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*Imperialism, Left
Populism & War*

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Internationalist Notes

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A. Smeaton – editor



The Legacy of US Reaction

The American middle class, subject of the ravings of the bourgeois media and academics alike, is a potent myth. Contrary to this myth, the Luxembourg Income Study Database ranks the US fourteenth out of the fifteen countries included in their rankings. This statistical database defines the term “middle income” as being those households with incomes from 62.5% to 150% of the median national income. The countries with the largest middle class to the smallest are: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Taiwan, Netherlands, France, Poland, Hungary, Australia, UK, US and finally Russia. US workers have never had the same experience with social democracy as the other states in the survey. With sad irony, most US workers identify themselves as being a part of a “middle class” when in fact they are not middle class by definition. The absorption of bourgeois values forms the ideological basis of this false identification. The term itself is so broad it can include anyone who is not homeless or working in a factory and directly involved in large-scale production.

US workers organized into the early American Federation of Labor chose May Day 1890 as the day to protest for an eight-hour workday. The day was subsequently adopted by resolution at the Paris Congress of the Second International, July 14, 1889, and marked the foundations of May Day as a workers holiday. Today, few proletarians in the US will identify themselves as proletarian and to even use such a term is to place oneself beyond the pale of the dominant ideas acceptable within the bounds of bourgeois political discourse. Confronting the legacy of the political destruction of all expressions of proletarian organization is key to confronting the reality of the vicious and highly adaptive mode of bourgeois rule in the US.

To do this one must look at the political development and destruction of the early workers movement via the lies and repression employed by the ruling class as it sought to enter into the slaughter of WWI. A confluence of legislation is seen in the first years of the twentieth century. From the Espionage Act and the Sedition Law of 1918, to the “Palmer Raids”, through the worst years of the lynching and state supported

“What was left at the end of this period as the raids and vigilantism began to subside, was a shell of a bourgeois Socialist Party, a shell of an IWW, a Socialist Labor Party that was turning in on itself in its adoration of the figure of Daniel DeLeon, and a browbeaten Communist Party furiously attempting to show itself as a legal party within the framework of bourgeois politics.”

vigilante terror, revolutionary movements and those workers who were at the time most positively inclined towards those movements, were the targets of hysterical propaganda and repression from which the proletariat never fully recovered. The same period saw the near total collapse of the Socialist Party USA after it expelled much of its membership when the early communist parties were formed in the US. The IWW was crushed through a system of anti-syndicalism laws passed at the state level while systematically being bankrupted with fines and legal costs. The reaction went further in the chaotic stillbirth of the early Communist groups in the US who were forced underground at their very inception and “bolshevized” into the official left of the bourgeois left in the US. The period from 1917 to 1923 was the key period in the destruction of the concrete organizational political expressions of the proletariat in the US.

What was left at the end of this period as the raids and vigilantism began to subside, was a shell of a bourgeois Socialist Party, a shell of an IWW, a Socialist Labor Party that was turning in on itself in its adoration of the figure of Daniel DeLeon, and a browbeaten Communist Party furiously attempting to show itself as a legal party within the framework of bourgeois politics. In fact, by 1923 a figure like C. E. Ruthenberg, writing in the pages of *the Liberator* (v.6 no. 3, March 1923), in an article titled *An Open Challenge* could openly state that:

“No Communist advocates the use of violence in the class struggle in the United States today.”

At this point the activity of the Communists was being increasingly geared towards achieving bourgeois legal acceptance as they went through their own period of Bolshevization. By the time of what is probably the greatest wave of strikes in US history, 1943 to 1945, the Stalinist party, under the false label of Communist acted to isolate and destroy all movements of workers against the no-strike pledge, acting openly as an agent of the US bourgeoisie in their “united front” against the working class.

One of the most vocal proponents for supporting the Federal Statute called the Alien

“The trouble is that pacifism and peaceful orderly democratic discourse cannot stop the slaughter that has been set in motion by the capitalist class.”

Registration Act, popularly known as the Smith Act of 1940, was the CPUSA. The Stalinists were especially supportive of the use of the Smith Act when it was used by federal authorities against the CPUSA's own opponents on the left, they only stopped their support for this piece of repressive legislation when the same federal authorities started applying it to them.

The Capitalist class must always resort to whipping up nationalist hysteria and using repression to silence even their mildest critics. The anti-war movement in the US largely went silent after the Iraq War. The two main antiwar groups, United for Peace and Justice and ANSWER (Act Now to End War and Racism) organized their yearly “days of action”. The UFPJ demonstration ended predictably with a slew of Hollywood luminaries, and Democratic Party functionaries again calling on people to furiously lobby their congressmen. ANSWER, while posturing as being slightly more anti-war, ultimately support the idea that Congress can be pressured to cut off funding for the war. ANSWER poses as a slightly more militant voice against the war than UFPJ. But both have the same bourgeois reason for being, to channel the antiwar sentiment down accepted legal electoral paths while promoting the political fortunes of the prime organizational core of ANSWER, the Workers' World Party. The WWP is the ultimate rancid ex-Trotskyist state-capitalist formation. It was expelled from the Socialist Worker's Party for supporting the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, and in later years fell deeply in love with North Korean “juche” style state-capitalism.

The trouble is that pacifism and peaceful orderly democratic discourse cannot stop the slaughter that has been set in motion by the capitalist class. Just as the Democratic Party politicians support the war while simultaneously catering to antiwar sentiment, the official left antiwar movement also acts to benefit from and sabotage any effective struggle. Even at a time when the sentiment against the war is so widespread and so broad their sincerest hope is that they can contain anti-war sentiment before it starts resulting in an increasing political awakening that begins to outstrip the bounds

“In this respect the traditional organizations of the left act in a manner which functions, regardless of the level of militant rhetoric and posturing, as the auxiliary of the Democratic Party faction of the ruling class.”

of the accepted limits of the state-capitalist left. The left petty bourgeoisie systematically betrays antiwar sentiment through the impotence of their “actions”. After the anniversary of the fourth year of the war in Iraq came and went all the leading organizations on the left can do today is to fill the classic role played by pacifism during imperialist conflict, acting as the tragic Greek chorus of the imperialist war.

The course of US imperialism, in its generalized permanent warfare, is waking broad masses of people, many who for the first time in their lives find themselves starting to think and act politically. In this respect the traditional organizations of the left act in a manner which functions, regardless of the level of militant rhetoric and posturing, as the auxiliary of the Democratic Party faction of the ruling class. Recently, the stale old liberal publication The Nation published an editorial gushing over how the ISO and the College Democrats of America (DP youth) were working so well together in the anti-war movement and in the new sanitized reincarnation of Students for a Democratic Society in the wake of the March 17, march on Washington. [2] Even the recreation of the classic middle-class protest milieu complete with a new SDS cannot conceal the role these organizations play in channeling the hostility to the war back into the ruling party orbit of the Dems. Even the loyal and fraternal order of followers of Bob Avakian in the Revolutionary Communist Party selling their newly renamed paper, “Revolution”, cannot hide how they themselves are no more than a middle class protest organization that ultimately will encourage its followers to support the Democratic Party when the next electoral circus comes to town as they have already done before.

