993 Waco massacre, because that’s what it leads to on a large scale. Likewise, “stop and frisk,” supposedly to search for illegal guns, leads directly to the 2013 police assassination of Kimani Gray, because that’s what the NYPD procedure leads to. Both were “according to regulations.” Both were murder. And when there is protest, the response is to impose a police state on the black and immigrant residents of the Brooklyn neighborhood. As demonstrators chanted at a March 25 demonstration in East Flatbush: “Kimani’s dead, the cops go free, that’s what they call democracy.”

Adam Lanza, a deranged youth, shot and killed 26 people, including 20 children in the gruesome Sandy Hook school massacre. Barack Obama has ordered drone strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, personally signing off on everyone on his “kill list,” that have killed somewhere between 3,000 and 4,500 people, including at least 1,000 civilians and close to 200 children in Pakistan alone (Columbia Law School, *The Civilian Impact of Drones: Unexamined Costs, Unanswered Questions* [September 2012]). Who, then, is the bigger mass murderer?

The appeal for “non-violence” by advocates of gun control is the luxury of wealthy whites who believe the police protect them. Not so for poor African Americans, Latinos, immigrants and working people. The prevalence of violent crime in impoverished urban neighborhoods is not the result of the legality or even availability of guns. If it were, you would see the same in upscale suburban communities. It is the result of poverty, homelessness, joblessness and all the other social ills that plague oppressed populations, and it is exacerbated by the racist police.

Placing a monopoly of violence in the hands of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state and leaving civilians unarmed and defenseless will only intensify the killing. Looking to bourgeois politicians – who with their “anti-crime” rhetoric have created the biggest system of mass incarceration in the world, capped by the barbaric death penalty – to bring peace to the streets of urban America is begging a fox to guard a chicken coop. And thinking that the black president in the White House, commander in chief of the most violent and murderous military apparatus on the planet, will protect black people from racist violence is a deadly illusion.

As for Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, promising that “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed,” that is indeed a statement of the individual right to own guns, including for protection against a despotic state, one that goes back to the American Revolution of 1776 and before that to the English Revolution of 1640. But like the rest of the

Bill of Rights, including the right to freedom of association, to equal protection under the law, against unreasonable search and seizure, etc., these basic democratic rights are under attack by the very state that claims to embody them.

Thus the Internationalist Group looks to the power of the working class to make society anew, through workers revolution that will sweep away the present society with its routine and brutal oppression, which spawns the kind of violent rampages carried in Newtown and Clackamas, in Columbine, Colorado or Virginia Tech, and replace the present state of the exploiters and oppressors with a workers state in which those who labor rule, and which can open the road to a socialist society on a worldwide scale in which poverty, wars and racism will be relics of the past to be studied in history books, not tragically experienced in daily life.

Our task is to get from here to there, and for that we need to build a revolutionary workers party. The problem in U.S. society today isn’t gun control, it’s who controls the guns. ■

Reforma...

viene de la página 24

individuos con grados avanzados en ciencia, tecnología, ingeniería y matemáticas (STEM). Si bien todavía no se anuncia las cantidades, ciertamente se elevará el número de visas nuevas a más de 200 mil por año.

Además de las visas STEM para abastecer con los “mejores y más brillantes” a Microsoft, Apple, Verizon, IBM y el montón de pequeñas firmas de tecnología, los capitalistas norteamericanos quieren muchos más trabajadores inmigrantes para que hagan el trabajo más sucio con los sueldos más bajos posibles. Durante años, este plan de “trabajadores huéspedes” se tropezó con los sindicatos, que correctamente veían que reduciría los salarios de los trabajadores en EE.UU. Pero ahora la AFL-CIO aparentemente ha firmado un acuerdo para una nueva “visa W” que empezaría con unas 20 mil al año, para llegar a unas 200 mil anuales. Supuestamente, los trabajadores “huéspedes” ganarían el “salario que prevalece en la industria” (¿Como 7.25 dólares la hora en el caso de los trabajadores de los restaurantes?)

Supuestamente, el aumento del número de visas se determinaría sobre la base de un cálculo que establezca si hay escasez de mano de obra. Esto es un absurdo en las condiciones actuales: por cada puesto de trabajo disponible hay tres solicitantes de empleo, y el gobierno disfraza el nivel real de desempleo al eliminar a los desempleados de largo plazo del conteo de la fuerza laboral. Quienes más directamente se verían afectados por esta afluencia de trabajadores a corto plazo serían *los mismos trabajadores indocumentados actualmente residentes en EE.UU.* Es más, los trabajadores “huéspedes” estarán sujetos a una forma de peonaje por tiempo definido (*indentured servitude*). Sólo que durante la colonia, estos sirvientes al menos alcanzarían su libertad después de cierto número de años, mientras hoy los “huéspedes” bien podrían verse echados de vuelta.

