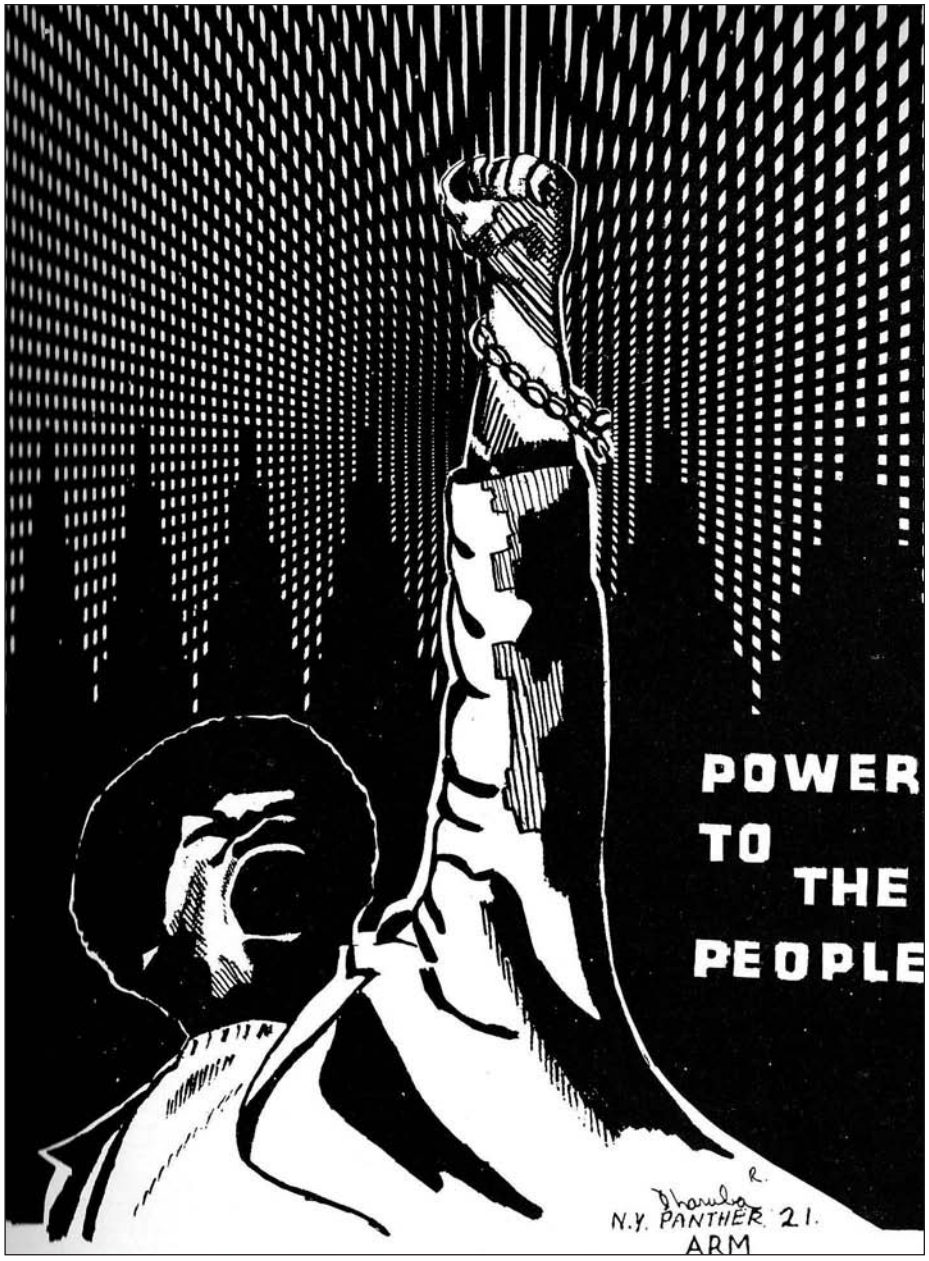

ISO

New Members

Study Packet

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"The boss needs you, you don't need the boss."

A Quick Intro to the ISO

The International Socialist Organization is committed to building an revolutionary organization that participates in the struggles for justice and liberation today—and, ultimately, for a future socialist society. The ISO has branches across the country whose members are involved in helping to build a number of struggles: the movement to stop war and occupation, the immigrant rights movement and other fights against racism, the struggle for women's rights–like the right to choose abortion, opposing anti-gay bigotry, and standing up for workers' rights. The misery that millions of people around the world face is rooted in the society we live in—capitalism, where the few who rule profit from the labor of the vast majority of the population. In the U.S., a tiny proportion of the population enjoys fantastic wealth, while millions of people live in desperate poverty, and many more live paycheck to paycheck. Yet we have the resources to feed, clothe and educate everyone on the planet. A world free of exploitation—socialism—is not only possible but worth fighting for. The ISO stands in the tradition of revolutionary socialists like Karl Marx, V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky in the belief that workers themselves—the vast majority of the population—are the only force that can lead the fight to win a socialist society. Socialism can't be brought about from above, but has to be won by workers themselves. The Democratic Party, much like the Republicans, acts in the interests of Corporate America and the privileged few at the top. Therefore, we do not support their candidates. We see our task as building an independent socialist organization with members organizing in our workplaces, our schools and our neighborhoods to bring socialist ideas to the struggles we are involved in today, and the vision of a socialist world in the future.

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THE WAY A BRANCH WORKS:

Meetings

Most branches meet once a week, these meetings will usually either be: public meetings on some relevant political topic that we advertise broadly; organizing meetings that we use to have discussions of our different areas of work, to gain a clear political perspective on the political issues of the day, or educational meetings to discuss an issue of socialist theory that we use to deepen our understanding of how we can change society.

Socialist Worker Sales

The other major activity that members of the branch participate in each week is selling our newspaper, *Socialist Worker,* and its bi-monthly spanish language supplement, *Obrerro Socialista*. We do this not only to put out an alternative perspective on the crisis in our world than the one we all get from the corporate media, but more importantly to meet and talk to people about socialist politics, and to try to get them involved in activism and in the ISO. Every member should sign up for two sales a week. At the branch meeting, you can find out when and where these sales happen and sign up.

Activist Work

As socialists, we think that the only way that capitalism can ultimately be overthrown is by the active revolutionary struggle of the majority of working people. But during most periods, the majority of workers aren't convinced of the need to get rid of capitalism. People can occasionally be convinced of the need for socialism through discussion alone, but in most cases, people's ideas about society change through struggle—whether it be in workplace struggles against paycuts and layoffs or for unionization, or struggles to end war, against police brutality, and more. Through our participation in various struggles, we hope not only to win victories against war, racism, etc., but also to convince others involved in these struggles of the need to fight for a different type of society altogether—a socialist society. Many of the activists of the 1960s and 1970s became revolutionary socialists as their ideas changed in the course of struggles against the Vietnam War, against women's oppression, and against racism.

The ISO is involved in many struggles, such as building the immigrant rights and anti-war movements, supporting workers' struggles, campaigning against the death penalty, defending abortion rights, and many other issues. Around certain areas of activism that a branch relates to every week, we have fractions set up so that those ISO members involved in a particular area of struggle can meet and collectively strategize and discuss our work in these movements. We also have a branch-building fraction that is more exclusively focused on political educaation and how to build the ISO. Everyone in the branch should be involved in one of these fractions.

Publications

In addition to our weekly newspaper, *Socialist Worker*, and its bi-monthly spanish language supplement, *Obrerro Socialista*, the ISO has several other important publications that we use: *The International Socialist Review,* our bi-monthly magazine. The ISR features longer, more theoretical articles as well as interviews with important activists from struggles around the world. There are excellent archives and resources on our websites. (www.socialistworker.org and

www.isreview.org)

We support *Haymarket Books*—an independent left wing book publisher that has put out a number of cutting edge books in the last few years, ranging from Marxist theory and tradition to detailed historical analysis of important events of the past two centuries. In order to arm ourselves for the fight for a better world, we need to take ideas seriously and learn the lessons of past victories as well as defeats. Haymarket books are an excellent tool for this. Check out their catalogue at haymarketbooks.org

Dues

We live in a capitalist society where very little can be accomplished without money. The ISO is a completely self-funded organization. That means that we don't have any funds outside of what our members themselves can raise. Often we will hold public fundraisers to pay for the weekly operation of our branch (renting meeting space and providing translation services and/or child care) or for special events or actions. But on a national level we rely on our own members' monthly contributions to keep our organization running. That is why every member of the ISO is expected to pay dues. Without these funds, we could not put out any of our publications, nor could we hold meetings—basically, dues enable us to function politically. If members have a bank account and are able to, they should get on dues check-off. This simply means that your dues will automatically be deducted from your bank account every month so the treasurer doesn't have to track people down and get cash from them, and it greatly facilitates the functioning of our branch and our organization as a whole. Talk to the branch treasurer about getting on dues check-off.

Local Branch Contact & meeting info:

Publications

www.socialistworker.org

www.isreview.org

www.haymarketbooks.org

Lee el número más reciente de Obrero Socialista, el suplemento en español de Socialist Worker.

www.socialistworker.org/Obrero.shtml

Where We Stand

Socialism, Not Capitalism
War, poverty, exploitation and oppression are products of the capitalist system, a system in which a minority ruling class profits from the labor of the majority. The alternative is socialism, a society based on workers collectively owning and controlling the wealth their labor creates.

We stand in the Marxist tradition, founded by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, and continued by V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky.

Workers' Power
Workers create society's wealth, but have no control over its production and distribution. A socialist society can only be built when workers collectively take control of that wealth and democratically plan its production and distribution according to human needs instead of profit.

The working class is the vast majority of society and is the key to the fight for socialism. Workers' central role in production give them a social power–by use of the strike weapon–to paralyze the system like no other social force.

Socialism is working-class self-emancipation. Only mass struggles of the workers themselves can put an end to the capitalist system of oppression and exploitation.

We support trade unions as essential to the fight for workers' economic and political rights. To make the unions fight for workers' interests, rank-and-file workers must organize themselves independent of the union officials.

Revolution
We actively support the struggle of workers and all oppressed people for economic, political and social reforms, both as a means to improve their conditions and to advance their confidence and fighting strength. But reforms within the capitalist system cannot put an end to oppression and exploitation. Capitalism must be replaced.

The structures of the present government grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect capitalist rule. The working class needs an entirely different kind of state–a democratic workers' state based on councils of workers' delegates.

We do not support candidates of capitalist parties like the Democrats or the Republicans. We support genuine left-wing candidates and political action that promotes independence from the corporate-dominated two-party system in the U.S.

Internationalism
Capitalism is an international system, so the struggle for socialism must be international, uniting workers of all countries. Socialists oppose imperialism–the division of the globe based on the subjugation of weaker nations by stronger ones–and support the self-determination of oppressed nations. We oppose all immigration controls.
We oppose U.S. intervention in Cuba, the Middle East, and elsewhere.
We are for self-determination for Puerto Rico.

China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, have nothing to do with socialism. They are state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers in these countries against the bureaucratic ruling class.

Full Equality and Liberation
Capitalism divides the working class, based on sexual, racial and national distinctions. The specially oppressed groups within the working class suffer the most under capitalism.

We oppose racism in all its forms. We support the struggle for immigrants rights. We fight for real social, economic and political equality for women and for an end to discrimination against lesbians and gays.

We support the fight for Black liberation and all the struggles of the oppressed. The liberation of the oppressed is essential to socialist revolution and impossible without it.

The Revolutionary Party
To achieve socialism, the most militant workers must be organized into a revolutionary socialist party. The ISO is committed to playing a role in laying the foundations for such a party. We aim to build an independent socialist organization, rooted in workplaces, schools and neighborhoods that, in fighting today's struggles, also wins larger numbers to socialism.

What is Socialism really about?

The Case for Socialism

By Alan Maas

Human need, not corporate greed.
Socialism is based on the idea that we should use the vast resources of society to meet people's needs.

It seems so obvious–if people are hungry, they should be fed; if people are homeless, we should build homes for them; if people are sick, the best medical care should be available to them. A socialist society would take the immense wealth of the rich and use it to meet the basic needs of all society. The money wasted on weapons could be used to end poverty, homelessness, and all other forms of scarcity.

There's no blueprint for what a socialist society will look like. That will be determined by the generations to come who are living in one. But it seems obvious that such a society would guarantee every person enough to eat and a sturdy roof over their heads. The education system would be made free–and reorganized so that every child's ability is encouraged. Health care would be made free and accessible to all, as would all utilities like gas and electricity. Public transportation would also be made free–and more practical and efficient. All of these basic needs would become top priorities.

A socialist society would not only take away the existing wealth of the ruling class, but also its economic control over the world. The means of production–the factories, offices, mines, and so on–would be owned by all of society. Under the current system, important economic decisions are left to the chaos of the free market and to the blind competition of capitalists scrambling for profits. Under socialism, the majority of people would plan democratically what to do and how do it.

Not surprisingly, socialist ideas bring loud complaints from defenders of the capitalist system. Most come down to the same thing: Public ownership and planning would involve a bunch of bureaucrats ordering people around and telling them what they should want.

It's a ridiculous accusation when you consider that the majority of people under capitalism have no meaningful choices about the things that matter the most in their lives–what they do at work and how they do it, what they can buy, how they spend the bulk of their time. These decisions are made in the corporate boardrooms, in the Oval Office, in the judges' chambers–without anyone's input.

Socialist planning would involve the exact opposite of this: the widest possible debate and discussion about what's needed in society and how to achieve it. Instead of leaving decisions about what gets produced and how to a handful of executives, all workers would have a voice in what they do at their workplace. And larger bodies of democratically elected representatives would be able to fully discuss overall social priorities.

If a socialist society mistakenly produced too much of one product, the extra could be given away and resources shifted into making something else. When capitalists make this kind of mistake, factories are shut down, workers are thrown onto the street, food is destroyed to push up prices, and so on. Socialism would put an end to this absurd waste.

In order for planning to work, a socialist society must be democratic –much more so than the current system. Democracy and capitalism don't really go hand in hand. In fact, repressive dictatorships run many so-called models of the free market in less developed countries. Even in countries that brag about how democratic they are, democracy is limited to electing representatives to government every two or four years.

Unfortunately, the record of the former USSR, China, and other so-called socialist countries has created the impression that socialism is a top-down society run by party bosses. This has nothing to do with genuine socialism–or, for that matter, with the whole experience of working-class struggle. Socialism will be democratic in a more fundamental way.

There were many revolutionary upheavals during the twentieth century–Russia in 1917, Spain in the 1930s, Iran in 1979, to mention only a few--and each one created a similar system for the majority in society to make decisions about the organization and priorities of the struggle. Each time, democracy revolved around a system of workers' councils–representative bodies elected from workplaces. All of the different examples of workers' councils over the years have shared common features: the ability of workers to immediately recall elected representatives; wages for representatives no higher than those of the people they represent; elections at mass meetings rather than in isolated voting booths.

We can't predict the exact form of workers' councils in a socialist society. What is important is the democratic principle that these bodies have represented in past struggles. The basic principle common to all revolutions is that representatives must be held accountable to those they represent. This can only be accomplished if discussion and argument thrive in every corner of society--and if representatives are responsible to the outcomes of those discussions. Such a system would be many times more democratic than what currently exists.

The heart of socialism is equality. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels summed up its aim with a simple slogan: "From each according to their

ability, to each according to their need."

This basic concept infuriates the bosses and their ideologues. They reject the idea of a society without power and privilege for a small group. They complain that under socialism, everyone would be paid the same amount. This is true. Roughly speaking, people would receive the same thing–there's no reason for it to work any other way.

"Aha!" comes the response. "You'd pay a brain surgeon the same as you'd pay a truck driver! Then no one would put in the work to become a brain surgeon."

Such a statement is telling about the priorities of capitalist society–that the only reason people would try to heal the sick is for money. Without financial incentive, the logic goes, no one will pursue work that requires a lot of education, training, and skill.

What a travesty! Socialism would be about giving people the opportunity to do what they really want. It would encourage them to become doctors, scientists, artists, or anything else they might desire–unlike now, where people's access to education is limited by their access to cash.

Capitalism actually stifles people's creativity. Only a minority of people are asked to put their minds to the running of society–and most of them do it for the purpose of making themselves richer, not for achieving any common good.

We would use our technological knowledge to eliminate boring or dangerous jobs as much as possible–and share out equally the tasks we couldn't automate. The goal would be to free all people to do the work they love–and to give them the leisure time to enjoy the wonders of the world around them.

Imagine what society would be like if it mattered what ordinary people thought–if it mattered what an assembly line worker thought about the pace of work and whether it was necessary or what a hospital worker thought about the availability of medical resources and how to use those resources. That's a world where people would become fully alive in a way they never will under capitalism.

Can the system be fixed?