The Bush regime did not come to power as the result of the bourgeoisie of the US having somehow erred in the conduct of their electoral circus and having punished itself in unleashing the very reactionary religious elements they rely on to maintain their rule and disseminate ruling ideas among their subject proletarians. Bush is the logical result of the trajectory of bourgeois politics in the US. Out of the ruins of Watergate and the defeat in Vietnam the Reagan-Bush

“The political impasse imposed on workers today is born of the needs of the bourgeoisie in the current imperialist epoch where China stands as the sweatshop of the world and the US is the biggest debtor nation on the planet.”

political machine grew into what it is today. It gave the ruling class the program that best fit their needs while using religious reaction and fear to maintain the outward appearance of a popular mandate. Even during the usual eight-year alternation of power, under the Clinton administration the constant sanctions and bombing raids in the no-fly zones over Iraq demonstrated graphically that a war against Iraq to topple the Ba’ath Party regime was inevitable. Almost as inevitable as the future conflict between the US and Iran appears today.

Bush explicitly came to power after being crowned by the apparatus in the Philadelphia Republican National Convention in 1999 at First Union Center where the Pentagon brass lined up to offer them their paeans. His rule was the direct product of the two capitalist political machines that dominate US politics and not an aberration.

The political impasse imposed on workers today is born of the needs of the bourgeoisie in the current imperialist epoch where China stands as the sweatshop of the world and the US is the biggest debtor nation on the planet. With the US steeped in a permanent and expanding war in the Gulf it is painfully apparent that the US military machine the final guarantor of US imperialist power and not the immaculately conceived dollar. The regime in Washington must force further confrontations, not simply with powers abroad like Iran but against workers within the US. The capitalist system itself provokes and exacerbates such crises, while posing as the defender of order when it moves to crush people. As the imperialist conflict threatens to widen into further wars, the question is this: will the bourgeois left be able to keep recouping the energy and anger of new generations of workers and keep them disoriented? Will continuing wars and disasters force a break with the old liberal-left expressions of the bourgeoisie in favor of more militant and proletarian forms of struggle?

After four years of war the dominant left still has no answers and has eliminated from discussion, in attempting to operate in another middle-class protest movement, has written off the only truly realistic options for those workers

who want to put an end to this war. What is needed are not the stale winds of the bourgeois left but a revolutionary perspective that is truly internationalist and unmistakably proletarian.

A. Smeaton

[1] C. E. Ruthenberg, *The Liberator. An Open Challenge*. March 1923. vol. 6 no. 3. [<http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1923/03/0300-ruth-anopenchallenge.pdf>]

[2] Graham-Felsen, Sam. *The Nation. Antiwar Students Rising*. April 2, 2007. Vol. 284, no. 13.

Canada:

Work Related Fatalities on the Rise

While a good number of post-modernists and ultra-left “theoreticians” question the extent and harshness of the exploitation of workers, and in some cases, the very existence of the working class in today’s Western capitalist economies, a recent report published in Canada sheds new light on a continuing reality: capitalism kills and the death toll is rising. Entitled “Five Deaths a Day: Workplace Fatalities in Canada, 1993-2005”, the 119 page report was published on December 12th 2006, by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS), a non-profit government funded organization.

Based on data compiled by the Association of Workers’ Compensation Boards of Canada, the document reveals that 1,097 workplace fatalities were recorded in Canada in 2005, an increase of 45 % from 758 in 1993 and 18% from 958 in 2004. On average, this means that every day five workers die from work-related causes. In 2005, of the 1,097 workplace fatalities, 491 (44.8%) were caused by accidents and 557 (50.8%) by occupational diseases, with asbestos-related ailments accounting for nearly two-thirds of the latter. The statistics reveal a dramatic rise of 25% in the number of deaths by accidents on the job in the period between 1996 and 2005, and an even more alarming increase of 174% in deaths caused by work-related diseases over the same period.

As noted before, asbestos remains a particularly deadly factor. Even though the use of this product has declined by 75% in Canada between 1998 and 2003, asbestos-related deaths alone accounted for about 340 deaths in 2005 and Canadian produced asbestos is a major contributor to more than 100,000 deaths each year worldwide. It is important to underline that although domestic asbestos use is in sharp decline, other lethal industrial diseases such as berylliosis are on the rise.

Our study of this report brings many questions and observations to mind; questions that are absolutely not addressed by the document. For example, hasn’t the ongoing pressure for higher productivity (speed-ups) to maintain profit rates been an important factor in the killing of workers? Likewise, what has been the role of the general increase of the length of the workweek and its

“Think about it, on average, every worker loses a potential seven years of his or her life. Thus, even in times of domestic peace, capitalist exploitation, the class war levies a very heavy and bloody toll.”

accompanying level of stress and fatigue in the growing death rates? As the report is based on statistics compiled by the various provincial and territorial Workers' Compensation Boards, what is the situation of workers who are not covered by these boards: the undeclared, the so-called “self-employed” and a large percentage of the agricultural workers? Why hasn't the increasing mechanization of the work process not lead to a decrease in human casualties? And as the important increase in accidents on the job is in large part imputed to the growth of employment in the basic resource industries such as mining and forestry as well as the construction sector, is this not in fact an indictment of the erroneous conclusions of those “theoreticians” who so lightly disparage the “traditional” working class, its conditions and in some case even its existence?

Though light on analysis, the report is blunt in its conclusions:

“Workplace fatalities, unlike death in general, are in principle avoidable.”

Thus any workplace death should be unacceptable. It is a matter of grave concern that the number of workplace fatalities in this country is increasing, not falling.” Indeed! And as capitalism's crisis deepens and the Canadian capitalists strive to maintain their profits, this will most likely be a longterm trend. A French study published by the “Institut de veille sanitaire” (Health Watch Institute), a state-subsidised organization has established that on average workers live seven years less than their bosses. Think about it, on average, every worker loses a potential seven years of his or her life. Thus, even in times of domestic peace, capitalist exploitation, the class war levies a very heavy and bloody toll.

Internationalist Workers Group (Montreal)

Latin America - Between Populism and Imperialism

We publish the following article here in its entirety. First appearing in issues 38 and 40 of Revolutionary Perspectives, the journal of the Communist Workers Organisation in the UK, and given the rise of left nationalist leaderships in countries once considered unquestioningly under the thumb of US imperialism and the persistence of massive broad popular struggles in the region for which the left nationalist bourgeoisie have no solutions. The left in the US cannot honestly reflect on the nature of these regimes and the events that brought them into being it moves into its best cheerleading mode until the objects of their adoration fall from grace.

US Hypocrisy

Is the US losing its grip over its own backyard? As military and economic power is advancing all over the planet a series of victories of “Left” governments have created new pressures for it in South America and the Caribbean. Following the victory in Brazil of the so-called Workers Party headed by Luiz Ignacio “Lula” da Silva, in Venezuela Chavez’ successful defence of his regime against a US-inspired coup confirmed in a referendum in 2004 plus the electoral victories of Gutierrez in Ecuador, Vasquez in Uruguay, Kirchner in Argentina, Morales in Bolivia and Michele Bachelet in Chile in the last few months, it looks as though the political complexion of Latin America is changing. The victory of Evo Morales last year was the victory of the sixth Latin American Presidential candidate in the last seven years who has explicitly campaigned against the so-called “Washington Consensus” of neo-liberalism.

Just how disastrous unregulated free market policies have been for Latin America is never faced up to by the US Government. When Bush went to South America in November to try to secure agreement on a Free Trade Area of the (FTAA or Alca in Spanish) he was not only greeted by strikes and hostile demonstrations in and but also found that there was strong opposition to the agreement amongst many Latin American governments. The leaders of the so-called Mercosur countries [1] declared that:

“The conditions do not exist to attain a hemispheric free trade accord that is balanced and fair with access to markets that is free of subsidiaries and distorting practices.”