En cuanto a los inmigrantes indocumentados que se inscriban buscando la legalización mediante esta “reforma”, además de informar al gobierno de su paradero, después de pasar por una revisión de antecedentes para eliminar a “criminales” y

“otros que representen una amenaza contra nuestra seguridad nacional”, y también pagar una multa brutal, serán empadronados en un status “probatorio” durante ocho a diez años antes de que sean elegibles para recibir una *green card* (de residencia permanente). Durante este tiempo tendrán el derecho a trabajar, pero poco más. Su situación será de hecho muy parecida a la de una persona que cumple una condena condicional probatoria bajo la supervisión de los tribunales; alguien que en estas condiciones fuera detenido por fumar marihuana, por ejemplo, podría perderlo todo.

Así pues, lo que toma cuerpo es una “reforma” que informaría a la policía dónde encontrar al indocumentado, que bien podría incrementar el desempleo para inmigrantes, que llevaría a una expansión del control policíaco gubernamental y, cuando mucho y a un precio considerable, daría el estatus de peón o persona sujeta a una pena probatoria. Que este sistema siquiera se implemente dependería de una comisión en la que los gobernadores de estados fronterizos como Texas y Arizona tendrían un efectivo derecho a veto. Y si de hecho habrá una tortuosa “vía a la ciudadanía”, estará sujeta a negociación con republicanos como Jeb Bush, cuya posición en la materia cambia de un día al otro.

Para los demócratas y los grupos “moderados” de defensa de los derechos de los inmigrantes, esto es suficiente por lanzar hurras. No para los marxistas. *Exigimos plenos derechos de ciudadanía para todos los inmigrantes*. Ya era bastante malo cuando la izquierda quería sumarse al clamor de los liberales burgueses para pedir una “amnistía” cuando no existía crimen alguno. Esta “reforma” en efecto trata a los indocumentados como infractores de las leyes, y no nos sorprendería para nada si en nombre del “espíritu bipartidista” terminan convirtiendo el estatus “no legal” en un delito. Al calificarla de “reforma”, la clase dirigente estima que puede permitirse un ataque frontal contra los inmigrantes, los derechos laborales y las libertades cívicas.

Una verdadera lucha a favor de los derechos de los inmigrantes debe ser una lucha contra el capital, que saca enormes ganancias de la actual situación en la que millones de trabajadores carecen de derechos legales, y que ahora quiere atesorar beneficios aún mayores al “legalizarlos”. Esta es una *lucha política*, porque la histeria antiinmigrante es una distracción con el propósito de desviar la atención de la actual depresión económica capitalista y dirigir el enojo obrero en contra de los “foráneos”. Igual hicieron los nazis alemanes (y fascistas nativistas en los EE.UU.) en los años 1930 al convertir a los judíos en chivos expiatorios. Debe ser una *lucha contra la campaña de guerra imperialista*, que ha hecho de los árabes, los asiáticos y todos los inmigrantes el “enemigo interior”.

Debe ser una *lucha contra el embuste de la “guerra contra la droga”*, que en realidad es una guerra contra los guetos negros y los barrios latinos, que retrata a los mexicanos como narcotraficantes. Debe formar parte de una lucha contra los socios menores latinoamericanos de Washington que sumisamente han impuesto las políticas de “libre mercado” que expulsaron a los campesinos de sus tierras, obligándolos a poner en riesgo a sus vidas al buscar una vida mejor en el Gran Norte. Debe ser una *lucha por la revolución socialista internacional*. Hoy en día los trabajadores inmigrantes se sienten

atomizados e impotentes frente a la represión racista. No lo están. Sin el trabajo de los trabajadores inmigrantes y los nacidos en EE.UU., el capitalismo norteamericano se paralizaría.