The basic idea of socialism–that the resources of society should be used to meet people's needs–seems like the simplest of proposals. The more difficult question is how to achieve it. How can society be transformed? In high school civics class, the textbooks explain that political change takes place "through the system." The U.S. government represents the "will of the people," we're taught, and people who want to "make a difference" should use the democratic process–by working for political candidates they like and maybe even running for office themselves.

But to judge from the 2000 election, the chances of "making a difference" aren't too good. The main qualification for a serious candidate for president, for example, had nothing to do with "political vision" or any of the overblown phrases thrown around in the media. Instead, it was the candidate's ability to raise outrageous sums of money from wealthy donors. George W. Bush got the jump on the other candidates. By the beginning of 2000, almost a year before the election, he had raked in $67 million–three times the existing record set by Bill Clinton in 1996.

Republicans have always been better than Democrats at getting money from rich donors, but the Democrats regularly rake in big bucks from corporations. And there are plenty of players who give money to both sides. During the 1992 election, for instance, Atlantic Richfield, Archer Daniels Midland, RJR Nabisco, Philip Morris, and the Tobacco Institute all gave more than $100,000 to both parties.

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During the 1998 election campaign, contributions to the major parties hit a record $1.6 billion. Business gave 63 percent of the cash–compared to less than 3 percent from unions, which are regularly denounced by Republicans as trying to control Washington. Election 2000 was no different: From the presidential race on down, the important contests were all but decided by a special class of voters–the millionaires who voted with their checkbooks.

Big business doesn't give away all that money for the hell of it. They expect something in return. A few years ago, Republican House leaders were caught allowing business lobbyists to actually write the legislation that gutted environmental regulations. Within months of taking office, George W. Bush was in hot water for letting his oil industry pals set energy policy for the nation. Even if most politicians aren't so brazen, this is basically how things are done in Washington.

Of course, money aside, a politician can't win an election without the votes of ordinary people. This is why candidates campaign on how they'll improve people's lives. But this is a fraud. Politicians under capitalism are the public face of a system set up for the rich. Their job is to say one thing to the majority of the population, then to do another for those they really serve. You don't need to look any further than Bill Clinton's presidency for a prime example of this.

After 12 years of Ronald Reagan in the White House, Bill Clinton was a breath of fresh air to millions of people. He promised "change." He promised to "put people first." He promised universal health care. He promised to fight discrimination against gays and lesbians, to fight racism, and to defend a woman's right to choose. He also promised labor unions that he would ban the permanent replacement of striking workers.

But Clinton began to break his promises even before taking office. Within months, most of his promised agenda had disappeared. We ended up with "don't ask, don't tell" for gays in the military, for instance, and he didn't lift a finger as legislation to ban the use of scabs during strikes went down to defeat in the Senate–which was controlled at the time by the Democrats. He took two years to screw up health care reform, compromising on one provision after another in the hope of staying on the good side of the health care bosses. And this was only the beginning.

Clinton signed into law legislation that Ronald Reagan or George Bush could only dream of. In 1995, Clinton agreed to a proposal to balance the federal budget that required across-the-board spending cuts. Departments like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency suffered the consequences. And the next year, Clinton signed the Republican Party's version of welfare "reform." Clinton promised to pursue bipartisanship–a code word for more "lite" versions of Republican proposals.

Politicians like Bill Clinton are a dime a dozen. The only characteristic that distinguishes Clinton is the skill with which he talked out of both sides of his mouth.

Politicians claim they're answerable to "the people." But they're really answerable to the bosses who control U.S. society. President Woodrow Wilson admitted as much at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Suppose you go to Washington and try to get at your government. You will always find that while you are politely listened to, the men really consulted are the men who have the big stake--the big bankers, the big manufacturers and the big masters of commerce…. The masters of the government of the United States are the combined capitalists and manufacturers of the United States.*

Nearly a century later, Wilson's words ring as true as ever. Both of the main political parties in the U.S. are run in the interests of those who control the purse strings–and they, overwhelmingly, are the bosses.

Of course, Republicans and Democrats aren't exactly alike. On any given issue, most Republicans are likely to be more conservative than most Democrats, but the differences between the two parties are minor in comparison to the fundamental similarities that unite them. Nevertheless, these differences are important in terms of how the two parties are seen by most people. It's been many years since anyone thought of the Republicans as anything other than the party of big business. But the Democrats have the reputation as the party of the people–the mainstream party that looks out for the interests of labor and minorities.

The truth is quite different.

The Democratic Party's image dates back to the Great Depression of the 1930s and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal reforms. These reforms laid the basis for many of the programs that we associate with the federal government today–like Social Security and unemployment insurance. These reforms were important victories, and it's no wonder that workers look back on the politicians associated with them as friends of labor.

That's not how Roosevelt thought of himself, however. "[T]hose who have property [fail] to realize that I am the best friend the profit system ever had," Roosevelt said. In fact, Roosevelt carried out the New Deal reforms as a conscious effort to head off a social revolt sparked by the Great Depression. In return, he got labor's votes–cementing the labor movement's misplaced loyalty to the Democrats, which lasts to this day.

Both of the main political parties in the U.S. are run in the interests of those who control the purse strings–and they, overwhelmingly, are the bosses.

The Democrats played much the same role during the social upheavals of the 1960s. Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson today have an entirely unearned reputation as antiracists because they eventually supported some civil rights reforms. But they had to be dragged into it. Kennedy did his best to ignore the growing civil rights movement in the U.S. South, and it was only after the Black struggle grew to explosive proportions that Johnson–a Southern Democrat with a long record of opposing civil rights–pushed through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the two key pieces of 1960s civil rights legislation.

The Democrats succeeded in co-opting a number of leaders of social movements, eventually putting them in the position of managing the system. For example, in the late 1960s, the Democratic Party–once the party of Southern slavery–opened its doors to Black politicians. The number of Black elected officials shot up to more than 10,000. Most major U.S. cities have had an African American mayor for some period of time. But these politicians–elected with the hope that they would challenge racism–have carried out the same attacks. They've ended up imposing the cuts in social services and defending racist police.

But, in spite of their record, at every election the Democrats have been able to count on their reputation as champions of workers and

the poor. Consider the fact that Bill Clinton–after all of his broken promises–had the uninterrupted support of organized labor and liberal organizations. In fact, these groups at various times disarmed opposition to Clinton's policies. On the eve of Clinton's signing of welfare reform legislation in August 1996, Marian Wright Edelman, head of the Children's Defense Fund, called off a planned demonstration in Washington, D.C., at the urging of the White House.

In fact, the bosses got away with welfare reform without much of a fight at all. That's because the liberal organizations that could have organized a response insisted that it was more important to stand behind Clinton for fear of getting something worse–a Republican victory in the 1996 election.

This is a perfect example of the politics of "lesser evilism." The argument–which emerges at every election–is that people should hold their noses and vote Democrat to avoid the greater evil of a Republican victory. The problem is that in voting for the lesser evil, you usually get the lesser and the greater evil. Bill Clinton is a case in point. He certainly talked a better game than George Bush or Bob Dole, but in office, he enacted legislation that could have come from their playbooks. So, though the "lesser evil" won in 1992 and 1996, the Republican agenda--getting "tough on crime," enforcing "fiscal responsibility," gutting the social safety net–took center stage.

Politicians won't make any concessions to our side if they know we're in their back pockets. If they think they can take the support of liberal organizations for granted, then they'll sign laws like welfare reform without a second thought–on the assumption that they can win a few more votes in the next election by appealing to the right.

That's why we need an independent alternative to the twin parties of capitalism.

The limits of reform

Not every country that calls itself a democracy is dominated by two political parties that stand for capitalism.

Most countries of Western Europe have mass parties associated with the labor movement–and by the late 1990s, these parties were running the governments in France, Germany, Britain, and elsewhere.

So would we come closer to socialism in the U.S. if we could vote for a political party that stood for the working class rather than the capitalist class? Such a party would certainly be an advance over what exists now, but ultimately, socialism can't come through the ballot box.

We're encouraged to believe that government stands above society–that it's the negotiator between competing groups like employers and workers. But this is an illusion. Governments in capitalist societies are tools of the ruling class. One reason for this has already been shown–that the bosses have a lot bigger say in what our elected representatives decide to do–but there's more to the question.

Governments consist of much more than elected representatives. Bureaucrats–who aren't answerable in any way to the rest of society–make crucial decisions affecting people's lives. Then there's the judicial side of the U.S. government. Federal judges all the way up to the Supreme Court never face an election. And standing beyond all this are what Frederick Engels called "bodies of armed men"–the police and the army. Formally, the Pentagon may be answerable to elected politicians. But, in reality, it's a power unto itself.

Because of this, even politicians with every intention of "making a difference" find that rather than pulling the levers of power, the levers of power pull them. They end up managing the system they expected to change.

Suppose that you were elected president and were determined to impose a tax on the rich to pay for a system of universal health care. Within minutes of taking office, you would get a visit from your appointed treasury secretary and the chair of the government's central bank, the Federal Reserve, whom you didn't pick. They would tell you that Wall Street wanted nothing to do with your plan unless you compromised. If you persisted, the bosses would take further action--perhaps sending their money out of the country so it couldn't be taxed and causing turbulence on the financial markets until you cried "uncle."

The "realistic" response of politicians is to make concessions--to try to find some arrangement that's acceptable to all sides. But when this becomes the priority, politics turns into the art of compromise instead of a campaign to accomplish something. And pressure to compromise shapes the plans and outlook of the people trying to make change in a system rigged against them.

Beyond all of these considerations, many of the most important decisions about people's lives have nothing to do with decisions made by elected officials or government bureaucrats. For example, no politician voted for the tens of thousands of layoffs happening around the U.S. The only people who had a say in that decision are company executives–answerable, if at all, to the tiny handful of people rich enough to own a significant chunk of the company's stock.

This is why the system can't be reformed. Elected representatives are only one part of government under capitalism. And in a number of tragic examples in countries around the world, they've turned out to be a dispensable part–when sections of the ruling class have decided to ditch democracy and rule by brute force.

Chile provides the most famous example of this. The socialist Salvador Allende was elected president in 1970 on a fairly mild program of reform that included nationalizing parts of the economy. Many people took this as a sign that socialism could be voted into existence. But for the next three years, Chile's bosses–and their international partners, especially in the U.S.–did everything they could to sabotage Allende. They succeeded in forcing him to compromise, but even this wasn't good enough. When the time was ripe, Chile's generals made their

move–launching a bloody coup that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Chilean workers.

The truth is that even if they aren't bought off, politicians don't have the power to make the kind of change that would really transform society. Instead of trying to elect well-intentioned politicians to make what changes they can, we need to overturn the whole system. That is what a revolution is all about: taking away the power of the people at the top of society to make unaccountable decisions that affect our lives; getting rid of a state machine that is organized to preserve this power; and organizing a completely different and more democratic system of workers' councils to decide how society should be run.
This doesn't mean that socialists don't care about reforms. In fact, outside of revolutionary upheavals, socialists spend most of their efforts mobilizing pressure to win changes in the existing system. Reforms make workers lives easier and increase their power in the here and now. And they make people more confident in the struggle to win further change. As the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg wrote. "Can we counterpose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing social order, our final goal, to social reforms?"

Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to [socialists] the only means of engaging in the proletarian class war and working in the direction of the final goal–the conquest of political power and the suppression of wage labor. Between social reforms and revolution there exists…an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.

Socialists fight for reforms, but reforms by themselves aren't enough. They can always be taken back if the movement retreats. We need revolution because capitalist society can't be permanently changed in any other way.

"If there is no struggle, there is no progress"

Socialists who talk about the need for a revolution in order to fundamentally change society are often accused of being unrealistic and utopian. The argument starts in different ways–people are bought off by the system, they're made stupid by television and popular culture, the U.S. government is too powerful to challenge. But it always ends with the question: How can a revolution ever take place in the U.S.?

Actually, the question isn't whether a revolution can take place in the United States. The question is whether another revolution can take place.

In a little more than two centuries, the U.S. has had two revolutions. The first, in 1776, overthrew colonial rule by Britain's monarchy. That struggle spread to every corner of society and produced a new nation organized around a representative government and perhaps the widest system of democracy known to the world at that point. There were gaping holes–the terrible crime of slavery was left untouched, for example–but the new United States was an advance over what existed before.

The U.S. experienced another social revolution 90 years later: the Civil War of 1861-65, which destroyed the Southern system of slavery. Today, credit for "freeing the slaves" usually goes to Abraham Lincoln and perhaps a few army generals. But the North never would have won the war against slavery without the active participation of masses of people. Black slaves themselves played a crucial role in sparking the struggle, as did the agitators of the abolitionist movement in the North. And it was the courage and sacrifice of soldiers in the Northern army--many of whom started without a clear idea of the war's aim, but became convinced over time of the need to abolish slavery–that transformed U.S. society.

The Revolutionary War and the Civil War weren't socialist revolutions. They were revolutions against national oppression and slavery that left the economic setup of capitalism intact. Nevertheless, these struggles fundamentally shaped U.S. society–and they disprove the picture of a country that's always been stable and quiet.

What's more, the years since have produced other uprisings that have shaken U.S. society to its foundations–the struggle for the eight-hour day during the 1880s; the "great red year" of 1919, when one in five U.S. workers was on strike; the 1930s movements, including the battle to win mass unionization; and the 1960s, which opened with the civil rights movement in the South and closed with struggles that questioned everything about U.S. society, from the brutal war in Vietnam to the oppression of women and gays and lesbians.

This way of looking at the past is very different from what passes for history in school. To begin with, the way history is usually taught–remembering the names of famous people and the dates when they did something important–is upside down. The course of history depends, first and foremost, not on what a few "great men" did or thought but on the struggles of huge numbers of people, especially during the times when they organized themselves in rebellions and revolutions. It's not that figures like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are unimportant. But what they did and what they're remembered for today was shaped by the actions of masses of people who aren't remembered at all.

Something else flows from a socialist view of history. We're encouraged to believe that political and social change, if it happens at all, takes place at a safe, gradual pace. Let any group of people organize to show their opposition to an injustice, and they're certain to be told to be patient–to let the system work as it has in the past. But this goes against the whole history of the struggle for justice and equality. For example, in the first half of the nineteenth century, virtually every U.S. politician, North and South, believed that the enslavement of Blacks would die out eventually if the Southern slave system was left alone. Yet, the power of slavery only grew. It took a civil war to put an end to this horror.

The U.S. is supposed to be the most stable of countries. But revolutions and social upheavals are a constant theme. And most of the reforms that workers take for granted today are a product of those upheavals. For example, unemployment insurance was introduced as part of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal program of the 1930s. Roosevelt didn't come up with the idea. He was forced by the crisis of the Great Depression and by massive social pressure to adopt an idea put forward by workers.

Of course, political leaders like Roosevelt always end up with the credit in history textbooks for the reforms they were forced to carry out. But this doesn't change the fact that they were forced to act–regardless of their political affiliation. Consider this: Republican president Richard Nixon launched more antidiscrimination and affirmative action programs than Democratic president Bill Clinton. That's not because Nixon was more liberal–on the contrary, he was a miserable right-winger. But Nixon was under pressure to act from the mass social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s–something Clinton didn't face.

The great abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass made all this plain with these words:
The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle…. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its mighty waters. The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.

The U.S. is supposed to be the most stable of countries. But revolutions and social upheavals are a constant theme. And most of the reforms that workers take for granted today are a product of those upheavals.

A power greater than their hoarded gold?
For hundreds if not thousands of years, most societies around the world have been divided between exploiters and exploited--between a ruling class of people that runs society in its own interest and much larger exploited classes whose labor is the source of their rulers' wealth and power. Under each system, the biggest conflicts have been between these classes--over who rules, who gets ruled over, and how.

As Marx and Engels put it in The Communist Manifesto:
The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight.

In all of these societies, the oppressed have dreamed of a future world of equality and justice where their oppression would end. And they have fought for it–from the slave rebellion against the Roman Empire led by Spartacus to the peasant uprisings in Europe, among others. So the ideals of socialism aren't new. But the possibility of achieving them is the product of only the last few centuries–in most parts of the world, of just the last 100 years.

Why? Because socialism can't be organized on the basis of scarcity. Unless there's enough to go around, there's certain to be a scramble over who gets what. That scramble is bound to produce a class society–a society in which one group of people organizes the system to make sure they get enough, even if others go without. Only under capitalism has human knowledge and technology been raised to the point where we can feed every person on the planet, clothe them, put roofs over their heads, and so on.

So, under capitalism, there's no longer any natural reason for poverty to exist. But abolishing poverty means getting rid of the system that causes it–and that requires a social force capable of overthrowing it. Marx and Engels argued that, in the process of its development, capitalism produced "its own gravediggers"–the working class, with the power to overthrow the system and establish a new society not divided between rulers and ruled.