It is no secret that they thought it was the US who was operating the “distorting practices”. This is not surprising given that Latin America has been the testing ground for all kinds of neo-liberal experiments in the last few decades, which have brought social disaster to much of the continent. At Mar del Plata in Argentina Bush tried to play the “democracy and freedom” card that he is using to justify “regime change” in the Middle East. However it doesn’t sound so plausible in a continent where the US has

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Castro and US Policy

conspired to overthrow democratically elected governments from to over the last century. Indeed policy was summed up when a Secretary State said of the Nicaraguan dictator Somoza in the 1950s and 1960s that:

“He might be a son-of-a-bitch but he is our son-of-a-bitch.”

The CIA overthrow of the democratically-elected Allende government in Chile in 1973, the financing of death squads in Central America and Colombia (the armed forces in guerrilla clothes) and the continual interference of the US-dominated IMF in the economic management of Latin American countries, all demonstrate that ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ are only convenient slogans behind which lies US expansionism. It is the same with the so-called “war on terrorism”. Whilst the US is “hunting ‘em down” in Afghanistan and Iraq it is also protecting characters like Luis Posada Carriles and Orlando Bosch who are both self-confessed terrorists who blew up an airliner of Cubana de Aviación in October 1976. Even though Bosch was known to the Justice Department as someone who “has been involved in terrorist attacks abroad and has advocated bombings and sabotage”, he was given an immediate residence permit by the Bush Administration. Carriles, as an anti-Castro thug, was so confident of immunity that he gave a press conference in Florida. This so blatantly exposed the Bush government as a supporter of terrorism that he was “arrested” and placed in comfortable detention facilities awaiting deportation “to a country of his choice”. It seems that the “our son-of-a-bitch” ideology extends to terrorism too.[2] Compare that with the “extraordinary rendition” or the treatment of suspects in Guantanamo Bay and the US just appears as hypocritical as ever, particularly in Latin America.

It is perhaps one of the greatest ironies of the present day that the policies of the state since 1992 have done more to keep Fidel Castro in power in than anything else. Castro has been an irritant to the ever since the famous standoff over the Missile Crisis in 1962. Although the

“As the Cuban economy reached the point of collapse they simply furnished Castro with a scapegoat, if not an explanation, for the economic disaster. As the Castro regime has been built on populist anti-American nationalism the vast majority of Cubans had no difficulty in blaming imperialism for their economic plight.”

agreed to take away the missiles the quid pro quo was a guarantee was that there would be no more Bay of Pigs-style invasions of. However despite Castro's support for guerrilla war all over the continent the US has managed to ensure that whatever short-term alliances Cuba has made in the region they have always managed to isolate the Cuban regime (either by using the military to overthrow the democratically elected “socialist” government of Allende in Chile or by fomenting their own guerrilla campaign (the Contras) against the regime of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua).

In the late 80s it was already clear that the favourable trade relations with the, which had sustained Castro in power in, were beginning to unravel. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Yeltsin takeover in saw an end to the generous treatment (worth \$6 billions a year at its height), which had received through various trade agreements.

The US government thought that this was its big chance at last to finish Castro off. The US Congress decided to screw up the sanctions regime that it had operated against since 1962. The Torricelli Act in 1992 and the Helms-Burton Act of 1996 both put penalties on any company or state that traded with Cuba. As the Cuban economy reached the point of collapse they simply furnished Castro with a scapegoat, if not an explanation, for the economic disaster. As the Castro regime has been built on populist anti-American nationalism the vast majority of Cubans had no difficulty in blaming imperialism for their economic plight. It has also played well on the international stage. Every year the UN votes to condemn the sanctions by massive majorities [3] and every year the US government ignores the vote. All this at a time when Cuba's GDP had halved and, according to some analysts, [4] was less than that of at the time.

The survival of the Cuban economy in this period is due to three factors. The first is that most goods are provided via ration books (the tarjeta). Cuba has the most equitable distribution of wealth in Latin America (although the Communist Party elite have access to more and better services) and this is something which prevented social breakdown when Castro

About 80% of the land was state-owned in 1990 but by the end of the decade less than 40% was in state hands. By profit sharing with small farmers and taxing more profitable agricultural enterprises the state became financially more solvent. The most important fact though was the growth of tourism.

Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution

announced ration cuts in the early 1990s (as well as an increase in social security). Second, Castro abandoned what had been the highest degree of state ownership of the means of production. About 80% of the land was state-owned in 1990 but by the end of the decade less than 40% was in state hands. By profit sharing with small farmers and taxing more profitable agricultural enterprises the state became financially more solvent. The most important fact though was the growth of tourism. Castro signed hundreds of deals with foreign tourist companies to build an infrastructure. Today tourism earns \$1.8 billions whilst sugar the old mono-cultural money earner only realised \$600 millions. In fact the almost total lack of investment in Cuban constant (fixed) capital over the last twenty years is evident everywhere in the piles of rusting machines without parts.

There have been other important economic changes. The Armed Forces budget has been cut by a third as 's sons are no longer sent to die for Soviet imperialism in Africa, has settled its debts with and trade agreements involving barter and loans have been signed with, and. Most significant of all though has been the agreements signed with the Chavez Government in since the one thing that lacks most is energy (power cuts remain in force every day). The advent of Chavez and the attempts to oust him are reminiscent of their treatment of and once again it has backfired.

The real reason for the wave of anti-US electoral victories are the consequences of the capitalist crisis in Latin America. In social terms Latin America remains the area of the world with the greatest disparity of wealth. Basically despite all the hyperbole about "revolution" (used to describe the literally hundreds of military coups that have occurred since the criollos won independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century) little has changed in wealth distribution.[5] Towards the end of the post war boom in the 1960s a new middle class was beginning to emerge but in the face of the world capitalist crisis since 1973 it has all but disappeared. Today Latin America as a whole has an estimated population of 500 millions of

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which 240 millions live below the poverty line (i.e. have less than \$1 a day to live on). In (which is fairly representative of the continent) in 1990 a quarter of the population did not reach the linea de indigencia. That means they are literally starving.[6]

In, despite high oil prices for most of the period 1970-98, the actual per capita income fell 35%. Given that its distribution of income was typical of Latin America where the top 20% of the population possess 78 times more wealth than the bottom 80% it is not surprising that a populist movement should arise. Hugo Chavez had tried to take power in 1992 in a military coup and his televised speech denouncing neo-liberalism at his trial launched his political career. He was eventually elected by a landslide on a populist platform. He took office in February, 1999. As Venezuela is the richest oil-producer in Latin America, which supplies the US with 15% of its crude oil, it is a key state for the US. Chavez could not nationalise the oil industry as the previous regime did it in 1975. In fact he has changed the state's relationship with the oil companies. He encouraged foreign oil companies to invest more in Venezuela without having to go through a state intermediary. This is more "liberal" than Mexico or Saudi Arabia. He also has the US over a barrel (pun intended). Unless investment in new sources is carried through the already high price of oil will become astronomical and world economic activity would become even more arthritic than it is now. Chavez knows they need Venezuela's reserves (280 billion barrels of untapped heavy crude are said to lie to the north of the Orinoco River) and so he has taken the opportunity to scrutinise the oil companies and to increase their taxes from 1% to 30%.[7] A crippling oil strike by those who worked in the industry was seen down in 2002-3 and, despite its effect, Chavez clung on to power. The failure of the strike allowed Chavez to sack 18,000 oil workers and thus made him more reliant on foreign firms but the increased revenue has allowed him to set up ambitious social programmes, which have encouraged the development of cooperatives and the nationalisation of firms where the owners have gone bankrupt. The Iraq War has also helped

The Failure of Neoliberalism

since it has helped to put the oil price up to \$60 a barrel (when Chavez had long argued that \$20 to \$28 would be a good level). Venezuela still produces about half a billion barrels less than its OPEC quota.