La población inmigrante en los Estados Unidos hoy es mayor que en cualquier momento desde los primeros años del siglo XX, después de las olas de migración europea que trajeron a los trabajadores que poblaron las fábricas y minas. Para 2011 había unos 40 millones de inmigrantes en EE.UU., y aunque constituyen el 12.5 por ciento de la población, representan el 16% de la fuerza laboral. En algunas industrias, entre ellas la agricultura, la alimenticia, el alojamiento, la construcción y empleados domésticos, totalizan más del 20 por ciento de los trabajadores. Aislados y sin derechos, son presa fácil de los patrones roba-salarios, quienes los utilizan para disminuir el pago de todos los trabajadores. Sin embargo, unidos a los trabajadores nacidos en EE.UU., los trabajadores inmigrantes pueden transformar la lucha de clases en este país.

Varios aspectos particulares de la actual ola migratoria merecen un comentario. Primero, que está retrocediendo. El número de inmigrantes indocumentados en los EE.UU. ha disminuido desde 2008, en primerísimo lugar porque se han desvanecido las oportunidades de empleo; también debido a la masiva militarización de la frontera; y finalmente porque esto ha facilitado la creciente dominación del tránsito de la frontera por los carteles del narcotráfico y de contrabando, quienes han subido considerablemente el costo (y lo han hecho más peligroso, debido a que los migrantes con frecuencia son secuestrados para exigir rescates, o masacrados). Aquí *la migra y el narco* trabajan codo con codo contra los migrantes.

En segundo lugar, hoy un número sin precedentes de los inmigrantes vienen de un solo país, México, en una de las mayores migraciones de la historia moderna. Hasta los años 1980, había menos de 2 millones de mexicanos en Estados Unidos. Hoy hay más de 12 millones de ciudadanos mexicanos radicados en EE.UU., lo que constituye un 10 por ciento de la población total de México. Si se incluyen a sus hijos resulta en unos *33 millones de personas de familias mexicanas residentes en EE.UU., la décima parte de la población del país*. (Esto se agrega a la población hispana tradicional de Texas a California, arraigada en sus tierras ancestrales que fueron robadas de México.) Esto constituye un verdadero puente humano para la lucha revolucionaria en ambos lados de la frontera.

En tercer lugar, la inmigración a los EE.UU. ha amontonado poblaciones que en sus países de origen eran fuertemente hostilizadas en sanguinarios conflictos intestinos, pero que aquí tienen intereses en común. En la ciudad de Nueva York hay unos 600 mil dominicanos y 400 mil haitianos; juntos constituyeron el 80 por ciento de los trabajadores de los autobuses escolares que recientemente hicieron una huelga de un mes. Los jóvenes de los 200 mil inmigrantes de la India, los 70 mil de Pakistán y los 60 mil de Bangladesh que viven en la ciudad se consideran predominantemente como una sola comunidad surasiática de *desis*. Esta mezcla presenta enormes oportunidades para los revolucionarios internacionalistas, enemigos de los nacionalismos fratricidas y del imperialismo.

En cuarto lugar, a diferencia de las

migraciones pasadas, los inmigrantes hoy están ampliamente esparcidos por todo el territorio estadounidense. En las empacadoras de carne de Alabama y Georgia hasta Iowa y Nebraska, operando moteles de Mississippi al estado de Washington, limpiando edificios de Los Angeles a Nueva York, y en restaurantes y sitios de construcción por doquier en el país, ahora hay millones de trabajadores que realizan trabajos mal pagados y con frecuencia peligrosos, que no tienen derechos legales, que son odiados por los reaccionarios, y cuyo trabajo es imprescindible para la economía capitalista. Pero para despertar a este gigante dormido, se requiere un elemento clave: una vanguardia revolucionaria.

Los trabajadores inmigrantes han intentado numerosas veces sindicalizarse —como en el caso de los trabajadores de los comedores de Pomona College en California, los troqueros portuarios y trabajadores de la construcción en Seattle, los trabajadores que preparan las pizzas congeladas en Milwaukee y en otras partes— para luego verse derrotados cuando la policía migratoria de la ICE acude en apoyo a los patrones (para estos y otros casos consulte el informe del National Employment Law Project, *Workers Rights on ICE* [Los derechos de los trabajadores en la congeladora], febrero de 2013). En cambio, el otoño pasado los trabajadores inmigrantes de una panadería de la cadena Hot and Crusty en la ciudad de Nueva York ganaron un contrato que abre camino, incluso con contratación sindical de trabajadores, después de dos meses en la línea de piquete luchando contra un *lockout* (paro patronal).