Why did Marx and Engels talk about the working class? Not because workers suffer the most under capitalism or because they're morally superior to any other group. Socialists focus on the position that workers occupy in the capitalist economy. Their labor produces the profits that make the system tick. The working class as a whole has a special power to paralyze the system–to bring the profit system to a halt by not working.

You can see this power in situations that fall well short of revolution. In March 1996, General Motors provoked a strike of 3,200 autoworkers at two Dayton, Ohio, factories that made brake parts for most GM vehicles. It was a huge blunder. Within a week, the walkout had crippled GM's production across North America. All but two of the company's assembly plants had to close. GM lost about $1 billion in profits in 15 days. Management gave in.

By the same token, a general strike by workers throughout the economy can paralyze a whole country–and bring a government to its knees. That's what happened in Poland in 1980 with the revolt of the Solidarnosc trade union. The upheaval began with a strike by shipyard workers in Gdansk, but it soon spread to involve 10 million workers across the country. Within weeks, democratically organized workers' committees sprang up to organize the strike and to make decisions about how to provide essential services. The so-called socialist government–a dictatorial regime with a long record of vicious repression–was powerless to restore order for more than a year. Before the

strike, Polish workers would never have guessed that they could rock a seemingly all-powerful police state. But they cut off the lifeblood of the system: the wealth they created by their labor.

Of course, other groups in capitalist society can, and do, fight back. For example, during the 1960s, the biggest upheavals in the U.S. involved African Americans fighting for civil rights and against racism. These were magnificent struggles that won real and lasting changes. And they inspired other parts of society to fight. But, by themselves, Blacks didn't have the power to transform the whole system. First, they were a minority of the population. And, organized as a community, African Americans had the moral power to embarrass and persuade--but not the kind of economic power to hit the bosses where it hurts.

Struggles organized on the basis of class have the potential of uniting the working majority in society. They hold out the promise of overcoming divisions among the have-nots—and of uniting people to fight on a common basis, not only for the demands they share, but also for the demands of specific groups. What's more, workers' struggles represent a direct threat to the wealth of the ruling class—the source of their power over society.

But workers only have power if they're united. "Labor in white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in Black skin," Marx wrote about slavery in the United States. His point can be extended to every form of bigotry and discrimination. That's why it's crucial for socialists to champion all fights against oppression. These struggles are just in their own right. But they're also critical in building working-class unity.

Unity has to be fought for. But there's something about the nature of work under capitalism that pushes workers to fight—and to organize that fight in a collective way. First of all, the whole dynamic of capitalism is for the bosses to try to increase their wealth by squeezing more profits out of workers. That means trying to get workers to work harder for the same or less pay. This drive for profit puts the bosses on a collision course with workers.

Moreover, capitalism forces workers to cooperate with one another at work—and that goes for resistance as well. Individuals can stand up for their rights at work, but only to a certain point. It's too easy to get rid of troublemakers if they stand alone. Solidarity is necessary to win the bigger fights.

Because capitalism brings workers together in large numbers, it's easier for workers to discuss and debate the way forward and to make collective decisions about what needs to be done. And the cooperative arrangements of work lay the basis for organizing a future society based on collective control. Workers can't divide up a workplace—with one taking the drill press, another a computer terminal, another a Xerox machine. They have to work together to make use of the resources around them.

"Solidarity forever" and "An injury to one is an injury to all" are old slogans of the labor movement. But they're more than good ideas. They are absolutely necessary for workers to win.

When Marx and Engels were writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, the working class was tiny—perhaps two or three million people, concentrated in Britain, a few countries in northwestern Europe, and along the northeastern coast of the United States. Today, there are more workers in South Korea than there were around the world in Marx and Engels' time.

Everywhere across the globe, people's lives are shaped by the fact that they have to work for a boss to survive. But the flip side of this reality is that workers have enormous power. They have shown that power in struggles in every corner of the world. The final words of Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto are more relevant today than ever before: "The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."

Can workers change society?

If we were to judge only from what we see around us, it might be hard to have confidence that the majority of people can organize to win fundamental change. After all, most working people aren't revolutionaries. Most of the time, they accept a number of ideas that justify the status quo—from the old cliché that you can't fight city hall to the belief that people at the top of society are somehow specially qualified to run it. This is partly because we're continually exposed to different institutions that are in the business of reinforcing these prejudices. The mass media are one example. Watch the local television news, and you'll see sensationalized stories about crime and violence—while discussions about the real issues that affect people's lives get shortchanged. The poor are stereotyped and scapegoated, while the wealth and power of the rich are celebrated. Even shows meant as entertainment tend to reinforce the conventional wisdom.

Likewise, it's easy to see how the education system encourages conformity. Except for the minority of students being trained to rule society, the experience of school is usually alienating. Students are taught to compete against each other—and ultimately to accept the conditions they see around them.

With all the selfish and mean-spirited ideas actively promoted by these voices of authority, it's a wonder that any sense of solidarity survives under capitalism. But it plainly does. This is most obvious in the outpourings of charity in cases of social crisis, like a famine or an earthquake—even when they take place halfway around the world. The kindness and generosity of ordinary people is boundless. But even on a day-to-day basis, society simply couldn't function without a basic sense of cooperation and sacrifice among ordinary people—within families, among coworkers, and so on.

Capitalist society obscures this basic decency—because the system is organized around greed. Obviously, those in charge get ahead by being as greedy as possible. But working people are forced—whether

they like it or not–to participate in a rat race that they have no control over. They're pitted against one another and required to compete just to keep their job or maintain their standard of living–much less get ahead.

As a result, the idea of people uniting for social change can seem distant and unrealistic. For most people, the experience of their lives teaches them that they don't have any power over what happens in the world–and that they don't know enough to have an opinion about it anyway. Powerlessness produces what appears to be apathy among people, about their own future and the future of society.

This is why it isn't enough for socialists to talk about why socialism will make an excellent alternative to capitalism. It's also necessary to talk about the struggle to get there-because struggle transforms people and gives them confidence in their own power. As Marx put it:
Revolution is necessary not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fit to found society anew.

The act of fighting back is the first step in challenging the prejudices learned from living in the dog-eat-dog world of capitalism. This can be seen in even the smallest strike. Strikes almost always start over a specific workplace issue–for instance, the demand for higher wages or better conditions. But whatever the original grievance, striking workers who may have thought of themselves as law-abiding citizens are acting in a way that goes against what society teaches them.

Fighting back also requires unity. Striking workers are often forced to question the divisions built up in their ranks–between Black and white, men and women, native born and immigrant. As a strike goes on, feelings of solidarity and a sense of the wider issues at stake start to become as important as the original issues

The changes that take place can be profound. Take the "War Zone" labor struggles in Illinois in the mid-1990s. The center of the War Zone was Decatur, Illinois, a small industrial city where workers were on strike or locked out at three companies–the food processor A. E. Staley, the heavy equipment manufacturer Caterpillar, and the tire maker Bridgestone/Firestone.

Several months into the struggles, activists organized a multiracial march to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday–in a town where the Ku Klux Klan had organized, both before and since. The War Zone workers were drawing on King's statements about the fight for civil rights to explain what their struggles were about–and to show that they had come to see that their fight for justice in the workplace was linked to other fights in society.

In the course of any struggle, activists committed to the fight around a particular issue have to grapple with questions about their aims. What kind of change do they want, and how do they achieve it? Their answers evolve with their experiences.

Think of the Black college students who joined the civil rights movement in the 1960s. In 1960, one member of the newly formed Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) could tell a reporter that she was motivated by traditional American values. If only Blacks were given educational opportunities, she said, "maybe someday a Negro will invent one of our [nuclear] missiles." A few years later, many SNCC members considered themselves revolutionaries. They had experienced the Freedom Rides to desegregate interstate bus lines, the murder of civil rights workers during the Freedom Summer voter-registration project in 1964, and the Democratic Party's betrayal of civil rights delegates at its 1964 national convention. These experiences convinced them that the struggle against racial injustice could only be won by linking it to the fight against other injustices–and for a different kind of society altogether.

This transformation was repeated throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. White college students who had volunteered for Freedom Summer used the skills they learned from the civil rights movement to organize the struggle against the U.S. war in Vietnam. Veterans of the anti-war movement in turn launched the struggle for women's rights, including the right to choose abortion. The modern gay and lesbian movement was born in 1969 with the formation of the Gay Liberation Front--an organization named after the liberation army in Vietnam.

Though the media love to dismiss them today, the struggles of the 1960s are proof that ideas can change with enormous speed. In periods of social upheaval, millions upon millions of people who focused their energy on all sorts of things suddenly turn their attention to the question of transforming society. The biggest struggles of all–revolutions that overturn the existing social order–produce the most extraordinary changes in people. What's most striking about the history of revolutions is the way that ordinary people, who are trained all their lives to be docile and obedient, suddenly find their voices.

The caricature of revolution passed off by many historians is of a small group of heavily armed fanatics seizing control of the government–and running it to enrich themselves. But this has nothing to do with genuine socialism. A minority–even a minority that genuinely wants to improve the lives of the majority–can't carry out a socialist revolution. That's because the heart of socialism is mass participation. As the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky put it:
The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events. In ordinary times, the state–be it monarchical or democratic–elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business–kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime…. The history of a revolution is for us first of all a history of the forcible

entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny.

The right-wing writers who pass judgement on revolutions also tend to focus on the toppling of governments–the armed insurrection to seize political control. But this is only the final act of a revolution. It's the climax of a much longer period of struggle in which the rulers of society face a growing crisis–at the same time as workers become more confident of their own power.

At the beginning of the process, the goals for change can be modest–a few reforms in the way the system operates. But the struggle to change this or that aspect of society raises deeper questions. People begin to see the connections between the struggles they're involved in and other issues–and the nature of the system itself. Each of these struggles gives workers a further sense of their ability to run society for themselves. The act of taking over political power is the final step of a revolution that has already been felt in every workplace, in every neighborhood, and in every corner of society.

A revolutionary socialist party?

Ideas can change very quickly in struggle. But they don't change all at once. In every battle, there are arguments over what to do next. Some people will see the need to step up the struggle and to make links to other political issues. Other people will argue that militant action makes matters worse. The outcome of the arguments shapes the outcome of the struggle.

This is where the intervention of socialists–who can express the experience of past struggles and suggest a way forward–is crucial. An organization of socialists can unite people so they can share their experiences and hammer out an understanding of how to fight back from day to day–in a workplace or community or at a school. The strength of such an organization is in the range of experiences and political understanding of all of its members.

An organization of socialists can unite people so they can share their experiences and hammer out an understanding of how to fight back from day to day–in a workplace or community or at a school. The strength of such an organization is in the range of experiences and political understanding of all of its members.

None of this would be of much use to a political party like the Democrats. The Democratic Party exists for one reason: to get Democrats elected to office. For that, it needs its supporters once or twice every couple of years to turn out to vote.

Socialists have very different goals, so our political party will have to look very different. We need socialists in every workplace to agitate around fightbacks on the shop floor. We need socialists in every neighborhood to take up the questions of housing, police violence, health care, and everything else that comes up. We need students to agitate on college campuses. We need socialists in every corner of society inhabited by working people, and we need these socialists working nonstop–organizing struggle and carrying on political discussions.

This commitment to struggle is part of our socialist tradition. Socialists have always been at the forefront of the fight for a better world. They have been leaders in the union movement, in the movement against racism, in the fight against war, and in many others.

To achieve its aims, a revolutionary socialist organization has to be more democratic than other political organizations under capitalism. We need to bring together the experiences of every socialist–and to make those experiences part of the common basis on which we all organize.

But a socialist organization has to be centralized. Why the need for a centralized organization? Because the other side is organized. The basis of their power is the profit they make at workplaces–highly organized systems built around exploiting workers. Their side organizes political propaganda through the media. Their side responds to resistance with a highly organized and disciplined police force and army.

We need an organization for our side–one that can coordinate actions not just in one workplace or even one city but around the country. We need an organization that can put forward a common set of ideas–using its own newspapers, magazines, and books. Socialists have to be able to fight around the same program, whether they're teachers, autoworkers, or college students, and whether they live in Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles–and, ultimately, in Seoul, London, or Johannesburg.

The bigger the struggle, the more complex and urgent the political questions. In the Russian Revolution of 1917, the hated Tsar was toppled in a matter of a few days. That part of the revolution was almost completely spontaneous. No socialist organization picked the date for the demonstrations that snowballed into a mass movement. The accumulated hatred for the Tsar and his regime was all that was necessary.

But the issue of what came next raised questions that couldn't be answered with spontaneous action. The government that came to power after the Tsar included people who called themselves socialists–and who claimed that the revolution had to be demobilized in order to consolidate the people's victories. Were they right? What should be done to make sure the Tsar never came to power again? How could democracy and justice be spread even further?

These questions were hotly debated throughout Russian society. The reason they were ultimately given socialist answers is because a tried-and-tested revolutionary socialist organization existed to make its case. On the basis of its past experience and its roots among workers across Russia, the Bolshevik Party was able to recognize and make sense of the situation in all its complexity–and to express the aims of socialism that workers favored.

Sadly, the need for socialist organization has been proven many times since–but in the negative. Too many times, mass mobilizations of workers have thrown the status quo into question–only to allow it back in because socialists weren't in a position to make the case on how to go forward. Such an organization doesn't form overnight. It spends decades preparing itself to be a voice at the crucial time.

This, then, is the case for why you should be a socialist. As individuals on our own, we can't accomplish much–not even with the best grasp of what's wrong with the world and how it could be different. But as part of an organization, we can make a difference.

This isn't an abstract question. There are towns in the Midwest where Ku Klux Klan members no longer parade around because socialists took the initiative to shut them down. There are former death row prisoners alive today because socialists, along with others, drew attention to their cases and helped to show why they shouldn't be executed, in many cases because they were innocent. There are workplaces where supervisors can't get away with murder because individual socialists have stood up to them. Socialists can, and do, make a difference right now.

We need to make more of a difference. We need socialists in every workplace, on every campus, in every neighborhood–involved in every struggle throughout society.

But there's a further task. Socialists need to show how the current day-to-day fights are part of a long-term fight for bigger political changes. As Marx and Engels put it more than 150 years ago:
The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.

Socialists are among the best fighters in the struggles of today. But we're also involved in the struggle for the future–ultimately, for a different kind of society where exploitation and oppression are never known again. That is the vision of a society that we put forward–and the struggle to make that vision open to larger numbers of people is the way that socialists put the best of themselves forward.

We live in a rotten and barbaric world. For millions of people, just surviving each day is intolerably difficult. For the rest of the vast majority, the struggle to get by leaves almost no time for leisure–much less for putting our minds to making the world a better place to live. Capitalism has produced poverty, famine, environmental catastrophe, and bloody war.

To hear defenders of the system explain it, these horrors are inevitable. It may not be a perfect world, we're told, but it's the best we can do.

What a sick society it is that tells us that 6 million children dead of malnutrition each year is the best we can do. Or that more than 1.5 million Iraqis killed by economic sanctions is the best we can do. Or that a world threatened by ecological devastation is the best we can do.

We know that we can do better. The resources exist to eliminate all of these horrors–and to build a socialist society free of poverty and oppression where we all have control over our lives.

That is a world worth fighting for.

The Meaning of the Manifesto

By Phil Gasper

Fifteen years ago, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and other so-called "socialist" societies, the death of Marxism was widely proclaimed. But as the 1990s unfolded, it became increasingly clear that modern capitalism was developing in just the way that Karl Marx and his collaborator Frederick Engels had first predicted in the Communist Manifesto.

An article published in the New Yorker at the time of the Manifesto's 150th anniversary in 1998 announced "The Return of Karl Marx": "Many of the contradictions that he saw in Victorian capitalism and that were subsequently addressed by reformist governments have begun reappearing in new guises, like mutant viruses...[Marx] wrote riveting passages about globalization, inequality, political corruption, monopolization, technical progress, the decline of high culture, and the enervating nature of modern existence—issues that economists are now confronting anew, sometimes without realizing that they are walking in Marx's footsteps."

Because Marx and Engels lived at a time when modern capitalism was young, they were able to analyze the system in a way that captured its essential features and its core dynamic.

Here, for example, is their dazzling description of the incessant change that capitalism brings in its wake: "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society...All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind."

The Manifesto charts the way in which capitalism has shattered narrow horizons and produced technological marvels. But it also describes capitalism as a system that is increasingly running out of control.

Capitalism concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a small minority, creates huge pools of poverty, turns life into a daily grind that prevents most people from fulfilling their potential, and experiences frequent and enormously wasteful economic crises. In 1998, the wealthiest 10 percent of the U.S. population owned more than 85 percent of assets in stocks and mutual funds, 84 percent of financial securities, 91 percent of trusts, and 92 percent of all equity in private businesses. Globally, the figures are even more astonishing. Fewer than 500 people around the world own more than the combined income of over half the planet's population.