The significant point is that Venezuela has power and it has already entered into a strong alliance with Cuba since Washington's failed attempts to dispose of Chavez. Chavez and Castro are said to converse every evening by telephone and Chavez is now bankrolling a joint trading agreement known as the Bolivarian Alliance (Alba).[8] This has been set up in direct competition with the US attempts at trade agreements. At the November 2005 Mar del Plata meeting referred to at the start of this article Alba had its first success. Standing right next to Bush, the host President Nestor Kirchner delivered a stinging attack on the IMF (for which read "the USA"), and all the trouble it had inflicted on Argentina before and after the collapse. Kirchner had been given \$900 millions by Chavez (who had arrived at the meeting carrying a shovel "to bury Alba") to help pay off Argentina's debts. Within a month (On 15th December 2005) Kirchner was to announce to an astonished world that Argentina had paid back \$9.8 billion dollars in loans to the IMF and therefore was now free of its influence. He stated that:

"The IMF has acted towards our country as a promoter and a vehicle of policies that caused poverty and pain among the Argentine people."

He was no doubt thinking that the IMF did not get Argentina a single peso after the economy collapsed at the end of 2001. Indeed the IMF demanded \$4 billions in repayments in the worst year of Argentina's crisis in 2002. And IMF policies were behind the disaster that Argentina faced in the first years of this century. Whilst the US flourishes on the worst budget deficit in history the IMF (run mainly by the US) runs round telling Latin American (and other) governments that the road to "development" means having a "balanced budget" and "fiscal discipline". The IMF calls on Latin American

“The IMF calls on Latin American governments to persuade them to drop all protection for their citizens in order to attract foreign investment but these “benign” investors then start speculating with the local currency and this begins to undermine any attempt by local firms to produce and sell anything since they do not have a stable currency with which to operate.”

The Victory of “the Cocalero”

governments to persuade them to drop all protection for their citizens in order to attract foreign investment but these “benign” investors then start speculating with the local currency and this begins to undermine any attempt by local firms to produce and sell anything since they do not have a stable currency with which to operate. Neither the EU nor the US would ever allow itself to be put in this position.

Kirchner is no radical or socialist. He has risen through the ranks of the Peronist Movement as a “grey” figure who was not averse to clientelismo (i.e. doing favours for his cronies and ensuring his own appointments). What he has done is to realise that the \$178 billions of debt that Argentina had when he took office was paradoxically a weapon in his negotiations with international creditors. The discussion was no longer about the terms of repayment but how much of the debt could be recovered by creditors. 76% of it was replaced by long-term bonds, which covered only one third of the value of its debt. The IMF was prepared to settle its debt as it hates to have bad debts on its books (as it is bad for its image!). In the past the outcome of such a policy would have been a period of autarky but Chavez’ oil money beckons and not just for Argentina. Uruguay and Brazil are either also negotiating loans or have received them. This is why Venezuela has been let into Mercosur, and Chavez hopes to build a wider anti-American regional system.

But the latest opportunity for the Bolivarian Alliance is Bolivia.

Bolivia is the poorest country in Latin America and in December Evo Morales the leader of the MAS (Movement Towards Socialism) was elected President. Again the answer to the question as to why the first indigeno, [9] and former leader of the coca-growers (cocaleros) union, had won a landslide victory has to be seen in the state of the economy. For the last quarter of a century Bolivia has been an experimental ground for free market policies which have not only seen the gulf between rich and poor get wider but overall has lowered the per capita GDP of the country. It now stands at \$2,800 compared to a Latin American average of \$8,200 (whilst it is \$42,000 for the USA).

“For the last quarter of a century Bolivia has been an experimental ground for free market policies which have not only seen the gulf between rich and poor get wider but overall has lowered the per capita GDP of the country.”

Once again the IMF has been the animator of reforms in which just about everything has been privatised (including the Social Security system). In some ways the roots of the victory of Morales go back to the fight of local people in Cochabamba against Bechtel when it was handed the water privatisation contract in 1999. Since then the country has been in revolt and a succession of the old guard Presidents have failed to stop the agitation (in which hundreds have been killed). Morales' victory was assured when parts of the army called for him to be allowed to assume power. These are the nationalist officers who are not clear where Bolivia is going but are prepared to fight to keep its territorial integrity in the face of the rich white separatist movements in the oil and gas regions of Santa Cruz and Tarija. Morales is in a difficult position in that the popular movement is expecting immediate improvements in living conditions but he is not clear how to deliver them. He has toned down the rhetoric and warned that Bolivia's current institutions could take 50 to 100 years to dismantle. His one hope may be Chavez. If the current programme which uses Cuba's greatest national resource (its doctors) allied to the oil revenue of the Chavez regime can bring some immediate (if cosmetic) benefits in health (already 800 cataract operations have been carried out by Cuban doctors in Venezuela) then Morales may gain some breathing space. Ultimately though he will have to take on the traditional elite who will resent even the mildest reforms. In that case the issue will be decided by the current political infighting that is going on inside the armed forces.

Socialism and Revolution

It will have become obvious that we have been discussing recent developments in Latin America from the point of view of those who wield power. We have by no means exhausted all that can be said on this subject. The various anti neo-liberal politicians that have gained some degree of power in the different countries actually defy bracketing since they all are responding to the attempts by capitalism to solve its global crisis in Latin America by cutting back on social spending in different ways. What is common to them

“After the collapse of Stalinism it may have been supposed that the identification of socialism with state ownership would have been eradicated. Far from it, every Right wing commentator in the US agrees with every old Stalinist, and nearly-as-old Trotskyist, that Castro, Chavez, Morales etc are “socialist”.”

all is the utter barbarism and degradation that capitalism has visited on these societies. The total failure of the capitalist social and economic system is nowhere more clearly revealed.

However Latin America is also a great place for political hyperbole. As we noted above, every general who overthrew another general did not just carry out a “coup d’etat” but proclaimed “a revolution”. Nowadays the hyperbole is on the Left. Every leader who makes some gestures towards the unbearable poverty of the masses is hailed as a “socialist” by all kinds of Left organisations especially in the USA and Europe. Whereas the first hyperbole is farce this second is a crime. After the collapse of Stalinism it may have been supposed that the identification of socialism with state ownership would have been eradicated. Far from it, every Right wing commentator in the US agrees with every old Stalinist, and nearly-as-old Trotskyist, that Castro, Chavez, Morales etc are “socialist”. Every move of social mobilisation from on high is greeted as if it was a genuine mass movement from below instead of as a social mobilisation by a regime. Socialism has nothing to do with state ownership of the means of production. Socialism can only come about through a movement which first overthrows the capitalist state, then establishes its own semi-state which withers away with the last vestiges of class rule, and then the way is open for a truly new mode of production to arise based on the common and free association of all producers. Socialism is neither a state in which the secret police is everywhere as with the G2 in Cuba, nor is it one that does deals with multinationals.

Some Trotskyists pour scorn on this position (which was that of Marx and Engels and even Lenin). They argue that what is happening in, e.g Venezuela, is a real step forward, and that inevitably the contradictions of the situation of someone like Chavez will dialectically lead to the revolution. This only shows that they have learned nothing from the past. They once fawned over Tito, Ben Bella in Algeria even, in some cases Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran as real anti-imperialists and all were the gods that failed. Anti-imperialism which is only anti-americanism is not socialism. And socialism cannot be

created from above. It can only be the result of genuine mass movement, which is not based on “the people” but on the self-conscious activity of the one class, which is globally exploited, the working class. It is to the prospects of the working class in Latin America that we will turn in our next issue [part II, ed.].