Dos factores han resultado fundamentales para la derrota o la victoria: la burocracia sindical procapitalista y la solidaridad obrera. Las actuales direcciones sindicales en EE.UU. son un estrato parasitario pequeñoburgués que tomó control de los sindicatos en el curso de la “purga de los rojos” en la segunda posguerra mediante la que se expulsó a los socialistas y comunistas que los habían creado. Está completamente ceñida a las leyes capitalistas y es, por lo tanto, incapaz de organizar a los trabajadores desprovistos de derechos legales. Para que los inmigrantes triunfen, es preciso expulsar de los sindicatos a esta burocracia vendida.

Por otra parte, los trabajadores inmigrantes por sí solos rara vez tienen el poder de parar una industria en su totalidad: necesitan del poder de todo el movimiento obrero para respaldarlos, incluso en *movilizaciones masivas para poner alto a las deportaciones*.


Para derrotar a los “lugartenientes sindicales de la clase capitalista” y organizar verdaderas acciones de solidaridad sindical es fundamental forjar un partido obrero revolucionario basado en un programa independiente de lucha de clases en contra de los demócratas, republicanos y todos los partidos y políticos capitalistas. La idea de que la “reforma migratoria puede detener las represalias y hacer avanzar los derechos sindicales”, como sostiene el informe del NELP, es ilusorio. Cualquier “reforma” legislada por los representantes políticos de Wall Street y las empresas capitalistas que lucran de la explotación de los trabajadores nacidos en el extranjero, cualquier iniciativa que concilie con los palurdos antiinmigrantes, necesariamente representará un ataque contra los derechos de los migrantes.

¡Al diablo con el chovinismo nacionalista y las hostilidades étnicas que enfrentan a los trabajadores entre sí mientras que los patrones se ríen en su camino a depositar sus ganancias en el banco! Los comunistas revolucionarios decimos “*Asiáticos, latinos, negros y blancos: proletarios del mundo ¡uníos!*” Para nuestra clase, justamente *la lucha obrera no tiene frontera*. Éstas no son consignas abstractas. Nuestro llamado por plenos derechos de ciudadanía para todos los inmigrantes se ha hecho realidad en varias ocasiones. La gran Revolución Francesa de 1789-99, la Comuna de París de 1871 y la Revolución Rusa de octubre de 1917 otorgaron ciudadanía a todos los trabajadores y defensores de la revolución.

Estados Unidos es una tierra de inmigrantes: todo mundo aquí vino de algún otro lugar, algunos en cadenas, con la excepción de la población americana nativa que fue diezmada con las políticas genocidas de los colonizadores y los esclavistas. Lo que decimos es que todos aquí deben poder vivir en este lugar con los mismos derechos que los demás. Si bien se trata de una simple demanda democrática, se requerirá de una revolución para lograrla. ■

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Exigimos: ¡Plenos derechos de ciudadanía para todos los inmigrantes!

La reforma migratoria “bipartidista” de Obama es un fraude

1° de ABRIL – Tramposos planes para una “reforma migratoria” andan en boca de todos en Washington. El grupo de senadores demócratas y republicanos conocido como la “banda de los ocho” ha filtrado reportes de que su propuesta “bipartidista” será develada en las próximas dos semanas. Portavoces sindicales y patronales anuncian que han alcanzado un acuerdo en torno a las cláusulas de un programa de “trabajadores huéspedes”. El presidente Barack Obama ha pedido audiencias del Congreso sobre la inmigración para celebrarse este mes. Grupos de defensa de los derechos de los migrantes están esperanzados y dicen que es “ahora o nunca” para una reforma que ofrezca una “vía para la ciudadanía”.

Que nadie se deje engañar. La “reforma” que están preparando no beneficiará a los 11 millones de inmigrantes indocumentados que se calcula que viven en Estados Unidos; al contrario, servirá a los intereses de los capitalistas que explotan su trabajo. La “contrarreforma” en marcha profundizará la explotación e intensificará la persecución de los millones de trabajadores que realizan muchas de las labores peor pagadas y más peligrosas en el país. Además, implicará ataques en toda la línea contra las libertades civiles y los derechos sindicales de toda la población.

Esto no será el resultado exclusivo de que los “reformadores” estén capitulando a los derechistas xenófobos y antiinmigrantes. Los liberales demócratas, supuestamente “amigos de los inmigrantes”, han reprimido con aún mayor saña a los nacidos en el extranjero que los conservadores republicanos. Hoy es ampliamente sabido que Obama ha deportado a más de 400 mil inmigrantes por año, lo que representa *más del doble* de los que expulsó George W. Bush. La inmensa mayoría de estos deportados no son culpables de ningún crimen en lo absoluto (estar en EE.UU. “sin estatus legal” es únicamente una infracción civil).