Nor is it hard to understand how the rich have acquired their vast wealth. In the mid-1960s, wages for manufacturing jobs in the United States were equal to 46 percent of the value added in production—by 1990, this figure had dropped to 36 percent. The capitalist class, in other words, is squeezing out more "surplus value" than ever from those who work for them--leaving even those who regard themselves as middle-class often just a single paycheck away from poverty.

Capitalism encourages greed, competition and aggression. It degrades human relations so that they are frequently based, as the Manifesto notes, on little more than "naked self-interest" and "callous 'cash payment.'"

MIKE DAVIS

Author of numerous books, including City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles and The Monster at Our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu

"The forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions." This seemed an outstandingly good idea when I first read the Manifesto at age 16; today, approaching age 60, it resounds with even greater urgency.

In a world ruled by Capital, the youthful Marx and Engels remain our contemporaries, and the breathtaking sweep of their vision of modern history, as well as their invincible optimism in the ultimate victory of Labor, are still our lodestones.

True, they did not foresee (how could they?) the defeat of the three Internationals and the ensuing savagery of the 20th century. Nor could they anticipate that there might be no world left to win as neoliberal capitalism rapidly undermines the ecological conditions for sustainable human civilization, while reproducing a global slum proletariat on a scale that dwarfs Victorian imagination.

But their essential program of revolt endures like granite: Communists join the ranks of every struggle, not as bearers of "sectarian principles of their own," but as champions of the interests of the working class as a whole, "independently of all nationality." Moreover, "in all these movements they bring to the front, as the leading question in each, the property question, no matter what its degree of development at the time."

To this, we must add: Now, comrades, act now, while there is still time left to put the earth on new foundations.

SHARON SMITH

Columnist for Socialist Worker and author of Women and Socialism

What stands out about the Communist Manifesto is its incredible foresight. Marx and Engels were writing more than 150 years ago, when capitalism was still in its infancy. Yet they were able to telescope not only what would bring about capitalism's development, but also the class forces that could bring about its downfall.

Marx and Engels understood that the capitalist system requires massive inequality between the rich and poor. They wrote, "You are horrified at our intending to do away with private property. But...private property is already done away with for nine-tenths of the population: its existence for the few is solely due to its non-existence in the hands of those nine-tenths."

The Manifesto described exploitation as rooted in alienation from the labor process decades before the rise of the assembly line: "The price of...labor is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases." Women's oppression also figured in Marx and Engels' analysis from the outset. In the Manifesto, they argued, "The bourgeois...has not even a suspicion that the real point of communists is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production."

The essence of the Communist Manifesto has not only withstood the test of time, but has also never been more relevant. Marx and Engels were clear that socialism would not come about because ruling-class people suddenly develop a guilty conscience, but is only possible through collective, democratic struggle by the vast majority.

Marxism points the way forward today, at a time when the need for change cries out everywhere you look. In the era of capitalist globalization and imperialist war, the need for international working-class solidarity is captured in the Manifesto's most famous phrase, "Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!"

So it's little wonder that, as economist Juliet Schor wrote, "Thirty percent of [American] adults say that they experience high stress nearly every day; even higher numbers report high stress once or twice a week...Americans are literally working themselves to death–as jobs contribute to heart disease, hypertension, gastric problems, depression, exhaustion, and a variety of other ailments."

Capitalism's ceasless drive to expand not only destabilizes social relations–sooner or later, it also undermines the conditions for economic growth itself. Marx and Engels argue that capitalism is a system in which highly destructive economic crises are unavoidable, and which has thus become fundamentally irrational.

"Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells," they write.

In a world threatened by pollution, global warming and the destruction of ecosystems as the result of uncontrolled capitalist growth, this image has a special resonance. Today, the search for profits threatens to destroy everything in its path, including the natural environment.

Capitalist society has raised production to the point where everybody could be provided with a decent life–enough to eat, a comfortable place to live, health care, educational and recreational opportunities, and much more. But, Marx and Engels write, "[t]he conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them." Each successive crisis under capitalism can only be overcome "by paving the way for more extensive and more destructive crises."

Private ownership and the anarchy of marketplace competition are no longer compatible with large-scale economic production integrated at the social and global levels. The only solution to these devastating problems is the abolition of capitalism itself, and its replacement by a system in which the majority of the population democratically control society's wealth.

The Manifesto is, above all, a revolutionary call to action–an explanation not only of what is wrong with society, but how it can be transformed to create "an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

Central to this strategy for change is the Manifesto's claim that capitalism has produced "its own gravediggers"–the modern working class, or proletariat. Marx and Engels argue that capitalism has created a group of people with both the capacity and the interest to fight for the overthrow of the existing system and the emancipation of all humanity.

The power of the working class is based on the fact that capitalism socializes the labor process--bringing workers together in large urban centers, and in bigger and bigger units of production. At the same time, the pressures of economic life tend to push workers together to fight back against their exploitation. And because of their key economic position, workers have the collective power to bring production to a halt by going on strike.

Of course, most workers don't begin with the goal of making a revolution. But as they are forced to engage in the class struggle to protect their own interests, "the collisions between individual workmen and individual bourgeois take more and more the character of collisions between two classes," Marx and Engels write.

The working class isn't perpetually on the verge of revolution. For long periods of time, many

workers may accept their lot under capitalism.

But Marx and Engels understood that this state of affairs couldn't last forever. The chaotic, turbulent, unplanned development of capitalist economies eventually throws whole societies into turmoil, and turns even the most modest of working-class demands into a challenge to the whole system.

This process is not a smooth one. The ruling class attempts to weaken the working class by exacerbating national, racial and other differences. But such divisions can be fought and overcome as capitalism continues to intensify the class struggle. And because of their strategic economic position, workers--whether blue collar or white collar, industrial or service--have the power to "become masters of the productive forces of society...by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation."

Marx and Engels can certainly be faulted for having, in 1848, an over-optimistic conception of how quickly these processes would work themselves out. But since the mid-19th century, capitalism has repeatedly shown that it cannot avoid periodic crises, and that these crises may bring the barbarism of modern warfare in their wake.

At the same time, the working class has grown ever larger, increasing its potential power to shut down the economy and threaten the very existence of the ruling class.

The argument is not just a theoretical one. Time and time again over the last 150 years, workers in countries around the world have shown their capacity for mass action--and, not infrequently, revolutionary struggle. Even in the United States, there is a rich tradition of working-class and socialist struggle.

But, the socialist tradition in the U.S. has been marked by breaks and discontinuities--with periods of mass radicalization followed

JAMES PETRAS

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There are many parts of the Manifesto that are very applicable today. In the first instance, I think we can see the importance of the class struggle. Currently, we see the class struggle from above. The capitalist class has been able to reverse a tremendous number of the gains that the working class secured through their class struggle from the late 1930s, '40s, '50s and into the '60s.

Bourgeois theorists, particularly at the height of the welfare state, talked about the class struggle being outmoded, with capitalism having reached a certain level of development that eliminated the class struggle, ideological politics and the need for class organization. They cited tripartite organizations between business, the government and the trade unions. They talked about advanced capitalism and the technological revolution. There was a certain euphoria that permeated good sections of social democracy.

We've seen that this was a passing period, and that subsequently, beginning by at least the late 1970s or early 1980s, there was a counter-offensive by capital. This demonstrates once again the profound understanding that Marx and Engels had of the centrality of the class struggle–how history moves not through technological changes, but rather how those changes are mediated through the class struggle and class organization.

Another point that I think is extremely important today is that Marx saw the way in which capitalism would become internationalized. Subsequently, there was Lenin's analysis of how this internationalization of capital took the form of imperialism. But I think it was Marx who originally saw the way in which the class constraints on continual capital reproduction literally forced capital to go overseas in order to sustain its rate of profit.

And with that, Marx saw the necessity of an international organization of the working class. As capital moved abroad, it created and reproduced the conditions of exploitation abroad, and opened up the possibility of undermining labor at its point of origin. So Marx saw internationalism as essential–not just to show solidarity with the exploited in the colonies, but also as a point of understanding the important benefits that the working class will achieve through internationalism and international solidarity.

These are important elements that are central to understanding the world today, and I think they're particularly relevant when we see many critics of capitalism searching for alternatives, and concocting what they call utopias, dreams or whatever out of whole cloth. They don't look at the objective conditions for creating alternatives.

Marx's brilliant insight was looking at the social organization of production. More than ever--on a world scale, on a national scale, or any other scale–the social division of labor today is so far developed and so profoundly embedded in practically all the societies of the world that you can see everywhere the contradiction that Marx and Engels pointed out between the social production of labor and private ownership.

The structure is an irrational one since the social division of labor implies a great deal of cooperation among the producers, but under the dominance of essentially irrelevant forms of ownership. Therefore, the possibilities exist far more today to move from social production to social ownership, and from social ownership to social management.

At the same time that we see this great advance in social production, we also have to recognize that there has been, at least in our period, a certain decline in the recognition by the direct producers of the circumstances in which they find themselves.

So here is where Marx and Engels lay out the need for a class-based political party to bridge the gap between objective conditions and the subjective consciousness needed to transform this contradiction into a new form of life.

by decades in which socialist ideas have barely existed.

The civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s, for example, radicalized a generation of Blacks, students and other activists, leading literally millions to embrace revolutionary politics. Militant young workers, often Black, led wildcat strikes in the auto industry, the post office and beyond. A new women's movement called for equal pay for equal work.

Yet within a few years, this "new left" had receded. The movements of the 1960s disintegrated, and the 1970s was followed by a one-sided class war against American workers, and 30 years of political corruption, corporate greed and growing militarism.

Although none of these periods of radicalization fulfilled its potential, the defeats and disappearance of the movements thrown up by them was by no means predestined. There is nothing inherent in American society that doomed them to failure. The task of socialists today is to learn the lessons of past defeats, and to use them to ensure victory in the future.

Capitalist crisis is inevitable, but socialist revolution is not. Capitalism may yet bring about "the common ruin of the contending classes." Only the active intervention of organized revolutionaries—"the most advanced and resolute section" of the working-class movement, in Marx and Engels' words, with a clear "understanding [of] the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement"—can bring about a different outcome.

The urgent task facing socialists at the beginning of the 21st century is the rebuilding of revolutionary socialist organization. There is still a world to win.

From Workers' Revolt to Revolution

By Paul D'Amato

"The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old regime," wrote Leon Trotsky in his famous History of the Russian Revolution. Revolutions are windows of opportunity where the old habits of deference and passivity are suddenly destroyed on a mass scale among ordinary people.

But the dead weight of tradition dies hard. Alongside the process of "self-emancipation," where workers begin to develop their own capacity and strength in struggle, the old idea that change can only come from above still survives.

A revolution awakens millions of people who hitherto were passive, having little belief in their own capacity to run society. As a result, it first strengthens reformist consciousness–the idea that we must rely on others to change society for us.

Workers are accustomed to believing that they are incapable of running society–that insofar as change is possible, they must depend not upon themselves, but upon representatives who will act on their behalf. Mass struggle begins to break the sense of subordination and deference among ordinary people, but it does not wipe it out in one stroke.

The result is that in the first phase of every revolution, there is a general shift to the left in mass consciousness, but the center of gravity of mass consciousness remains reformist. There is a difference between the reformism of trade union and movement leaders, who are more or less "hardened" in their reformism, and the reformism of workers whose struggle points a way beyond reform but whose own consciousness at first still tells them that reform is the best they can expect.

In the first phase of a revolutionary movement, the spontaneous element predominates. Workers' consciousness changes in struggle, but consciousness lags behind experience. As a result, workers are capable of overthrowing the system before they become fully aware of what alternatives they are capable of posing to it.

In 1917, for example, several days of mass protest cracked the tsar's armed forces and the tsar was forced to abdicate. Immediately after, the main socialist parties put out a call for forming soviets.

The Petrograd Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies had within its grasp the ability to take the reigns of power, but it did not. This was recognized by the bourgeois politician Rodzianko, who told Cheidze, the reformist leader in the Petrograd soviet, "You have the power, you can arrest us all."

There is a need, therefore, for an organization of revolutionaries that can fight inside the movement to break past the constraints of reformism and win the majority of workers to the idea that they must pose a new alternative to capitalism. The possibility that workers might be able to translate their power into more than just opposition to the way things are is not at first apparent to them–it becomes so only through a period of hard lessons in the course of struggle.

The role of revolutionary organization is to unite the most militant workers and activists in the struggle–those who have a clearer grasp of the possibilities for revolutionary change–so as to be able to turn revolutionary potential into reality.

In the process of struggle, ideas of solidarity, equality and opposition to oppression come to the fore. But workers don't become aware of their position and power in society at the same time.

Some move faster than others and are ready to take the lead. The role of revolutionary organization is to unite the most militant workers and activists in the struggle–those who have a clearer grasp of the possibilities for revolutionary change–so as to be able to turn revolutionary potential into reality.

Without such a party, the revolutionary moment is lost and the movement either goes into decline or is militarily defeated. Either way, society begins to flow back into its old channels and "order" is restored once again.

"Without a guiding organization, the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston-box," writes Trotsky. "But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston or the box, but the steam."

Why We Need to Build a "Vanguard" Party

by Paul D'Amato

Lenin's insistence on the need for a revolutionary party is based on the idea that the working class can't be liberated by anyone standing over or outside its ranks

Socialists who consider themselves Leninists are often criticized for wanting to create a "vanguard party."

To the extent that critics of Leninism are denouncing what is, in fact, a caricature of Lenin–that any vanguard party will be top down and autocratic–there's little to be said. There are, no doubt, self-declared "vanguard" organizations of a few hundred people that lead nothing and repeat worn-out cliches.

But Lenin himself was a leader of a mass party in Russia that led a successful revolution. Lenin and the Bolsheviks were a vanguard in the true sense of the word–not isolated cranks.

Lenin's insistence on the need for a revolutionary party is based on the idea that the working class can't be liberated by anyone standing over or outside its ranks.

That's why Lenin opposed individual terrorism, for example–since it created a passive majority waiting on a small minority to take action for them.

He also rejected parliamentary socialism for viewing socialism as something accomplished by politicians on behalf of the working class. In short, for Lenin–as for Karl Marx before him–the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself.
But there are obstacles to working-class self-emancipation. Otherwise, capitalism would have been done away with long ago.

The employers can depend on the state to use force to keep people in line when necessary. But often, force isn't necessary–because the majority of people more or less accept society as it is. Simple inertia is built into the structure of society–because people can't imagine things being any other way.

Plus, the competitive nature of the capitalist system can pit workers against each other. And there's what Marx called "the ruling ideas of society"–pushed by the corporate-run media and schools to try to convince us that we live in the best of all possible worlds.

Given this, workers have different degrees of consciousness about the possibility of change at any given moment. Some accept the profit system as the best system, while others reject it outright. Some reject racism in the name of solidarity among all workers, while others blame foreigners for their problems. This is why workers don't change their ideas overnight.

Capitalism forces workers to fight–whether they're gas workers in Chicago or autoworkers in Brazil. In the process of struggle, ideas of solidarity, equality and opposition to oppression come to the fore.
But workers don't become aware of their position and power in society at the same time. Some move faster than others and are ready to take the lead.

So, in any struggle, there will always be some kind of leadership. The question is what kind?

Without a clear alternative to the belief of most workers that they have to rely on others to change things for them, potentially revolutionary movements can be sidetracked by moderate leaders who want to keep the fight within the boundaries of existing society.

At the heart of Lenin's concept of the "vanguard" party is the simple idea that working-class militants and other activists who have come to the conclusion that the whole system must be dismantled must come together into a single organization in order to centralize and coordinate their efforts against the system.

In his famous 1969 pamphlet Listen, Marxist! anarchist Murray Bookchin attacks Leninism, or a caricature of it, but then concludes: "[We] do not deny the need for coordination between groups, for discipline, for meticulous planning and for unity in action. But [we] believe that [these] must be achieved voluntarily, by means of self-discipline nourished by conviction and understanding, not by coercion and a mindless unquestioning obedience to orders from above."

Revolutionaries, Bookchin argues, must be organized to "present the most advanced demands" and "formulate the immediate tasks that should be performed to advance the revolutionary process," providing "the boldest elements in action and in the decision-making organs of the revolution."

Ironically, this sounds like a description of Lenin's Bolshevik Party in 1917!

What Kind of Party Do We Need?

By Ahmed Shawki

Ahmed Shawki is the editor of the International Socialist Review and author of the recently published book Black Liberation and Socialism. He spoke on the question of revolutionary organization at the Socialism 2006 conference in New York City.

What I want to discuss is what kind of party we want, and here, I'm not talking about a party other than a socialist party and an organization seeking to become a party, like the ISO. I'm not here to deal with the so-called opposition in this country–the Democrats or any such formation.

This is meant to be a discussion of some of the theory and ideas and traditions that lie behind our thinking as socialists and Marxists of what kind of organizational norms and organizations we need to develop to be the most effective we can possibly be in the fight against this system and the fight against capitalism. What kind of norms and political positions such a party should take, how it should be organized and the like.