Jock

[1] Mercosur is “The Common Market of the South” and was set up in direct opposition to the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) in the 1990s. Venezuela became a full member in December after the failure of the Buenos Aires talks on the FTAA. Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia are associate members of Mercosur.

[2] For more on the terrorism of Western democracy see “Terrorism and Democracy: Imperialism’s Final Frontier” in *Internationalist Communist* 23.

[3] In 2003 it was 179 votes to 3 (the three are always the USA, Israel plus one other, currently the former US colony of the Marshall Islands)

[4] Although statistics in Latin America tend to be so politicised that no really reliable figure exists (so treat even the ones in this article as illustrative!).

[5] Criollos are the descendants of the white Spanish land-holding elite who then led the break with Spain and established republics in which they dominated through the triumvirate of landowners, Army and Church.

[6] Figures from CEPAL (Centre for the Study of Latin America) and UNCLA (United Nations Commission for Latin America) which remain the most reliable sources.

[7] Even this does not compare with the 90% tax Putin imposed on foreign oil companies revenues last year.

[8] Alba is not only the Spanish for “dawn” but contrasts neatly with the Spanish acronym of the US proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas or Alca.

[9] Indian, or member of the pre-Spanish Conquest population of South America. Morales is an Aymara speaker, the other Indian language is Quechua.

Latin America: Between Populism and Imperialism

Part Two: The Working Class in Latin America

Marx always recognised that the basis of the proletariat's antithesis to capitalism was forged on a daily level in the struggle for immediate economic goals. He recognised that if the working class did not fight in this way then it would not develop the collective sense to organise and overthrow capitalism at a later stage. Worse still they would become in his words, reduced to the status of "mere degraded wretches". Striking and organising collectively is not easy. Apart from the ideological domination of the capitalist class which allows it to propagandise against class solidarity (indeed the BBC has banished the word "class" from its bulletins) and persuade workers to stay at work no matter what, there is also the simple material fact that workers have families and a prolonged struggle, especially if it gains nothing, can lead to disaster.

In places like Latin America there are even more enormous difficulties. The state regularly resorts to death squads (i.e. the police out of uniform) to murder anyone who becomes prominent in any fight to organise for even the most minor of claims. This is particularly true in Central America where anyone who takes up the cause of the exploited becomes a target of these death squads. And even when these are faced down by many courageous workers there is then the question of dealing with the unions (sindicatos). In the advanced capitalist countries the unions have become part of the apparatus for labour regulation rather than the representative force of a collective struggle (which they were in the beginning). In Latin America the picture is even more complicated. Frequently the central unions are not only the clients of one political party or another but they actually operate more like mediaeval guilds or the mafia in deciding who can get work and who cannot. And even if all these difficulties are overcome there is still the political problem of not falling into the programmatic arms of the leftwing of capital. As we saw in the first part of this article, the rise of the Left in Latin America has led to a whole series of diverse regimes which are all tinged by one form of populism or another. In Chile, Argentina and Brazil "moderate" socialists are in power. 'Moderate' here means that they will

Solidarity not Nationalism is the Way Forward

do nothing to discourage inward investment and thus try to keep the workers quiet with stirring speeches that things will get better in the future and little more. After four years in power the Workers Party of Brazil has done nothing other than preside over increased poverty in Brazil and only gets the workers' votes as the least worst option. The other illusion is that the problems of daily life can be solved by driving out foreigners from ownership of chunks of the economy. In Latin America nationalisation and nationalism have always been close bedfellows. In this article we look at these issues in the context of two very different strike movements, which broke out in 2006. The first is the strike in the Chilean copper mines and the second is the struggle of the schoolteachers of Oaxaca in Mexico.

The strike in the largest copper mine in the world, Escondida, just outside Antofagasta in Chile ended on September 1st 2006 after lasting 25 days. The strike sent waves of unrest throughout the international bourgeoisie. The owners, the Anglo-Australian consortium BHP Billiton, lost \$16 million a day as production fell to 40% and then to zero. The "left" government of Michelle Bachelet was concerned that the strike would be a signal for a wave of action throughout the Chilean economy and those who need the copper 3/4 like the growing Chinese economy 3/4 all looked on nervously as it wore on and the copper price rose from \$0.80 to \$3 a pound. The "socialist" Chilean government provided a heavy police presence at the mine and are rumoured to have encouraged BHP Billiton to resist the most ambitious of the miners' demands.

Undoubtedly the strength of the miners' response took almost everyone by surprise. After all no Escondida miner had ever been on strike. In the years after the Pinochet coup anyone trying to resist the demands of the capitalists risked their own lives. Pinochet murdered a whole generation of working class activists (however mistaken so many of them were to believe that there was a parliamentary road to a better future under Allende). Now the General has lost his immunity from prosecution for the crimes of the 1970s while one of the victims of his torture squads is President. Such a political background no doubt helped the

“The final package, which the union recommended was approved by 1607 votes to 121, but it is to last only 40 months (!) at a time when world copper prices show no sign of declining.”

open cast mineworkers of Escondida to fight for a better wage. However what really sparked the strike was the high price of copper, which had given BHP Billiton record profits. The Melbourne-based conglomerate recorded a 63% rise in profits to \$13.7 billions the biggest ever profit reported by an Australian company. Most of this went back to the shareholders and this sparked the anger of the miners when the company offered them only a 3% rise in wages. After weeks of negotiations between the unions and the company the union declared a strike. This had the active support of 1200 of the 2000 miners. In some ways the strike had admirable features. The miners did not go home and passively await the outcome of the strike but established a tented city at the mine entrance. Every night union leaders had to report to them as to the state of the negotiations. And during the day the workers busied themselves by carrying out socially useful activities like collecting rubbish from the beach or painting municipal buildings to establish some solidarity with the inhabitants of Antofagasta. And in a sense the workers could claim a victory in that the original wage offer of 3% then became 4 % and finally the company agreed to give 5% plus a \$17,000 one-off bonus as well as implementing a series of health provisions.

However on closer examination it looks as though the union sold them short. The final package, which the union recommended was approved by 1607 votes to 121, but it is to last only 40 months (!) at a time when world copper prices show no sign of declining. The strike was also causing more grief to BHP Billiton than they were prepared to admit. At first they could keep up 40% of production but eventually had to shut down operations altogether. And as the original demand was for 13% and a \$30,000 bonus the miners have hardly made a dramatic gain. It is a reminder that Marx also warned workers not to put too much store on economic victories as the real victory is in the development of the consciousness of the class.

Since the strike ended there have been two developments. Contracts are up for renewal in most of Chile's copper mines including those run by the state and the workers in them have

taken heart from the struggle at Escondida. The 400 Workers at BHP Billiton's \$1 billion Spence copper project have voted to go on strike after rejecting the company offer of 3.8%, which is exactly the rate of inflation in Chile. They have asked for 10.8% plus a bonus and increased benefits. The Government is also bracing itself for a similar struggle at the state-owned Codelco copper firm (which is the biggest copper producer in the world). This has increased its profits from \$4.3 billion last year to \$7 billion this. Codelco workers want a share of these profits but the Government does not want to pay them a rise above the inflation rate (i.e. nothing). This makes the second development at Escondida appear all the more ridiculous.