Las aparatosas redadas de Bush en las fábricas capturaron los encabezados de los periódicos, pero la presente administración se ha valido de “redadas silenciosas”. Desde enero de 2009, la división de Inmigración y Aduanas (Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE) del Departamento de



Contingente internacionalista en la marcha del Primero de Mayo de 2011 en la ciudad de Nueva York

Seguridad de la Patria ha *cuadruplicado* el número de las auditorías “I-9” con respecto a la “verificación de elegibilidad para el empleo”, provocando así que decenas de miles de inmigrantes pierdan sus trabajos. Esto también ha dado a los patrones roba-salarios una herramienta adicional para no pagar a sus trabajadores, al afirmar que tienen que cumplir con una auditoría aún si no es el caso. En lugar de pagar a los trabajadores la compensación requerida por lesiones, las aseguradoras llaman a la ICE y hacen que el trabajador herido sea deportado.

En lo que toca a la fabulada “vía para la ciudadanía”, ésta será extremadamente dura y llena de obstáculos, costará miles (y en algunos casos decenas de miles) de dólares por persona, entre multas punitivas e impuestos atrasados, y tomará años para completar. Bajo la propuesta “bipartidista” el tiempo *más corto* contemplado es de *13 años*, pero podría ser mucho mayor, incluso el doble, o simplemente no terminar nunca, si (a) las millones de solicitudes “legales” pendientes de ciudadanía no se han resuelto primero, (b) los individuos no pueden pagar las fuertes penal-

izaciones o aprobar los exámenes de inglés y civismo, (c) una comisión de gobernadores de los estados fronterizos no certifica que la frontera esté “segura”.

Entretanto, el plan pide una militarización aún mayor de la frontera, con la continua expansión de la Patrulla Fronteriza norteamericana (que ya ha doblado sus efectivos desde 2005) y el uso exhaustivo de “drones” no tripulados, aviones “espías en los cielos”. ¿Cuánto tiempo transcurrirá antes de que empiecen a disparar desde el aire a los que cruzan la frontera, como el Pentágono y la CIA ya están haciendo en media decena de países? Un estudio publicado en enero de 2013 informó que EE.UU. ya gasta 18 mil millones de dólares al año para la policía migratoria, lo que representa más que los presupuestos combinados del FBI, la DEA y la ATF.

Como resultado de ello, EE.UU. ha creado un *estado policiaco para los inmigrantes*. No sólo en Arizona los indocumentados temen que al caminar por la calle les exijan que “muestren sus papeles” como en la Alemania nazi o en la Sudáfrica del apartheid. Si te detienen por una infracción de tránsito, puedes terminar en un campo de concentración (“centro de detención”) durante meses para ser luego deportado, separado de tus hijos nacidos en EE.UU. Lo mismo vale para un adolescente que se pelea en la escuela. Y ahora, en nombre de la “reforma migratoria” la burguesía quiere *extender estas medidas de estado policiaco a toda la población*.

Para verificar la “elegibilidad de empleo” de un trabajador, se elaborará un registro nacional con “medios electrónicos no falsificables” para establecer la identidad y el estatus legal. Esto es aún peor que un carnet de identidad nacional, toda vez que contendrá el registro laboral del individuo. Además de revisar la exactitud de las solicitudes laborales de todo mundo, muy pronto las usarán para cazar “malhechores” que han cometido infracciones de tránsito, “padres morosos” para que paguen las pensiones de sus hijos, poseedores de armas o cualquier otra categoría que se pueda pensar – probablemente incluyéndote a *tí*. La “reforma” también proyecta un “sistema de entrada-salida” para rastrear a quienes entran legalmente al país. ¿Cómo? Fácilmente: añadiendo un microchip rastreador a la visa.

Esta es una “reforma migratoria” al gusto del Gran Hermano. Y no por casualidad: estas medidas no han sido diseñadas para satisfacer las necesidades de los inmigrantes sino que, por el contrario, tienen como propósito usar a los inmigrantes para satisfacer las exigencias de los capitalistas, en un período en el que el capitalismo norteamericano busca regimentar a la población en un estado cada vez más empresarial (reforma educativa, reforma a la salud, etc.). En concordancia con ello, el plan “bipartidista” proyecta multiplicar considerablemente el número de visas H1-B para *sigue en la página 22*



Vehículos aéreos de la Patrulla Fronteriza. ¿Cuándo empezarán a disparar a los que cruzan la frontera?