I believe that there are three reasons that this question is important. The first is to explain some of the historical background that lies behind the approach we take in building organization.

Second, because we also have to face reality and say that the kind of party we want today was once wanted by much larger sections of the left and is no longer part of their outlook.

We have to have some explanation as to what happened to the radicalization the last time, and what ideas flow out of the defeated period of radicalization. There was a crescendo, an impasse, and then a decline and a stepping back of the left, with a number of ideas coming into prominence that reject the idea of political organization or political party. This is a crisis that still plagues sections of the revolutionary left today.

Thirdly, the question of what kind of party to build today is taking on particular forms internationally and, I believe, has spilled over into this country. There is now a discussion among sections of the revolutionary left internationally of creating broad, anti-capitalist parties as one strategy, and of contending for electoral advances as a major focus of energy. There are a number of options like that which I think we need to take some stock of.

It's a broad topic, and of course, it's main importance is to promote the discussion and understanding of what we're trying to do in the United States–what its problems are and what its potential development is.

First, on the question of political parties and political representation. Ever since the birth of the Marxist wing of the socialist movement, though not exclusively the Marxist wing, there has been a premium placed on the question of the political representation of the working class.

If you read the earliest writings of Marx and Engels and the early socialists, the question arises–that we need our own political representation. The capitalist class, the old feudal classes all have theirs. We need a way to politically represent ourselves.

That was the initial assumption of all Marxists–the need to have a political representation of the working class. Broadly speaking, the view of the party was of an all-encompassing working-class party, which brought together different factions, different groupings of the working-class movement.

In part, this is because the early working-class movement was not dominated with one single political ideology. People may have read that at one stage, Karl Marx said I am not a Marxist. That was to reject some would-be followers who interpreted his views in a particular way, and created political organizations that had nothing to do, as Marx and Engels saw it, with the direction they wanted the movement to go.

Marx himself had placed some emphasis on the attempt to build political organization. But you were talking about a period of the rise of capitalist social relations, and therefore, in large part, the bulk of Marx's own personal activity lay in developing theory rather than political organization.

Engels participated much more effectively in the construction of the Second International and played a formative role in the construction of what was to be the model socialist organization of the day–the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), an organization that produced, after a period of illegality, dozens of newspapers, a mass membership, elected officials. The SPD was led by a man called Karl Kautsky who was described at the time as the Pope of Marxism–that was supposed to be a good thing as opposed a negative thing.

You have political organizations that saw themselves as representing the entirety of the working class, which contended for political office, had political representation, led the trade unions and many of the civic associations. This is the rise of the early social-democratic party–right across Europe, a massive phenomenon. Different countries, different strengths, other countries, certain weaknesses–but this was the model of socialist organization, and with it, you had the appearance of a united socialist movement internationally, under the Second International.

Many people who look back at this and think that Lenin was an early heretic. They look at the short pamphlet Lenin wrote called *What Is to Be Done?* and say that this is the epitome of everything that's wrong with Leninism–pointing to the fact that instead of the broad model of organization, Lenin insisted on professional party organization, a strict hierarchy and centralism, although when possible, the democratic component being instituted.

The reality is much different. The reality is that Lenin's views on the party in the first instance were highly conditional to the specific circumstances under which socialists were operating in Russia. Thus, at the formative conference of the Russian Social Democratic Party in 1898, something like two-thirds of the delegates were arrested by the police. So the conditions upon which you organize an open democratic party are somewhat different than they would be in others.

What people characterize as Leninism was conditional to illegal conditions inside Russia. The main difference was conditional on the objective circumstances Lenin saw, and those should not be seen as Leninism–illegality, professional revolutionism, that only the committee above another committee can instruct what people should do.

I'm not saying that Lenin was identical to Kautsky. You can go back and read Kautsky, for example, where he says clearly in the period of the late 1800s that the German Social Democratic Party is a revolutionary party, but not a revolution-making party. In other words, we're a party that seeks the transformation of society, but we're not about to make a revolution.

Lenin insisted always on the revolutionary character of the Bolsheviks, in part because they operated under Tsarism and in part because of events after the writing of *What Is To Be Done?*

The critical event that divides out the socialist movement and has bearing on the question of organization is, of course, the First World War. On August 4, 1914, the main pillar of social democracy, the German SPD, votes for war credits, with the exception of Karl Leibknecht, and the rest of the socialist movement in other countries follows suit.

At this point, Lenin begins to develop ideas about organization which I think are much more important and relevant to us–focused not on the question of illegality and professional revolutionism and so on.

Instead, he focuses on the idea that there is a built-in contradiction between building a political organization that combats capitalism and one that from the outset represents the entire working class.

He concludes that you have to begin by grouping together militants and activists–because we're not talking here about commentators and writers, but people who are involved in the actual struggle against capitalism–into a party that can lead politically other sections of the working-class movement through the ebbs and flow of the working-class struggle.

He used the term vanguard for this, to mean people who are in advance in consciousness–that is, who are enemies of capitalism, rather than half opposed and half accepting. This isn't an insult–it's the reality for most people, that they hate the system, but don't know what else you can put in its place.

The point was how to put together a political organization that in reality represented the best fighters of the working-class movement. That idea became enshrined into the history of the revolutionary movement for one reason–it wasn't Lenin's writings so much as Lenin's doing. The Russian Revolution was the first successful revolution. In terrible conditions, it brought a weak working-class movement to power, and it laid open the question of working-class power internationally. And from that experience, the main principles of working-class organization were codified, and an attempt was made to generalize these internationally.

The problem begins not there, but with the defeat of the Russian Revolution. Because with the defeat of the Russian Revolution, instead of codifying the actual real experiences of both Russia and an understanding of the particular national conditions of different movements, which Lenin always insisted on, what's codified is an idea of a world centralized party dominated by the Central Committee and the Politburo of the USSR, under which function the central committees of other countries, and that's the world movement of socialism.

In Lenin's day, you had the Bolshevik Party taking a position hostile to the workers' councils when they first arose in 1905–there's a revolution outside of the Bolshevik Party, they're suspicious of it, they say we don't support it, and then they have to switch. In other words, the vanguard isn't always right. That's an idea that develops later–that all thought comes out of the Comintern.

Why is all this relevant? Because that became the understanding internationally of what it meant to build a revolutionary socialist or communist party. It became the principle model about which the revolutionary left that re-emerged in the 1960s debated and from which different elements were taken.

A small minority of the movement–we would argue, in large part, the Trotskyist elements in the movement, but not solely the Trotskyist elements–began to look toward the original Lenin rather than the Stalinized Lenin for the ideas of the party.

In my estimation and in the estimation of our tendency, the experience of the revolutionary left of the 1960s took years to sort through what I briefly sketched out.

Out of the initial upsurge, many people took wholesale some of the ideas of Stalinized Leninism and applied them. It led to all kinds of peculiarities, not the least of which was the cult of personality, most obviously in the Stalinist movement and in the Mao-influenced section of the revolutionary movement.

You had a situation in which revolutionary parties emerged quite differently from the situation I described earlier. By and large, in most of the Western countries in which the revolutionary left developed, it didn't emerge out of a mass workers' movement that represented the working class, but largely among elements wholly outside the existing organized working-class movement.

That's different from country to country. In the United States, you had one of the most extreme divorces between socialists and the working-class movement. In some countries like Britain and other places, there wasn't the same kind of distorting impact.

But internationally, you had the whole movement dealing with the fact that, first of all, the authentic Marxist tradition on the question of organization had been Stalinized and distorted by the experience of Stalinism, but also with reality of capitalism.

That is, it wasn't simply that the left had the wrong idea, and that's why it screwed up in the 1960s and '70s. It inherited the ideas that came before them and was trying to work its way through them, but it's also the case that capitalism fought back, and the left was unable to reestablish the relationship with a mass working-class movement in time.

Today, there is an idea that the construction of a socialist organization is in itself a flawed project. In short, it's been there, done that—we tried it in the 1960s and '70s, and this model of organization doesn't work. I think that there's a reaction that we can sometimes have to say "you just did it wrong"—which is a good answer to a been-there-done-that kind of remark.

But I think the more sophisticated answer would be that not only did the left in the 1960s inherit models of organization from the past, but it was itself dislodged from its historic role and placed outside of the working-class movement. And this is despite valiant efforts of many sections of the left to reconnect with the working class, which should be applauded, not derided.

I want to start to draw a number of conclusions from what I laid out.

First, in the 1960s, you had the dominance internationally of the left by big Communist Parties and big social-democratic parties—that was what was seen as the opposition to capitalism. We might have said that this wasn't the kind of opposition we would organize, it doesn't do anything right, but those organizations were the main pillars of opposition.

Today, part of the weakness of the left is that those organizations don't exist as organizations that resist capitalism. Social democracy exists, but basically, around the world, it has adopted neoliberalism and pro-capitalism outright as its program. The Communist Parties don't exist as the force that they once did, which means that in communities, in neighborhoods, in particular struggles, a number of people who were there before aren't there now.

This leads to a conclusion that there is a space politically for a party that is not revolutionary—that doesn't have the overthrow of capitalism as its aim. There is a political vacuum that exists internationally, which people are seeking to fill. But I would suggest that it isn't automatic that it would be filled in the manner that people seek to fill it.

It's one thing to say that social democracy has moved right and adopted neoliberalism, and Stalinism has largely disappeared organizationally, and in that space, we can build a broad, anticapitalist, but not necessarily revolutionary, movement. That is being proposed in a number of situations, and I believe it's an argument that we need to be friendly toward, because it's people trying to regroup forces opposed to the system.

But it isn't clear to me at all on an international scale what this means in reality. The main activists involved in this kind of project internationally are themselves members of revolutionary organizations, or are largely inspired by the project of building a revolutionary organization against capitalism.

The goal is to try to capture some of the dissension and the anger that exists against the system, but which is unorganized. Nobody should denigrate this opposition outside the system that's unorganized.

But I believe that in terms of an understanding of what it means to build organization, the main thing that's been lost is how you actually begin the process of the retraining, reeducating and re-launching of a revolutionary cadre, no matter what the organizational structure. How do you take a new generation of people and transform them from isolated or individual militants against the system to what is a self-conscious revolutionary cadre.

That really is the main task that we see the ISO as undertaking. The road to get from where we are now and where we want to get is the multimillion-dollar question. What kind of party do we want? I could have answered at the beginning—we want a revolutionary party of some size rooted in the working class that's multiracial, multi-ethnic and geared to the conquest of state power and internationally.

The problem is that this isn't what we are now, and we have to look at the rest of the left in this country and internationally and say truthfully what our numbers and our strengths are collectively. It is not the case that we are at the point where we're talking about a mass party.

Therefore, the real question is how you get from here to there. That's the most difficult thing to do, because there's not just one path to getting there, but having said that, not all the paths are of equal value.

For example, in my estimation, there isn't much space for a broad, anti-capitalist party in the United States. On the other hand, in Brazil, there is space for a large anti-capitalist, socialist party that has been expelled from the Workers Party (PT).

The experience there is that the best of the Brazilian left builds the PT and is now finding that its aspirations, hopes and ambitions are being opposed by the leadership of the party it created. They're being expelled, and at the moment, the main party formed out of that expulsion is polling anywhere from 7 to 11 percent against Lula in the polls. So there's not only a space for that kind of organization, but a reality.

The problem for us in this country is that we don't have that kind of left. Everybody talks about regroupment of the left, but the reality of who that left is, what it would actually mean to regroup, whether you could actually gain forward momentum, or if you would be mired in a series of endless discussions and debates–these are some of the questions that affect us.

We believe that the main task for us is to be sure as an organization that we are involved and develop links and relations with every sector possible in the struggle against capitalism, racism, militarism, sexism–to be an organization with not just commentary or criticism on struggles, but one that places itself fully in solidarity with and involvement in those struggles.

It's impossible for an organization of our size to do everything, but it is possible to ally ourselves with or solidarize with every struggle–even as we have priorities about what we believe we can best contribute to.

Second, the most critical aspect of the ISO beyond our general political outlook is the fact that we have an organization that's young and active–and that also needs to be educated in the traditions, the language, and in the theory and the practice of the past.

We want people in this organization themselves to be leaders in the mass movement, and to do so, you can't simply be an activist. You've got to have some grasp of politics, of theory–which is why we put a high premium on that.

Third, we believe one of our tasks is to grow and grow substantially, and we don't see any contradiction between that and what I've previously said–to be involved in every struggle. Many people will say that we recruit out of struggles. But the essential idea that a political organization and a party needs to grow is something that we can defend.

We can also defend another notion–it has to be a party that is explicit about its radical nature and about the character of its project.

I ended with those few points because I think that one of the weaknesses of the left coming out of the 1960s has been a de-emphasis of politics and theory, which the radical movement in the United States has always had. Most people want political discussion and political theory.

Secondly, there has been a tendency to think that being an open socialist is something that is impossible to build around in the United States. I would venture that the opposite has been the case.

When we parted way with some comrades some years ago in the 1970s–actually at the peak of the movement–there was a decision to make. One choice was to retreat from the project of building a directly working-class organization through emphasis on labor work, because the ground wasn't fertile, and instead build an organization that is committed to working-class power, but in the main looks toward youth and students.

That was one of the debates between ourselves and comrades in the International Socialists some years ago. I have to say that 30 years after the process, it is undoubtedly the case that comrades in the IS and Labor Notes have done extremely good work in the labor movement. But from the point of view of the project of Leninism–of building the seeds of a socialist organization committed to the transformation of society–we have made a contribution which has at least kept together that potential.

With a coming radicalization, our organization will really be put to the test. We have not, as of yet, accomplished the heights. Surviving this period has been quite an accomplishment. But the real accomplishment is proving your relevance in the struggle, and I believe that we are at the stage in which we have the constituent elements of an organization that can–over time, and with others–become the kind of party we look to.

Why We Sell Socialist Worker Newspaper

When Horace Greeley decided to launch a newspaper in 1841 that would report on the fight against slavery and for women's rights, socialism and reform movements, he didn't pull any punches explaining why. "I founded the New York Tribune as a journal removed alike from servile partisanship on the one hand and from gagged and mincing neutrality on the other," he said.

From the "servile" Fox news to the "mincing neutrality" of the New York Times, a quick glance at the media today shows that things haven't changed much since Greeley's day. Extreme right-wing journalists like Fox's right-wing blowhard Bill O'Reilly or ABC's vile John Stossel--who are loathe to question any motive of the Bush administration--are the extreme end of the spectrum.

More often, the media aren't as nakedly on the side of the rich and powerful. Instead, they try to present themselves as a provider of "unbiased" and "balanced" news. But as Karl Marx commented, the ruling ideas of society are those of the ruling class.

The truth, as a journalist once remarked, is that "freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." In other words, to individual billionaires and huge corporations.

Even the liberal mainstream media often don't see it as their duty to inform the public or challenge the status quo. While the liberal press might express disagreement with certain aspects of the right-wing's agenda, at the same time, it shares many of the same assumptions, such as the "right" of the U.S. military and the free market to dominate people's lives around the world.

In other words, the "debate" is generally between people who agree on the fundamentals–like going to war on Iraq–but who occasionally disagree on how best to sell it.

Take Katherine Graham, the former owner and publisher of the liberal Washington Post. In 1988, Graham remarked–to a meeting of CIA recruits–that we "live in a dirty and dangerous world. There are some things the general public does not need to know, and shouldn't. I believe democracy flourishes when the government can take legitimate steps to keep its secrets and when the press can decide whether to print what it knows." In other words: the public's right to know extends only so far as the government, and those who run the press, decides it should.

Sometimes Individual journalists manage to get stories printed that lay bare the corruption and injustice at the top of society. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's exposé of the Watergate scandal in the Washington Post during the Nixon administration is one example. The recent Toledo Blade report on decades-old atrocities carried out by U.S. forces in Vietnam is another. But scandals inevitably fade, and the press moves on.

Socialist Worker is different in that we proudly take a side all the time–the side of the working class–and offer an analysis of the news that actually makes sense. Every week, SW reports the facts that the mainstream media would rather gloss over and challenges the steady stream of lies that come from the minority of people at the top.

In that sense, Socialist Worker is actually more objective than publications like the New York Times or the Washington Post. But SW takes pride in being a newspaper that avoids "gagged and mincing neutrality." We don't pretend–as mainstream news outlets do–that the society we live in is an equal playing field or that we're impartial.

In the battle for ideas, words are weapons. Socialist Worker is our weapon.

A recent letter to SW, for example, praised the paper as "a valuable alternate view" but questioned the "negative tone" of its articles. A lot of our articles are angry–because we think that the logic of a system that watches millions starve in a world of plenty, or sacrifices Iraqi lives for the sake of U.S. oil and empire, is sick. Socialist Worker stands in solidarity with the oppressed and the exploited around the world. That's something you can't pretend to be neutral about.