During the strike union leaders constantly made speeches inflaming nationalist sentiment stating "the copper is ours not the foreigners". Now they have begun a campaign to get the Government to nationalise the mine. This is at best an irrelevance since the same exploitation goes on in both state and privately owned mines. At worst it is much worse than this in that it feeds the illusion that state ownership is workers' ownership. This is not the case as the whole history of the Eastern Bloc and the USSR show. As long as money and wage labour exist so does exploitation. The unions always use nationalist arguments to divert workers from understanding the real nature of exploitation is in the capitalist mode of production itself not in which set of capitalists own which bit of the means of production. The workers of Escondida would be better asking why the union called a strike when other contracts in Chilean copper mines were coming up for negotiation. Instead they fought alone (and as their strike led to a copper price rise BHP Billiton did not lose much). If they had shut down Chilean production totally they would have found it easier to fight.

There is an annual ritual in Mexico. Every May since 1980 the corrupt and powerful Sindicato Nacional De Trabajadores Educativos, the teachers national union (SNTE) stages a strike. The teachers arrive in the central square or zocalo of every regional capital and occupy it, setting up camp for a week and then when some of their demands are met they up tent and return

The Teachers' Strike in Oaxaca - From Ritual to Revolt

“They beat people, dropped tear gas from helicopters and set fire to their belongings, leaving 100 people injured and 2 dead.”

home. This year the same thing happened except that the teachers in Oaxaca demanded not only more money for themselves (at \$500 a month they are regarded as well paid) but also for an increase in the minimum wage rates for all workers in the state. Furthermore they did not go home when some of their demands were met but continued occupying the square until June 14th. At this point the strike tradition met up with the election tradition. In election years the ruling party (which for 80 years was the PRI or Party of the Institutionalised Revolution – a real oxymoron if there ever was one) nowadays the PAN (Party of National Action) create some provocation to set off a popular movement in order to terrify people into voting for the established party. In Mexico it is actually referred to as the voto del miedo (fear vote). On June 14 Ulises Ruiz Ortiz of the PRI, the local Governor of Oaxaca (which is both a state and a city) who is known for his repressive rule (he has ordered 37 political murders since taking office in December 2004), sent the police at dawn to attack the teachers and their families. They beat people, dropped tear gas from helicopters and set fire to their belongings, leaving 100 people injured and 2 dead. The teachers retreated from the zocalo but regrouped and returned to retake the square by throwing rocks and using sticks against the police. A huge demonstration of 400,000 Oaxacans then paraded in solidarity and within a few days the strikers and many groups that joined them had set up an alternative local government called the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) and demanded the resignation of the Governor. This political demand was too much for the union leaders of the SNTE (who just happen to be high up in the PRI). They went into the square and promptly announced that the strike was over and the workers would return to work on July 10th. However they were met with cries of “traitors” and “sell out” and the strike continued. Not only that but the APPO was soon in battle for control of radio and TV stations. They would occupy one then the Government goons would arrive to attack and shut it down so they would move on to another. The State Governor was even reduced to taking out the main TV transmitter

“The movement in Oaxaca by contrast debated boycotting the July 2nd election and aims to change the whole political character of Mexican society. The two movements thus underline that 2006 has been a year of significant change in Mexican political life.”

when local people occupied the TV studios and began broadcasting their version of events. In typical Latin American tradition squads of non-uniformed agents occasionally fired on the demonstrations in order to intimidate those taking part. Eight people, including a child of 12, have been killed in this way and hundreds wounded, but the resistance has not been broken. In some ways the situation is a standoff. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz still remains Governor but his violence and manoeuvring have failed to quell the movement.

Oaxaca is, of course, not the only city to be occupied by a permanent mass demonstration. There has been little publicity about the deeper movement in Oaxaca but the result of the Mexican elections is well known. Lopez Obrador, the candidate of the leftist PRD was stated to have lost the by 0.6% of the vote amidst widespread and blatant vote rigging. Nothing out of the norm for Mexico here but the sense that the oligarchy have deprived the have-nots of a regime which (however unlikely) promises them some relief has led to the questioning of the whole parliamentary charade. The PRD have steered clear of any popular movement and are trying to mobilise an all-class alliance to fight for clean elections. The movement in Oaxaca by contrast debated boycotting the July 2nd election and aims to change the whole political character of Mexican society. The two movements thus underline that 2006 has been a year of significant change in Mexican political life. The humiliations that have been heaped on workers over the last few years are coming home to roost. The plan for the PAN/PRI parties to implement the US' Plan Puebla Panama to build a superhighway across the narrowest part of the isthmus to benefit US multinationals has further alienated Mexicans. They are told that the highway will benefit everyone but they can see that the removal of peasants from the land to make way for the road and its associated infrastructure is a benefit only to big business and the corrupt contract donors in the Government. The ruling class might have got away with this if the economy had been booming but, as we pointed out in the first part of this article, the economic performance of the whole of Latin America has been nothing less than disastrous. Whilst Latin

America was a beneficiary of the post-war boom in the 1960s, the 1980s were called the “lost decade” as per capita growth rates plummeted and the economies south of the Rio Grande actually contracted under the impact of the IMF’s imposition of neo-liberal policies. The 1990s saw a sluggish recovery but currently per capita GDP in Latin America is growing at only 0.2% per annum. Mexico is slightly better than the average at 0.9% but even this is hardly “development” as the IMF keeps talking about. Mexico’s case would be worse were it not for the subventions sent from the 4 million or so Mexicans who have migrated to the USA. The key figure is that the disparity of income in Mexico is greater than in most countries in the world and the gap between rich and poor is getting wider. Mexico has 40% of its population classed as “poor” (i.e. earning less than \$2 a day) and 25% as living in “extreme poverty” (less than \$1 a day). This is actually worse than the world average [1] so the question is not really why is there social unrest but why has it been so long coming.

Possibilities and Problems

According to some reports [2] the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO), although constituted in an ad hoc and informal fashion, although it is dominated by activists from various small organisations whose activities tend to be endorsed by the whole assembly, does operate something like a proletarian organisation. Delegates are mandated to carry out tasks rather than simply elected like parliamentary representatives who can then do what they like. If they fail to do what they are supposed to then they can theoretically be replaced. Such an organisation built around the needs of the struggle from the bottom up is the very opposite of the sort of mobilisations organised by Chavez Bolivarian Movement in Venezuela where the workers carry out actions for the Government in order to ensure its policies are implemented. Such mobilisations are to defend state capitalism [3] rather than to really be a step on the way to a new form of society.

There is no doubt about the bravery and resolve of those involved in this struggle. As popular resistance has increased, as the legitimacy of the system has come under question, so Government violence has

“Each successful struggle offers encouragement to the next struggle and many of the collective experiences of struggle have thrown up new experimental forms of organisation, which may yet turn to take on a proletarian programme.”

increased. 2006 has produced more ruling class violence against workers and peasants than for some time.

However despite all this resistance and determination to take matters into their own hands by the workers in Oaxaca the goal for which they are fighting is still not clear. The replacement of the hated Governor of Oaxaca is hardly the beginning of a new society (and in Oaxacan history is not new since popular movements have already kicked out three such Governors in the past). If the APPO wanted to really change society rather than just promote the rhetoric of change they might first have thought of dismantling the teachers' union whose leaders have so clearly been acting for the Mexican state. And a real revolutionary movement also needs to understand what it is that it wants to change. It is not just about removing one corrupt governor nor even about people power. It may be too early for this but the issue is not confined to Oaxaca or even all Mexico, but is a global issue. What has to change is the social formation, the mode of production. As long as the fruits of our labour are turned into commodities for the capitalists to then use against us then there can be no talk of “revolution”. In this sense overthrowing the currently constituted state power is also not enough as the bases of that power lies on the alienated labour of the working class. Dismantling capitalism is a task that cannot be accompanied by any one section of the working class on its own. The monster can only be destroyed by an international movement which first paralyses the capacity of the great imperialist powers to act, and then spreads over the planet. In Latin America there are signs that the working class is beginning to stir itself not to support the latest populist caudillo [4] or even self-proclaimed “democratic socialists” but is beginning to fight on its own terrain for its own interests. Each successful struggle offers encouragement to the next struggle and many of the collective experiences of struggle have thrown up new experimental forms of organisation, which may yet turn to take on a proletarian programme. Such a programme is absolutely essential if workers are to coalesce around a vision of how to change society. It

cannot come to all workers at the same time but arises here and there in episodic sparks of consciousness. It is only when workers found a party for themselves to put all these sparks of consciousness together that the mass organisations thrown up by the struggle will have something to guide them away from false solutions like Cuban state capitalism or Chavez' caudillismo towards the only alternative to capitalism - communism.

On a world scale this is what the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party is working towards. This is not a re-run of the mistakes of the past. The future World Party of the Proletariat will not be a Stalinist party. It is not an instrument to run a territorial power. It is an international instrument of revolution, which cannot identify with any territory in which the working class may come to power. That is the task of the class wide bodies established in that area and as we have said no one not even the class party of the most far-sighted communists can carry out that task for the workers. They have to do it themselves for themselves. This was one of the great lessons of the Russian Revolution. At the same time the Party is an essential element in putting together all the experiences of workers in the past. Revolution cannot be made starting from scratch every time and the role of the Party is ensure that this does not happen. It will be the first to see the obstacles in the way of liberation some of which, like trades unionism, nationalism, and state capitalism posing as socialism, we have touched on in this brief article.

Jock

[1] According to the International Labour Organisation the employed world working class stands at 2.8 billion of which about half live in poverty (as defined above) and one in five (520 million) live in extreme poverty (i.e. cannot even get \$1 a day). In Mexico it is 1 in 4.

[2] Much of the second half of this article is based on information from a sympathiser in Mexico but the material about the nature of the internal organisation of the APPO is taken from various US Indy media commentators.

[3] Castro had similar mobilisations in the Seventies in Cuba. His Committees for the Defence of the Revolution were however as much about policing every neighbourhood as carrying out any real initiatives to benefit the local people.

[4] Caudillo means leader and is often the term used to refer to Latin American military dictators in the nineteenth century.

IBRP Statement – May Day 2007

Global Capitalism Brings Misery to Millions

*Only the World Working Class
Can End that Misery*

We publish here a draft of the IBRP Mayday statement. It illustrates the arrogance of a ruling class that has become all too accustomed to thinking that they have vanquished all working class resistance to their rule. They couldn't be more wrong. Workers will time and again revive their struggle against capital to ask for more than the crumbs from the capitalists table, they will demand the whole kitchen.

“Everything is for the best in this best of all of all possible worlds” is the latest message from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund about the state of the global economy. As May Day 2007 approaches the IMF celebrated the prospect of a fifth year of high world economic growth. Not to be left out, the World Bank produced a report showing that the numbers of people living on less than a dollar a day has fallen below 1 billion for the first time. The “solid economic growth” of 3.9% per year since 2000 in “developing countries” is credited with this new capitalist achievement. Profits are increasing at new levels as labor productivity expands. All this is grist to the mill of the capitalist propaganda machines that are once again asserting that the capitalist method of production is the only way of doing things. The new “global market” has revived capitalism so that we really have reached “the end of history”.

At the same time we are told that the working class, at least in the advanced countries, is a dying breed and that the class struggle is a thing of the past. We are all citizens now, enjoying the benefits of expanding democracy. Even the protest voice of the anti-globalization movement seems to have gone silent.

Contradictions of the System

In reality the contradictions of the system are increasing not diminishing. Statistical aggregates are never very good guides to social reality and, as always, there is another way of viewing the figures. The fact that the number of people living on less than a dollar a day has fallen from 1.5 billion in 1990 to 985 million in 2007 has as much to do with the declining value of the dollar in that period as to improved living standards. The statistic does not tell us that the average income in the advanced countries in the sixties was about ten times that in the poorer countries, whilst today, that ratio has doubled. Underdevelopment is a necessary condition for global capital accumulation in the era of imperialism, the era of capitalism' parasitism and decay. It does not bring progress but misery to the majority of humanity who create its wealth.

“This year British capitalism is celebrating 200 years since the British Parliament voted to end the slave trade in 1807. What they don’t say is that this was done because wage slavery is a lot more efficient to exploit than chattel slavery (as a slave owner has a material incentive to keep a slave alive but free wage laborers’ costs can be driven below the level of subsistence).”

Inequality is growing both between and within states. 80% of the world’s workforce lives below what the advanced countries would consider the poverty line. And no statistic can tell us about the sum total of human misery of those who are either, not integrated into production, or work only as virtual slaves.

This year [British - ed.] capitalism is celebrating 200 years since the British Parliament voted to end the slave trade in 1807. What they don’t say is that this was done because wage slavery is a lot more efficient to exploit than chattel slavery (as a slave owner has a material incentive to keep a slave alive but free wage laborers’ costs can be driven below the level of subsistence). In China, according to Amnesty International, wage labor costs are kept low, despite labor shortages, because 200 million migrant workers have no legal status to live in the places where the work is. Pay is three to four months in arrears and with no right of residence they have no legal redress against employers. These workers produce the ridiculously cheap commodities of the advanced world and thus allow the wage rates there, especially of those on the minimum, to be frozen or reduced. The cheap cost of Chinese (not to mention Vietnamese and Indian) labor has a knock-on effect on living standards over the rest of the world. Precarious working conditions, lower wages, and a decline in the social provision of the state, are all part of the offensive of a globalized capitalist system of production. And in the advanced countries the myth is propagated that class no longer matters and that the class struggle is a thing of the past.

The myth has some force, given that the rise in exploitation worldwide has meant that the capitalists have made us pay for the crisis of accumulation, which opened, with the devaluation of the dollar in 1971. But like so many phases in history there is a limited time scale for this situation to continue since the contradictions of the system have not gone away but on the contrary have intensified. Today 2% of the world’s wealthy own over 50% of the world’s wealth whilst even in the advanced countries the working class share of national GDP is falling. In short, exploitation is increasing. In the US the lowest earning 10% of the population live better

“Whilst capitalism has enjoyed long periods of comparative social peace these have never lasted. Irrespective of the mountains of debt and the gross speculative activity of finance capitalism a crash in this sphere will not bring a better society of itself. That can only come from the growing anger against the system itself.”

than two thirds of the rest of the world but as the Swiss Bank UBS research showed “we find that low income Americans have been in recession all this century”. There is no greater demonstration that there is no trickle down effect under capitalism but a greater concentration of wealth in the hands of those who do not work whilst the arms of those who do work get ever more but ever thinner. Or as Marx put it in 1847:

“Society as whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other”

The Alternative

And today some capitalists have grown extremely nervous about this. No less a figure than Ben Bernanke, Chairman of the US Federal Reserve has suggested that “global inequalities” are the “greatest threat” to the stability of the system. Investment banks are commissioning research into the global poverty their activities have helped to create. They are right to be nervous. Whilst capitalism has enjoyed long periods of comparative social peace these have never lasted. Irrespective of the mountains of debt and the gross speculative activity of finance capitalism a crash in this sphere will not bring a better society of itself. That can only come from the growing anger against the system itself. In Capital Volume III Marx wrote that “in the last resort the cause of all real crises” lies in the “restricted consumption and poverty of the masses”. Perhaps this is what Mr Bernanke has been reading?