Moreover, Socialist Worker doesn't simply report the news. It aims to show the connections between the events that affect working people's lives, and fit them into a picture of the world that can explain why they happen. Socialist Worker is also a place to take up the debates and questions that inevitably arise in the struggles of the day.

Over the past months, SW has devoted space to some of the key debates facing activists today–from who progressives should support in the 2004 elections to whether the United Nations is a solution in Iraq. Debates like these are key for our side to be able to plot a course forward.

But SW isn't just out to deliver the news or spark debate; it's a tool for organizing. From the antiwar movement, to striking workers at Tyson foods in Jefferson, Wis., to the fight for immigrant rights in the wake of

the September 11 attacks, Socialist Worker doesn't just report on these struggles–it aims to win an audience among the militants who are active in them.

We want people who are involved in everyday struggles to see SW as a place where they can share the lessons of the defeats as well as the victories and, most importantly, get involved in building the kind of political organization that can ultimately challenge the system.

"Why would anyone want to stand on a street corner and sell a paper?" is a question sometimes asked of people who sell Socialist Worker. A paper like SW doesn't circulate in the same way capitalist papers do. We don't depend on funding from advertisers and distributors. We don't drop it into a news box or sell it at newsstands.

SW isn't just another newspaper to be consumed–it's a tool to begin building political relationships with people who are starting to question the system. That's why we mainly sell Socialist Worker face to face, on the street and at our campuses and workplaces.

There's nothing new about that. People fighting to change society have always turned to the press to put forward their views and organize their fight. Every revolutionary upheaval in society has seen a flurry of radical newspapers–from L'Ami du Peuple, a radical paper of the French Revolution, to North Star, the paper of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, to Pravda, the paper of the Russian Bolsheviks.

In each case, the papers were a way of providing political clarity and organization. As the Russian revolutionary Lenin put it, "A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer. In this last respect, it may be likened to the scaffolding around a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labor."

In the years 1912 to 1914, the Bolshevik Party had 3,000 members in Petrograd. Their paper, Pravda, had a circulation in the city of 30,000. In 1917, party membership in Petrograd reached 32,000. That's because those who had read the paper in 1912 became Bolsheviks themselves a few years later.


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We want equality for all!

Sí, se puede

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ALL OUT FOR MAY 1

Feds' raids designed to spread fear

By Nicole Colson

THE BUSH administration organized a series of immigration raids last week to send a message to the new immigrant rights movement.

As part of a new crackdown, the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a division of the Department of Homeland Security, carried out of coordinated raids on IFCO Systems facilities that swept up 1,200 undocumented workers.

In the early morning hours of April 20, ICE agents burst into worksites in Chicago, Cincinnati, Phoenix, Houston and dozens of other cities across 26 states.

In Houston and elsewhere, the Feds used buses to take dozens of people away. Many were immediately deported—without even being allowed to contact their families.

The administration claims that raids like these are to prevent workers from being "exploited."

As proof, officials pointed to the fact that at least seven IFCO executives were also arrested in the raids.

But those "executives" turned out to be lent- and mid-level managers in most cases.

Now, the families of the detained are trying to figure out what to do.

In Chicago, one woman whose husband was arrested told CBS News she didn't know how to explain to her son that his father wouldn't be coming home.

"My son keeps asking me, 'Why isn't daddy isn't home?'" she said. "I can't eat. I don't know what to do. Who can help me?"

"He has a living here," said the man's brother. "This is where he grew up. He's just like me. He speaks

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Today, when members of the International Socialist Organization go out and sell Socialist Worker, our aim is the same. We want to convince people we meet of the need for socialism–and the need to build an organization capable of fighting for a different world.

In 1920, Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci commented on the socialist paper he helped found: "The workers loved L'Ordine Nuovo because in it they found something of themselves, the best part of themselves, because in it they sensed their own inner striving: how best can we be free? How can we become ourselves?"

Socialist Worker aims to be a part of helping people to answer those questions today. As the old slogan goes, in the battle for ideas, words are weapons. Socialist Worker is our weapon–make it yours, too.

Speaking for the Oppressed

By Lee Sustar

When socialists sell revolutionary newspapers today, we're often accused of repeating a 100-year-old formula from the Russian Revolution that has no relevance in the U.S. In fact, the most important revolutionary organizations of the African American radicalization of the 1960s made their newspapers central to their activity.

The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense—deemed by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover "to be the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States"—was launched by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in Oakland, Calif., in 1966. The Panthers made waves with their armed "patrols of the police" in African American neighborhoods. But what set the Panthers apart was their aim to build an explicitly revolutionary socialist party. Their newspaper, The Black Panther, was central to the project.

After police in the nearby town of Richmond killed an unarmed Black man, Denzil Dowell, the Panthers made the story the lead article in the paper's first issue on April 25, 1967—and led an armed march on the police station to demand an investigation.

Three months later, the massive Black rebellions in Newark, N.J., and Detroit as well as smaller riots in 60 other cities highlighted the growth of radicalism among African Americans. Moreover, the Vietnam War was growing increasingly unpopular, especially among Blacks.

It was in this context that Huey Newton spelled out the need for a revolutionary party in his article, "The Correct Handling of a Revolution," written in the week between the Newark and Detroit uprisings. Newton argued that riots were a "sporadic, short-lived and costly" form of resistance and exposed Blacks to "the brutal violence of the oppressors' storm troops."

"The main purpose of the vanguard group," Newton added, "should be to raise the consciousness of the masses through educational programs and other activities. The sleeping masses must be bombarded with the correct approach to struggle and the party must use all means available to get this information across to the masses."

The article reflected an elitist concept of the revolutionary party derived from Mao's China—something that could also be seen in the arbitrary changes in "line" by party leaders. But with the uprisings of 1967, achieving theoretical clarity seemed less urgent than giving political expression to the revolutionary mood in Black America.

When the police shooting of Newton and his arrest on murder charges in an officer's death made national news, The Black Panther newspaper enabled the group to expand from its initial Oakland base of 75 in 1967 to several thousand just two years later. Party activist David Hilliard, who oversaw the paper's publication, later wrote that The Black Panther was "crucial to the daily work of the party...the most visible, most constant symbol of the party, its front page a familiar sight at every demonstration and in every storefront window organizing project throughout the country."

The Panthers rejected what Newton called "pork chop" Black nationalism. In 1969, he wrote an article from prison arguing that "only by eliminating capitalism and substituting for it socialism will Black people, ALL Black people, be able to practice self-determination and thus achieve freedom."

What set the Panthers apart was their aim to build an explicitly revolutionary socialist party. Their newspaper, The Black Panther, was central to the project.

Just what was meant by "socialism" was unclear. Sometimes the paper featured long quotes from Mao Zedung or North Korea's Kim Il Sung, reflecting the illusions in supposedly "red" China held by the far left in that era. Yet the paper won widespread following because it printed what no mainstream paper would--accounts of police brutality, reports on protests and strikes, and criticisms of moderate Black leaders.

The Black Panther eventually reached an estimated circulation of 100,000. Political differences—and state repression—soon led to a rapid decline in the Panthers' membership.

In 1969 alone, police killed 28 Panthers, and hundreds were jailed. By 1971, the party, unable to formulate a clear revolutionary perspective, split—and both factions soon faded. The Black Panther newspaper, nevertheless, had underscored the importance of a revolutionary newspaper in generalizing the struggle.

As party member Landon Willis put it in a 1970 article written from prison, "The Black Panther Community News Service is a living contemporary history of our people's struggle for liberation at the grassroots level. It's something to be studied and grasped, and saved for future generations to read, learn and understand."

If the Black Panther showed how a newspaper could build a revolutionary socialist organization, the Detroit-based Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) highlighted the role of a newspaper as collective agitator. A group of Black activists—many of them were veterans

of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee and various Black nationalist organizations–launched their newspaper, the Inner City Voice (ICV), after reading Lenin's Where to Begin? a pamphlet making the case for the revolutionary newspaper.

The ICV editor was John Watson, who had organized an all-Black study group on Karl Marx's Capital, led by Martin Glaberman, a longtime autoworker, activist and revolutionary socialist. The ICV oriented on Dodge Main, a strategic plant that manufactured all of Chrysler's axles, taking up racist discrimination by both management and officials in the United Auto Workers union.

DRUM was launched among Black workers following a May 1968 wildcat strike at Chrysler Corp.'s Dodge Main plant, led in part by an ICV supporter named General Baker. In the fall of 1968, DRUM supporters won the student elections to place Watson as editor of the Wayne State University newspaper, The South End, a daily with a print run of up to 18,000.

"The South End returns to Wayne State with the intention of promoting the interests of the impoverished, oppressed, exploited, and powerless victims of white, racist monopoly capitalism and imperialism," the new editors wrote. "We will take the hard line...Our only enemies will be those who would further impoverish the poor, exploit the exploited and take advantage of the powerless."

The masthead featured two Black Panther logos and the slogan: "One class-conscious worker is worth more than 100 students." By scrupulously meeting financial requirements and publishing nonpolitical news of sports and student activities, Watson outmaneuvered administrators who sought to shut down the paper.

The bulk of the South End readership, however, was off campus–at factories, hospitals and schools. A special issue devoted to DRUM spelled out the group's perspective to Black workers across Detroit. "DRUM's scope is not limited to the oppressive situation at Chrysler nor all the rest of the plants for that matter," the lead article began. "Although most organizing activity will be in the plants, DRUM sees its long-range goal as the complete and total social transformation of the society. This necessarily will take the effort of the whole Black community as well as other progressive sectors of society."

DRUM differentiated itself from the Black Panther Party by rejecting the Panthers' theory that the Black lumpen proletariat–the inner-city unemployed–would form the revolutionary vanguard, and stressed instead the centrality of the working class to revolutionary social change.

Thus, the South End always put working-class issues in a theoretical, historical and international framework, and frequently featured articles on Marxism. Entire special issues were devoted to opposing the military dictatorship in Greece and supporting the Palestinian national liberation movement.

DRUM activists lost control of the South End after a year, but their efforts helped to launch the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, a federation of DRUM-type workplace organizations. The League split in 1971 over disputes over whether to build a national organization and debates over Marxism and Black nationalism.

Yet the issues that led to Black radicalism and the workplace revolts of the late 1960s and early 1970s remain–racism, police violence, poverty, aggressive employers and an unjust imperialist war of aggression. A revolutionary newspaper that can provide an analysis of those problems–and can help link the struggles they produce–is just as relevant today.

Lenin and the Socialist Paper

By Paul D'Amato

When Lenin became a socialist in Russia in the late 1890s, the movement was, in his phrase, "primitive," consisting of groups of isolated activists in various cities and towns. Each worked separately and with no real knowledge of the general picture of the movement–or with any means to develop a general, national perspective for taking on the police autocracy of Russia's Tsar.

Lenin became concerned with ending the "narrow" and "amateurish" character of the movement, which, he wrote in 1901, prevented workers in Russia from developing a "consciousness of their community of interests throughout Russia." It was not only a question of how to link together socialists in different cities, but how to take what were often local struggles of workers and unite them–with the aim of developing a force capable of posing a political challenge to Tsarism.

One of the key means for overcoming this localism, in Lenin's view, was the creation of an all-Russian newspaper. "The comrade's varying views on theoretical and practical problems are not openly discussed in a central newspaper," Lenin complained. A paper could help them elaborate "a common program" and devise "common tactics." Instead, "they are lost in narrow study-circle life," which leads to them exaggerating "local and chance peculiarities."

A national newspaper for Lenin, was not only a means to disseminate propaganda—ideas about the nature of capitalism, the way to overcome it and achieve socialism—but as a means to create a national organization of militants linked together by common experience.

A national newspaper for Lenin, then, was not only a means to disseminate propaganda–ideas about the nature of capitalism, the way to overcome it and achieve socialism–but as a means to create a national organization of militants linked together by common experience.

The paper was, in Lenin's words, not only a "collective progagandist," but also a "collective agitator" and a "collective organizer." Our watchwords, Lenin argued, were "Learn, propagandize, organize–and the pivot of this activity can and must be only the organ of the Party."

In light of this, Lenin wanted a newspaper that aired differences and debates–that not only reported on local struggles, but also presented commentary on important political and theoretical questions facing the movement. "It is necessary," he wrote, "to combine all the concrete facts and manifestations of the working-class movement with the indicated questions; the light of theory must be cast upon every separate fact; propaganda on questions of politics and Party organization must be carried on among the broad masses of the working class; and these questions must be dealt with in the work of agitation."

Local agitational leaflets were narrow and insufficient, Lenin argued, dealing only with local questions. "We must try to create a higher form of agitation by means of the newspaper, which must contain a regular record of workers' grievances, workers' strikes and other forms of proletarian struggle, as well as all manifestations of political tyranny in the whole of Russia; which must draw definite conclusions from each of these manifestations in accordance with the ultimate aim of socialism and the political tasks of the Russian proletariat," he wrote.

This conception of the role of a newspaper as central propagandist, agitator and organizer was unique at that time in the world socialist movement.

The Socialist Party in the U.S., for example, had not a single official organ. Instead, it had hundreds of local and national publications, all of them linked to the party or its locals, but privately owned and run. Even in 1904, when the party had only 20,000 members, it had about 40 daily, weekly, and monthly papers and magazines. In 1912, when the party had more than 100,000 members, it boasted 323 publications.

These publications may have been more or less effective in winning converts–which in the Socialist Party primarily meant winning people to vote for socialist candidates. They carried various types of propaganda, sometimes good, sometimes bad, but they were not interventionist, activist, organizing and centralizing tools.

They were not intended to be–nor could they have been–publications aimed at guiding, practically and politically, the organization as a whole. They weren't intended to be forums for workers in the party to compare struggles and experiences in order to determine the next step in the struggle.

After the defeat of the 1905 revolution in Russia and the beginning of a new workers' upsurge, the party began to issue a daily paper, Pravda, at the beginning of 1912. The paper had its ups and downs, but it very quickly became the backbone for a layer of several thousand militants inside Russia's most important factories.

Lenin's writings after the first six months of Pravda show that his views on the kind of paper needed for the socialist movement had developed. The importance of the paper wasn't just that it put socialist ideas across in a way accessible to workers, but that it was a paper bought by, read, written for and sold by workers. In other words, Lenin's Bolsheviks wanted not just to produce a paper directed at workers, but a workers' newspaper.

Lenin was very careful to emphasize the importance of regular financial contributions by workers for Pravda–because without them, the paper could not be published. Thus, after six months of publication, he ran a lengthy article, spread over several issues, about the significance of the fact that 504 workers' groups had given donations–far more than any other paper on the Russian left–to support Pravda.

But there was more to it than that. As he wrote: "From the point of view of the initiative and energy of the workers themselves, it is much more important to have 100 rubles collected by, say, 30 groups of workers than 1,000 rubles collected by some dozens of 'sympathizers.' A newspaper founded on the basis of five-kopek pieces collected by small factory circles of workers is a far more dependable, solid and serious undertaking (both financially and, most important of all, from the standpoint of the development of the workers' democratic movement) than a newspaper founded with tens and hundreds of rubles contributed by sympathizing intellectuals."

For Lenin, even something so simple as reports in Pravda listing the collections at workers' meetings for different causes and struggles had an important role to play beyond merely providing information. "As they look through the reports on workers' collections in connection with letters from factory and office workers in all parts of Russia," he wrote, "Pravda readers, most of whom are dispersed and separated from one another by the severe external conditions of Russian life, gain some idea how the proletarians of various trades and various localities are fighting, how they are awakening to the defense of working-class democracy."

It was the whole packag–reports of collections, workers' letters about workplace conditions or about police brutality, reports on strikes, election campaigns and demonstrations–that could come together in the paper to create a general picture of the movement and where it needed to go. True to this commitment, Pravda received and published thousands of letters and reports from workers around the country.

Lenin's view of the role of the revolutionary newspaper can be summed up this way: "The workers' newspaper is a workers' forum."

In Defense of Leninism

By Sharon Smith

It has been almost 80 years since the death of the Russian Revolutionary Vladimir Illich Lenin, and yet the controversy generated by his life's work—that is, the building of the revolutionary socialist party that led the Russian working class to power in the Russian Revolution of 1917—still rages over whether Lenin and his legacy are to be held up as a method for building a revolutionary movement or as a failure to be roundly condemned in order never to be repeated.

The scenario from Lenin's naysayers usually reads something like this: In 1917, Lenin and a tiny band of co-conspirators pulled off—not a massive, popular, social upheaval—but a military coup, and then proceeded to rule Russian society with an iron fist. The post-revolutionary period was, thus, not a flourishing of working class democracy, but a totalitarian dictatorship. It is also assumed that the brutal dictator who ruled Russia from the late 1920s until his death in the 1950s, Joseph Stalin, simply inherited his position from Lenin—that Stalinism is a continuation of the Russian revolution, rather than a complete negation of everything that Lenin stood for. And, the argument concludes, this entire scenario owes its theoretical substance to none other than Karl Marx.