But the crisis in whatever form it manifests itself cannot have anything other than a solution of increasing barbarism unless those masses in the world’s working class develops a consciousness of their own place in the scheme of things, and develop their own program. This is not about yet again simply begging for wage rises, nor is it about trust in a populist who pretends to redistribute wealth, like a Chavez. The history of the twentieth century demonstrated that state-controlled capitalism (as in Stalinist Russia) was still capitalism and not communism. It was not even a step towards it but simply another form of

extorting surplus value from the working class. Today there are enough resources to give everyone a decent existence without having long hours of labor but the current antagonistic system of production will not accede to this. Capital accumulation depends on the poverty of the vast majority. The vast majority, who create the world's wealth hold the key to ending it and to creating a better method of production. The class struggle will not go away although the deliberate censorship of news of thousands of workers strikes around the world makes it seem like that. The collective fight against capitalism's constant attacks has to give birth to a genuinely anti-capitalist movement, which for the first time actually attempts to implement the communist program. But this cannot come about overnight. Every partial struggle will lead to reflection on the nature of the system, and to greater numbers of workers becoming aware of the stakes. It is up to revolutionaries to be part of that struggle, and that reflection, and to win workers to the fight for a future communist society. Although we start from a weak base that is what the groups of the International Bureau are dedicated to, in order to help forge the future World Party of the Proletariat well in advance of such a historic showdown. Such a party will not be an instrument of rule but a leadership in the struggle, fighting against all the false alternatives that a decaying and desperate system will throw in the workers' path.

The real alternative is stark. Either capitalism carries on increasing the misery of millions, creating hunger, famine, environmental disaster and even more war, or the working class re-asserts itself politically as a class and rediscovers its own program. The great issue of history remains their barbarism versus our socialism.

Workers of the World Unite!
We have a World to Win!

*International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party
May 1st 2007*

Platform of the IWG/GIO

Who we are

In April of 2002 the publishers of *Internationalist Notes* (US) and *Notes Internationalistes/Internationalist Notes* (Canada) decided to unify their efforts and constitute themselves as the *Internationalist Worker's Group/Groupe Internationaliste Ouvrier*. The IWG is currently the organizing committee of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party in the US and Canada. This came as the result of years of contact and familiarization with the positions of the IBRP. The comrades of *Battaglia Comunista (Partito Comunista Internazionale)* in Italy and the *Communist Worker's Organisation* in Britain came together in 1984 to form the IBRP and were joined by *Bilan et Perspectives* (France) in 2000.

What defines us as Internationalist Communists

We believe that the world revolutionary party is indispensable for the overthrow of the dictatorship of capital. This party must be the product of worker's struggles and represent the most conscious vanguard elements of the working class. This vanguard is not in any sense an elite group standing above and apart from the struggles of the class. It is not a party of generals giving orders rather it is on the frontlines of the class struggle. The party draws out the lessons of these struggles and points the way forward for the class. It has always been our position that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves. It is a task that cannot be delegated, not even to the most conscious and prepared revolutionary party.

The foundations for this revolutionary party must be prepared for, before the revolution arises; when the revolutionary crisis arises it will be too late. History teaches us that there will be no successful revolution without a revolutionary party in the vanguard of class struggle. This revolutionary

party will not arise spontaneously. It requires the conscious effort of the most conscious layers of the working class to bring it into being. Although the IWG-GIO supports laying the groundwork for a world revolutionary party of the proletariat it does not claim to be that party. We work, within the common framework of the IBRP, towards this goal.

Bourgeois parties

All parties and groups that have claimed to be parties and organizations of the proletariat (Social Democrats, Stalinists, Maoists, Trotskyists, etc.) are enemies of the proletariat and today act as the left arm of the bourgeoisie. They pose as defenders of the working class when in fact they are precisely the opposite. All states that call themselves "socialist" or were once called "socialist" were in fact state-capitalist formations. The organizations that supported these states or cooperated with those that supported those states are the enemies of the proletariat. However the Russian Revolution of 1917-1918 still remains a brilliant inspiration to us. This revolution represents the only overthrow of the capitalist class that achieved any degree of success. This revolution was crushed through civil war (1918-1921) imposed from without and destroyed through counterrevolution from within. As yet there have been no socialist states in the world.

Imperialism

Capitalism is imperialism and imperialism means war. From its very outset the rule of capital began to penetrate into every sphere of social life, into every corner of the globe. This process cannot be altered or reformed. Imperialism represents the most advanced stage of development reached by capitalism, it is not a political or military policy carried out by a government. The imperialist phase of capitalism opened with the outbreak of the First World War. This signified that the division of the world among the centers of imperialist power was finished. From this time onwards the bourgeoisie could only expand at the expense of their rival capitalists in a brutal struggle for the

re-division of the planet. Hence, we as revolutionaries do not side with any imperialism great or small. We do not enter into united fronts with bourgeois parties nor do we mix the interests of the proletariat with any faction of the bourgeoisie.

National Liberation Movements

We do not call for the support of national liberation movements or for national self-defense because these movements mix the interests of the proletariat with the interests of their oppressors. Any calls for the support of movements of national liberation serve the capitalist class by mobilizing workers in the support of the re-division of the world in favor of one faction of the bourgeoisie or another.

Anti-fascism

Anti-fascism is an ideological tool the capitalists use to get workers to defend one faction of the bourgeoisie over another. Fascism is a form of the rule of the bourgeoisie, like Stalinism or Democratic Capitalism. The support for and defense of democratic capitalism will not help workers in their task of overthrowing the rule of capital regardless of the political cloak that the capitalist class wears. We fight capitalism in whatever form it takes.

Elections

Elections serve to suck workers into voting in a system created by the capitalists which gives their oppressors the appearance of a popular mandate. Elections cannot be used to win reforms on the behalf of workers nor can they be used as a platform for spreading revolutionary propaganda.

Unions

In the epoch of imperialism unions have been transformed from organizations for the defense of workers immediate interests into organizations for the control of workers by the bourgeoisie. They

serve the interests of capital by disciplining workers and sabotaging their struggles at every turn. Unions cannot defend workers nor can they overthrow the capitalist class. They cannot be made revolutionary through a change of leadership nor can they be reborn as revolutionary unions.

We stand against the petty sectionalism and self-absorbed narrow-minded focus of petty-bourgeois issue movements. The many facets of capitalist oppression must be understood in their proper historical-material context. We stand against all forms of exploitation and oppression but without the overthrow of the capitalist class the system that breeds exploitation and oppression will remain intact.

Our tasks

As Internationalist Communists our primary tasks are to agitate among workers wherever and whenever possible, to develop and spread the revolutionary press and to lay the groundwork for a theoretically prepared and centralized revolutionary organization. It is through debate and confrontation, the clarification of theory, that revolutionaries are defined from the left swamp.

Our theoretical positions arise from our historical experience as a political tendency. Organizationally we draw our experience from the Internationalists of the Italian Communist Left in its struggles against capitalist counterrevolution – Stalinism, fascism and democracy. This political tendency provides us with a theoretical perspective that is unique when compared to the sterile political tendencies that many of us are familiar with. In the pages of our press we shall attempt to clarify our positions. We ask that you support us in this work.

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