Lenin's harshest critics, of course, come from the ideological right wing, most of them masquerading as academics—out to prove one thing and one thing only: that Lenin was a brutal despot on the scale of a Hitler or Mussolini, a man whose insatiable desire for power was surpassed only by his thirst for blood. One such critic of high academic standing, Richard Pipes, the Baird Professor of History at Harvard University, put it this way in his book, *The Russian Revolution:*
The party that Lenin forged and led was really not a party in the customary sense of the word. It was more of an order in the sense in which Hitler called his National Socialist party, bound by the members unshakeable loyalty to their leader and to one another, but subject to no other principle and responsible to no other constituency. Genuine political parties strive to enlarge their membership, whereas these "pseudo-parties"—the Bolshevik one first, and the fascist and the Nazi ones later—were exclusive.

These sorts of right-wing ideologues, who are the source of most of what passes for fact about Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, have actually produced a view of Lenin and Leninism that is pure fiction— and for a fairly straightforward reason, I would argue: to discourage people here from fighting back, because if the Bolshevik Party, the one example we have of a successful working-class revolutionary party, turns out to have been an authoritarian nightmare, then the only logical conclusion

is that it just isn't worth trying to build a revolutionary party today.

And if the Russian Revolution, the one successful working-class revolution in world history was one which blew up in the faces of the workers who fought for it, then workers here shouldn't even consider trying to overthrow the profit system here. Workers should just resign themselves to the existence of capitalism, and they should just accept it when they lose their jobs or get their wages cut, or their health care or whatever—because the alternative is even worse.

I am just going to give one more example of the suspect quality of the academic literature that supposedly proves how authoritarian and bankrupt the Bolsheviks were—A Russian historian named Dmitry Volkogonov, who in a biography on Lenin's closest collaborator in the Russian Revolution of 1917, Leon Trotsky, wrote that Trotsky once confessed that he organized the Red Army through terror and repression. He even quotes Trotsky to support this assertion. He said that in Trotsky's autobiography My Life," Trotsky said, "It is impossible to organize an army without repression. It is necessary to put before the soldiers the choice of death in the front or the rear." Well, if you look at the actual quote in My Life, Trotsky did write those words—but the sentence doesn't end there. He finishes by saying, "That was the principle of the old armies, but we built an army on the principles of the October Revolution."

As absurd as some of these formulations are, the fact is that these sorts of accounts about Lenin and the Bolshevik Party make up most of what is accepted as the "truth"—the documentation—of the events of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its immediate aftermath. And that this is what makes up the basis of what most people believe about Leninism—including many people who are part of the left, who want to see workers have more power in society, who want to change the world for the better—some of these same people accept much of the official mainstream criticism of Leninism. In fact, many people on the left who wouldn't agree with a single other thing that these right-wing academics have to say nevertheless share their assessment of the Bolshevik Party.

That is why within the left, the word Leninism is so often equated with a lack of internal—and therefore external—democracy, and that it is so often assumed that the very idea of organizing a revolutionary socialist party around a set of principles is inherently elitist, and that that set of principles is often so disparagingly referred to as the mindless carrying of a "party line" by the membership.

It is quite easy to list a string of quotes from Lenin to back up the basic viewpoint that the Bolshevik Party was based upon elitism first and secrecy and authoritarianism second. I'll give you a couple of the most famous ones. In 1903, in one of his earliest debates on the nature of the revolutionary party, "What is to be done?," Lenin wrote: "The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively of its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labor laws, etc." And elsewhere in the same debate he stated fairly explicitly, "Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the relations between workers and employers."

Not only, presumably did Lenin hold the elitist idea that only intellectuals could convince workers of the need for revolution, but Lenin also said elsewhere of the revolutionary party, "such an organization must consist chiefly of people professionally engaged in revolutionary activity; that in an autocratic state, the more we confine the membership of such an organization to people who are professionally engaged in revolutionary activity and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult will it be to unearth the organization."

Most of Lenin's critics conveniently leave out this side of Lenin, when he expounds at great length on building a broad, massbased activist party, so that we are left only with the grim and determined strategies laid out in "What is to be Done."

And Lenin spelled out concretely what it meant to be a local member for the Bolshevik Party around the same time, in his "Letter to a comrade about our Organizational Tasks:" "Every member of the factory committee should regard himself as an agent of the committee, obliged to submit to all its orders and to observe all the 'laws and customs' of the 'army in the field' which he has joined and from which in time of war he has no right to absent himself without official leave."

Around quotations such as these, Lenin's critics paint the picture of Lenin as authoritarian, and Leninism as elitism. But again, it's what they leave out that matters. Because it is equally easy to present a series of quotes that paint an entirely different picture of Lenin and Leninism. Take for example, the statement Lenin made at the beginning of the 1905 revolution in Russia, which flies in the face of everything you just heard from Lenin, from the strategy for party-building from "What is to be Done:" "The working-class is instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic, or socialist." A few years later, Lenin developed this idea further, when he said of workers: "The very conditions of their lives makes the workers capable of struggle and impels them to struggle. At every step they come face to face with their enemy—the capitalist class. In combat with this enemy the worker becomes a socialist, comes to realize the necessity of a complete abolition of all poverty and all oppression."

And, as for intellectuals, far from idolizing them, he argued, "A tight hold must always be kept on the intelligencia. It is always the instigator

of all sorts of squabbles. One cannot rely on a small periphery of intellectuals, but one can and should rely on hundreds of organized workers." And as far as the internal party regime, Lenin argued to open up the gates of the party and welcome in new members by the thousands: "The youth—the students and still more so the young workers—will decide the issue of the whole struggle. Form hundreds of circles from among the youth and encourage them to work at full blast. Allow every subcommittee to write and publish leaflets without any red tape—there is no harm if they do make a mistake; we will gently correct them." And he added to this view elsewhere, when he said, "We must learn to form looser, broader and more accessible organizations. Our slogan is: for a larger Social Democratic Labor Party!"

Most of Lenin's critics conveniently leave out this side of Lenin, when he expounds at great length on building a broad, mass based activist party, so that we are left only with the grim and determined strategies laid out in "What is to be Done." Nevertheless, having seen the two sides of Lenin, it is reasonable to ask how these two different sides of Lenin—these two seemingly completely contradictory viewpoints on the nature of the revolutionary party—can be reconciled, both coming from the same person.

These are the two sides of Leninism—the necessarily different strategies and tactics, but always with the same aim: preparing for the coming revolution, by building a mass revolutionary workers party over a period of years in advance of a revolutionary upheaval—even when such a revolution seems way off in the distant future. These different strategies were dictated not by Lenin, but by the political conditions which existed in Russia at any given time. On the one hand, of necessity, in the highly repressive conditions that at most times existed in tsarist Russia, the party had to operate in secret and be organized as a tightly disciplined network. But entirely different methods were used to build the party in the middle of social upheaval—such as occurred in Russia in 1905 with the first Russian Revolution and then again in 1917, when the second Russian Revolution broke out that brought the working class to victory.

A couple of facts can illustrate just how repressive Tsarist Russia was before and in between the two Russian revolutions—between the defeat of the 1905 revolution and the years immediately preceding of the 1917 revolution—a period in which any and all opposition was crushed, and in which joining a revolutionary party was a virtual guarantee that you would end up in prison, or in exile in Siberia sometimes over and over again. In 1898, when the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party held its founding convention, virtually every delegate to the convention was arrested by the police. As far as infiltration by the police, every party committee during certain periods had police agents among its members—in 1910, every Moscow committee was headed by a police agent; in 1912, two police agents sat on the editorial board of Pravda, the party's main newspaper, and one police agent sat on its central committee.

The way Lenin himself described the need to restrict the party in this period was quite simply, that "making the party accessible to the masses" meant making "revolutionaries accessible to the police." Open democracy, as we think of it, was completely impossible if the party was to survive.

But as soon as the 1905 revolution broke out and masses of workers began moving into struggle, Lenin argued for a complete about face in the methods of building the party, for a wide open and democratic organization–he said quite clearly: "Now the open propaganda of democratic ideas and demands, no longer persecuted by the weakened government, has spread so widely that we must learn to adjust ourselves to this entirely new scope of the movement." And he said, specifically, "The whole party organization is now built on a democratic basis. This means that ALL the party members must take part in the election of officials, committee members and so forth and that ALL party members discuss and decide questions concerning the political campaigns of the proletariat, and that all party members determine the line of tactics of the party organizations."

Far from being the brutal tyrant that he is so often purported to have been, Lenin stood above all for freedom and democracy—and whenever external conditions permitted it, these were the operating methods of the Bolshevik Party. In fact, the idea that Lenin ruled the party with an iron fist at any point in its history is downright laughable.He repeatedly argued to that the leadership should not bark out orders to the membership but that they should "patiently explain" policies and aim to convince them over time of the politics.

Repeatedly during the course of building the Bolshevik party over two decades, Lenin found himself outvoted and in a minority, shouted down and heckled at meetings, and denounced by fellow party members. This is all part of the public record. Yet Lenin's critics, when they hear that the Bolsheviks operated on the basis of "democratic centralism," hear only the word centralism. But the fact is that the party was far more democratic than it was centralized.

Nowhere was this more in evidence than during 1917. In fact, when Lenin started to argue for a working-class insurrection at the beginning of September 1917, when the Bolsheviks first won a majority in the soviets, (the Russian word for the workers councils that sprung up all over Russia in the Revolution) it took him no less than a month and a half, until mid-October, to convince a majority of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party that it was time to make this proposal to the soviet. And even then, two members of the central committee voted against. And even after the Central Committee voted that it was time to organize an insurrection, the Bolsheviks did not take power themselves, they made a proposal to the Soviet that it should take power, by organizing a military revolutionary committee (this was immediately voted for in the soviet).

And one of the central committee members, Kamenev, actually leaked

the information to the local media that the Bolsheviks had voted for an insurrection, so the plan for the insurrection appeared in the daily newspaper days before it took place. This is hardly the picture of the secret military coup that Lenin is supposed to have singlehandedly masterminded and carried out in October of 1917—but an open and inclusive debate within the party and within the working class organizations.

It is in the evidence—and there is plenty of it—from 1917, that the fictional character of Lenin painted by the right-wing ideologues falls flat on its face. To begin with, the Bolsheviks had absolutely nothing to do with the demonstrations that began the revolution in February of 1917. Not only that, but they actually urged the women workers who were planning to demonstrate on International Women's Day to calm down! (It should be noted that, while the Bolshevik party was taken by surprise by the start of the February Revolution, the local Bolsheviks quickly shifted and began taking part in the strike wave.)

Nevertheless, this rather embarrassing episode shows quite clearly that the revolution of 1917 was hardly a creation of the Bolshevik Party—it would have happened with or without it. But it succeeded, I would argue, because of it. Even though most people viewed the February revolution that overthrew the tsar as the end of the revolution— the Bolshevik Party alone argued that this was just the beginning, that a second revolution had to take place that would transfer "all power to the soviets." This was the Bolshevik Party slogan—and it became the slogan of the October revolution when it happened.

The whole way the soviets were run guaranteed democracy because—unlike Congress, where you either have to be a millionaire yourself or be backed by millionaires to get elected—no delegate to the workers council was allowed to earn more than the average workers' wage. And most importantly, the workers councils operated by the principle of "immediate recall."

This example illustrates that the relationship between the Leninist party and the working class is by no means a one-way relationship—the party learned as much from the workers as it taught them. And Lenin stressed this repeatedly; the party was pushed forward as much by the workers movement as it pushed the movement forward.

Throughout 1917, there are many examples in which the party was wrong on this or that issue, or moved too slowly, or tried to move too quickly. But the crucial factor was that the party had, over a very long period of time, learned how to lead—not by fiat, not by substituting itself for the working class, but by organizing the most class conscious workers into a political party as a way to help raise the consciousness of the working-class as a whole. Lenin was adamant about this relationship, stating, "There must not be a hint of dictatorship of the Bolsheviks."

There is no question that the Bolshevik Party could have seized power in June or July of 1917. In Petrograd, in Kronstadt, and a number of other areas, throngs of workers were calling for an insurrection. But in June or July the Bolsheviks were still a minority in the elections to the soviets in the most of Russia. To have organized a seizure of power at that point would have meant organizing it in the name of the minority.

It was only after September, when the Bolsheviks won a majority in soviet after soviet, and Trotsky was elected president of the Petrograd soviet, that Lenin began to argue for an insurrection—that is, when the insurrection would be the act of the working-class majority. The fact that it was the act of the working-class majority is the reason why in Petrograd, certainly, the insurrection itself was virtually bloodless (more people were killed in the making of Eisenstein's film about the Russian Revolution several years later than were killed in the Petrograd insurrection itself). Between the time of the February Revolution and the insurrection some seven months later, the size of the Bolshevik Party had multiplied by more than 20 times—from 20,000 to nearly a quarter of a million members. There can be no question that the Bolsheviks represented the will of the majority of workers in Russia in 1917.

And there is no doubt that power was transferred in 1917 not to the Bolshevik Party but to the soviets themselves. Nor were the soviets or workers councils a creation of any Leninist—or Marxist for that matter. They sprung up first in the revolution of 1905 and then again, spontaneously in February 1917. And they operated on a democratic basis that is unknown in capitalist society. Unlike Congress or parliamentary democracy, or the constituent assembly that existed in Russia at the time—which call themselves democratic but actually work to exclude working-class people from real power in society—workers councils do the opposite: they give every single working-class person real representation in government. The eyewitness to the Russian revolution, American journalist John Reed (who wrote Ten Days that Shook the World, a book that has turned thousands of people into socialists) described the workers' councils this way, after seeing them in action: "no political body more sensitive and responsive to the popular will was ever invented." And he went on to describe how, even though most delegates to the soviets were elected by workers in factories, "the soviet system is extremely flexible, and if the cooks and waiters or the street sweepers or the cab drivers of that ward organized and demanded representation, they were allowed." Any segment of the population that felt it was being discriminated against could make up an independent soviet.

The whole way the soviets were run guaranteed democracy because—again, unlike Congress, where you either have to be a millionaire yourself or be backed by millionaires to get elected—no delegate to the workers council was allowed to earn more than the average workers' wage. And most importantly, the workers councils operated by the principle of "immediate recall." Unlike here, where you have to wait four or six years until the next election when a politician breaks his or her promises—in the soviets, delegates were not elected for any set period of time and could be removed within hours if the workers who elected them decided it was time for a change.

And actually, its worth mentioning that workers councils were not something that was exclusive to the Russian Revolution—they have arisen in every single situation in which the workers movement becomes powerful enough to challenge the government—all over the world. Workers councils have sprung up everywhere from Italy, Hungary and Germany in the late 19-teens and early 1920s, to Portugal in 1974 and Iran in 1979. Above all, Leninism is about winning the rule of the workers' councils, not the revolutionary party. It is about making Karl Marx's argument, that socialism is the self-emancipation of the working-class, a reality—it is about workers and the oppressed freeing themselves from exploitation and oppression.

This is an important distinction, and one that, not surprisingly, eludes the official historians who consider the soviets yet another form of the Bolsheviks despotic rule—forgetting completely that the soviets were multi-party institutions.

The first months, in particular, of post-revolutionary Russia show that, when workers are given the opportunity to rule themselves, to raise their own intellect, they jump on the opportunity. There are endless accounts—usually very surprised accounts—by foreign visitors to post-revolutionary Russia: of workers and peasants crowded into the opera houses and theaters; of large meeting halls packed with workers and peasants stuffed like sardines, discussing the issues of the day; of workers who could barely read poring over issues of socialist newspapers. All this in a country where the majority of the population was still illiterate.

If anything (and again, this flies in the face of the so-called official historians yet has been documented repeatedly in the records of the Russian revolution) post revolutionary Russia was the flourishing of workers' control from below. Just a few examples help to illustrate just how little the party was in control of the situation. In 1918, for example, when the Bolsheviks negotiated the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which finally pulled Russia out of the first world War, the regional soviet of Siberia refused to accept the treaty—even though it had been ratified by the central soviet, the body representing the soviets nationally. Nevertheless the Siberian soviet refused to accept the treaty and announced it was still in a state of war against the Central Powers.

This spirit of independence existed not only in the soviets, but in workplaces and communities throughout Russia. On the railways, for example, each station operated as a sort of independent republic, with the stationmaster elected by all the workers in the station. In factories, the factory committees run by the workers often refused to pay any attention to instructions they received even locally, and proceeded to make their own decisions about work and production—and usually awarded themselves large pay increases. Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, recalled in her reminiscences how she was at the commisariat of education one day and a working woman came in: "During our conversation, I asked her what shift she was working in. I thought she was working the night shift. Otherwise she would not have been able to come to the Comisariat in the daytime. "None of us are working today. We had a meeting yesterday evening, everyone was behind with her domestic work at home, so we voted to knock off today. We're the bosses now, you know." And Lenin's wife comments: "For early 1918, this was the typical case."

The historian Marcel Liebman described: "Local committees sprang up everywhere: workers' committees, peasant committees, housewives committees, committees for factories and quarters, committees of soldiers, Cossacks and sailors. In the industrial quarters, in the big blocks crowded with working-class families, there were house committees that tried to regulate the details of communal life. Jules Destree, a Belgian socialist who was in Russia, tells how, while travelling from Petrograd to Moscow by a very slow train, the people sharing his compartment had formed a 'travelling committee' before they reached their destination." School students organized at their schools and got rid of mandatory examinations, and elected their teachers. The list went on and on and on.

It is very important to understand that, not only was Lenin in favor of this kind of control from below—he went to great lengths to encourage it. On the eve of insurrection, he wrote in State and Revolution: "The mass of the population will rise to take an independent part, not only in voting and elections, but also in the everyday administration of the state." Then, addressing the soviet immediately after the insurrection: "We must allow complete freedom to the creative faculties of the masses." And a few weeks later, On November 6th, Lenin wrote in Pravda, "Comrades, working people! Remember that now you yourselves are at the helm of state. No one will help you if you yourselves do not unite and take into your hands all affairs of state…Get on with the job yourselves: begin right at the bottom, do not wait for anyone."

Two months after the insurrection, Lenin urged working-class people to go still further. At the end of December 1917, Lenin wrote: "one of the most important tasks of today…is to develop the independent initiative of the workers, and of all the working and exploited people generally, develop it as widely as possible in creative organizational work. At all costs, we must break the old absurd, savage, despicable, and disgusting prejudice that only the so-called 'upper classes,' only the rich, are capable of administering the state and directing the organizational development of socialist society."

This is the vision of socialism represented by Lenin and Leninist

organization—one in which ordinary people take the running of society into their own hands. And his vision represented not only an end to exploitation of the working class but an end to all forms of oppression. For example, even though the revolution implemented enormous advances for women—including the right to vote and run for public office well before women had won this right in the so-called advanced countries (including this one) and granted women in Russia the right to abortion decades before it was won in the West—Lenin expounded at great length that much more needed to be done to wipe out women's oppression: "Notwithstanding all the laws emancipating women, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework rushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery…The real emancipation of women, real communism, will begin only when and where an all-out struggle begins against this petty housekeeping, or rather when its wholesale transformation into a large scale socialist economy begins." And he called for more public catering establishments, nurseries and kindergartens to help free women up from household labor.

Lenin was just as dedicated to wiping out racial and national oppression. On the question of Jews (against whom discrimination and violence was about on the same scale at it is against Black people in the United States) the Bolshevik Party had long before the revolution made the ending of Jewish oppression a central feature of its program. In 1914, Lenin emphasized this issue: Workers "must present their conviction of the necessity for complete equality, for complete and final renunciation of any special privileges for any particular nation…The [ruling class] try to make Jewish people a scapegoat for all their sins. The Bolshevik Party have therefore rightly given first place in their bill to the position of the Jews".

"Comrades, working people! Remember that now you yourselves are at the helm of state. No one will help you if you yourselves do not unite and take into your hands all affairs of state…Get on with the job yourselves: begin right at the bottom, do not wait for anyone."

Not only did the Russian revolution outlaw discrimination against Jews but all three of the main soviets voted in Jews as their presidents—which is about as significant as it would be to elect a Black president in the United States today. When Trotsky described the Russian revolution as a "festival of the oppressed," he was not exaggerating.

But this side of Leninism usually gets ignored—this vision of socialism, the reality of post-revolutionary Russia in its first months—before it was invaded by the armies of 14 countries, including this one, to try and overthrow the new workers' government; before the economic blockade against against Russia (on par with today's sanctions against Iraq) that caused mass famine and epidemics throughout Russia). In other words, before the revolution was starved and the economy devastated by the Civil War—the counter-revolutionary war that set into motion forces that would eventually unravel the revolution, despite the heroic efforts of the Bolsheviks to save it.

Instead, when discussing post-Revolutionary Russia, the naysayers focus on a series of charges—all of them leveled against the Bolsheviks as if they were operating in a period of peace and prosperity, rather than a situation in which an active counter revolutionary military mobilization was trying to restore power to the tsar and the old Russian capitalist class. The Bolsheviks are criticized for dispersing the constituent assembly (the parliamentary body that was about as representative of working-lass people as the U.S. Congress is today) as an attack on democracy, without acknowledging that the constituent assembly was raised as the rallying cry of the counter-revolution—not because they believed in democracy of any kind, but only to undermine the soviets.

Similarly, the Bolsheviks are charged with outlawing political parties such as the Socialist Revolutionaries and, on and off again, the Mensheviks, after mid-1918—without acknowledging that these were outlawed because they were actively supporting the counter-revolution. The Socialist Revolutionaries (who were neither, just for the record) stood formally in favor of returning to a monarchy and went so far as to try and assassinate Lenin. He almost died after the seond attempt on his life—a fact conveniently missing from most of the official histories on this question.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, at the end of two and a half years of civil war—which the Red Army won only because of the dedication of the mass of Russian workers to defending the revolution—the Bolsheviks are charged with putting down a series of rebellions in the winter of 1921, in particular the Kronstadt rebellion in March of 1921. This charge is leveled against the Bolsheviks without the slightest regard for the context in which these rebellions took place. Mass famine was sweeping the country (some 7 million Russians died of starvation and diseases like typhus during this period); industry was ground to a standstill because of the war and the blockade; and counter-revolutionary armies (like the Polish army) were camped right outside Russia's borders, waiting to seize on these rebellions as an excuse to invade Russia once again. This is the context in which the Bolsheviks made the tortured decision to crush the Kronstadt rebellion.

Marx had said that people make their own history, but not in conditions of their own choosing. And you could not have picked more difficult conditions than what existed in Russia in 1921. Russia was already a poor country before the revolution, and Lenin understood full well that a workers government in Russia could not survive for very long without a revolution elsewhere to support it. Lenin himself said repeatedly,

"Without a revolution in Germany, we are doomed."

And there was a revolution in Germany—there were three revolutions in Germany in fact, between 1918 and 1923. It was only then, after the final defeat of the German revolution in 1923, that the hopes for support from abroad were finally crushed. In 1921, the future was not at all clear, and the Bolsheviks made the enormously difficult choice to try and hold out—a choice that was made the easier because the defeat of the Russian Revolution in that context would have meant a return to the rule of tsarism. The counter-revolutionaries staging anti-Semitic riots against Jews throughout Russia were a constant reminder of what a return to tsarism would mean.

And there the naysayers case is complete—including the claim that the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion constituted the beginnings of Stalinism in Russia—without acknowledging that both Lenin until his death in 1924 and Trotsky throughout the 1920s, fought tooth and nail against the bureaucratic rule that Stalin was in the process of building.

The Russian Revolution did not survive, that is true. But the tragedy is that, 80 years later, instead of honoring it for giving us in later generations the one glimpse we have of what a workers' revolution might look like—of the tremendous possibilities for a socialist society in the future for the world—even many people on the left accept the official histories of these right-wing ideologues and lay the blame for its failure on the Bolshevik Party and on Lenin in particular. Yet the very essence of socialism is to share the wealth—not the poverty— in society. If anyone is to blame for the defeat of the Russian Revolution, it is the capitalists whose armies invaded and blockaded revolutionary Russia, reducing its economy on a scale that was "unprecedented in human history," according to one economist. All the Bolsheviks were ever allowed to share was the poverty. The revolution was never able to operate in anything other than conditions of terrible scarcity. Instead of viewing the Russian Revolution as a proof of what's wrong with Leninism, it makes far more sense to appreciate the tremendous accomplishments of the Russian revolution despite the tremendous drawbacks of the situation.

Nevertheless, many people on the left who embrace the ideals of workers control and an end to oppression—the things that for a brief period were a product of the revolution—do not at the same time embrace the need for a revolutionary party. It is fairly common even to hear people describe, "I'm a Marxist, but not a Leninist." But there is an inherent contradiction in that point of view. Building a revolutionary party is the only way to make a reality of the self-emancipation of the working class. There has not ever been, and I would argue, there will never be, a single instance when a ruling class faced with a mass strike of workers and the emergence of workers councils suddenly develops a guilty conscience and hands over power. The reality is that they use every means at their disposal—and they have many—against every gain made by workers. It is saying, "I believe in the self-emancipation of the working-class, but not for the main vehicle for winning it."

Without the Bolshevik Party, there would have been no workers control in Russia in 1917, no emancipation of women, no liberation of the oppressed nationalities—because there would have been no Russian Revolution. The fact that the Bolsheviks had slogged it out over many years—through the ups and downs, making mistakes and learning from them—meant that they could transform themselves from what one Bolshevik called a "despised minority" isolated from the mass of workers, to become the party that would win the support of the majority of Russian workers and the peasantry in 1917. You can't have the Lenin of *State and Revolution* without the Lenin of "What is to be Done"—one would not exist without the other. History is filled with heroic struggles of workers and the oppressed rising up against their oppression, only to be crushed because they had no revolutionary party, or a party that was too new and inexperienced to be able to lead the movement to victory—the German Revolution was one such bloody defeat.

We are Leninists because we want to see the victory of the working class and the victory of a future socialist society.

Marxism and the FIGHT Against Oppression

Marxism and Oppression

By Paul D'Amato

Over the last few decades, left-wing activists and academics have by and large rejected Marxism and its emphasis on class and class struggle. In particular, Marxism has been attacked for ignoring or downplaying questions of oppression. The idea that society consists of a series of separate but overlapping "identities" based on things such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, national identity and cultural practices is now widespread. This view of society is akin to the liberal pluralism we learn in school. Society, so the argument goes, consists of different, sometimes competing "interest groups." No overarching analysis of society can take all of these "differences" into account and unite them into a coherent framework. Marxism is viewed as unable to deal with oppression because it is concerned only with class exploitation. The views of one feminist author writing in 1979 are still widespread: "Marx never questioned the hierarchical sexual ordering of society."[1]

Marx is similarly attacked for his supposed lack of attention to racism. To quote one academic:
Ethnic and racial conflicts were not subjects to which Marx gave much close attention. Although Marx acknowledged these types of division in society, he does not appear to have been much interested in explaining their dynamics. Obsessed with a supposedly more fundamental category of socioeconomic identity, namely class, Marx slighted race and did not grant it a place of its own in his historical work. In 1849, in response to the query "What is a Negro slave?" Marx wrote: "A man of the black race. The one explanation is as good as the other...A Negro is a Negro."[2]


NEGROES BEWARE

DO NOT ATTEND COMMUNIST MEETINGS

Paid organizers for the communists are only trying to get negroes in trouble. Alabama is a good place for good negroes to live in, but it is a bad place for negroes who believe in SOCIAL EQUALITY.

The Ku Klux Klan Is Watching You.

TAKE HEED

Tell the communist leaders to leave. Report all communist meetings to the

Ku Klux Klan

Post Office Box 651, Birmingham, Alabama.

Divide and rule: racism helps the bosses by blunting class unity

The idea that Marx and Engels ignored or downplayed oppression because they "privileged" class is simply wrong. What they (and Marxists since) have argued is that 1) various oppressions cannot be understood separately from capitalism because capitalism shapes and depends upon oppression for its survival, and 2) the most thoroughgoing struggle against oppression cannot be carried out on the basis of separate struggles of the oppressed, each united across class lines. Such a struggle will always be limited by the narrow interests of bourgeois and middle-class elements within the oppressed group who will seek to limit the scope of the struggle within the confines of capitalism. Only the working class (Black, white, Latino, gay, straight, women, men) has both the collective power and the common interest to fight for complete liberation.

The Marxist tradition

Capitalism is a society based on the exploitation of the many by the few. Because it is founded on massive inequality, it requires various means to oppress and keep down the working class and the poor. The ruling classes of the world know the value of "divide and rule," both as a means to weaken any opposition against them, and as a means to squeeze more profits from the working class.

The working class is not only an exploited class—it is also an oppressed class. Workers receive worse education, worse housing and worse job opportunities than the sons and daughters of the middle class and the rich. Workers are constantly reminded that they do not possess the intelligence or the capabilities of those above them on the social ladder. Workers are disadvantaged at every step, stressed under financial and family constraints, forced to work in dangerous jobs and, therefore, more likely to suffer from various physical and mental ailments. In turn, they are then forced to accept the poorest quality health care—if they can get it at all.

Racial, sexual, national, linguistic and other oppressions interact with this basic class oppression to produce sections within the working class who are doubly or "specially" oppressed. Marx and Engels were clear that capitalism—a system based upon the exploitation of wage labor for profit—was founded on enslavement and oppression from its beginnings:
The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins are all things that characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.[3]

The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother-country and were turned into capital there.[4]

Direct slavery is as much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry. It is slavery which has given value to the colonies, it is the colonies which have created world trade, and world trade is the necessary condition of large-scale machine industry.[5]

In fact the veiled slavery of the wage laborers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its pedestal...Capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.[6]

Everyone accepts the idea that the oppression of slaves was rooted in the class relations of exploitation of that system. Fewer recognize that under capitalism *wage slavery* is the pivot around which all other inequalities and oppressions turn. Capitalism used racism to justify plunder, conquest and slavery, but as Marx pointed out, it also used racism to divide and rule—to pit one section of the working class against another and thereby blunt class consciousness. Marx developed this idea throughout his works, including these two passages about slavery in the U.S. and England's oppression of Ireland:

In the United States of America, every independent workers' movement was paralyzed as long as slavery disfigured part of the republic. Labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin.[7]

Every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working class divided *into two* hostile *camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the* ruling nation *and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists of his country* against Ireland, *thus strengthening their domination* over himself. *He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude toward him is much the same as that of the "poor whites" to the "niggers" in the former slave states of the U.S.A. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker at once the accomplice and the stupid tool of the* English rule in Ireland.

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, *despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And that class is fully aware of it.* [Marx's italics][8]

Marx concluded that part of the key to building a successful workers' movement in England was to win English workers to the idea that Ireland had the right to separate from England.

Marx's observations on Ireland became the foundation of Vladimir Lenin's position on the self-determination of oppressed nations—in an era when the world's biggest and most powerful capitalist states fought to carve up the world between themselves. Lenin's arguments against Rosa Luxemburg over Poland's right to self-determination in 1914 have become a cornerstone of the revolutionary Marxist tradition:

Successful struggle against exploitation requires that the proletariat be free of nationalism, and be absolutely neutral, so to speak, in the fight for supremacy that is going on among the bourgeoisie of various nations. If the proletariat of any one nation gives the slightest support to the privileges of "its own" national bourgeoisie, that will inevitably rouse distrust among the proletariat of another nation; it will weaken the international class solidarity of the workers and divide them, to the delight of the bourgeoisie. Repudiation of the right to self-determination or to succession inevitably means, in practice, support for the privileges of the dominant nation.[9]

Natonalism and combating *national oppression*, for Marx (and later Lenin) were not at all the same thing. On the contrary, it was the duty of socialists, especially those in the large oppressor nations, to combat all forms of national oppression and inequality precisely in order to *break down national divisions* in the working class and strengthen their struggle against capitalism. Socialists are for the voluntary, free union of peoples and are therefore in principle opposed to any forced retention of any nation within the borders of another. This is the exact opposite of the anti-Marxist caricature that claims that Marxism "ignores" such divisions as a "diversion" from the class struggle.

Marx and Engels on women's oppression

Marx and Engels rejected outright the idea (up- held by conservatives, but also by some feminists) that the low status of women was an unchanging feature of human existence—fixed for all time by human biology or by the ideas in people's heads. Women's position in society has been conditioned by the particular stage of development of the productive forces of society, and, corresponding to that, the given social relations of a particular society. Women's status in society has always been related to the role they have played in— and in the different forms taken by—the family in history.

Women's status, for example, was very different in preclass societies. Engels describes how in the horticultural society of the Iroquois, women's control over agriculture gave them a far higher status than women in later times. Though there was a sexual division of labor, it did not necessarily confer a dominant role to the men:

The division of labor between the two sexes is determined by causes entirely different from those that determine the status of women in society. Peoples whose women have to work much harder than we would consider proper often have far more real respect for women than our Europeans have of theirs. The social status of the lady of civilization, surrounded by sham homage and estranged from all real work, is socially infinitely lower than that of the hard-working woman of barbarism...[10]

Women's oppression arose and coincided with the rise of the first class divisions in society:

The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamous marriage was a great step forward; nevertheless, together with slavery and private wealth, it opens the period that has lasted until today in which every step forward is also relatively a step backward, in which prosperity and development for some is won through the misery and frustration of others.[11]

Capitalism does not free women, but it creates the conditions in which women can be liberated. Noting how modern industry in the 19th century was drawing women out of the domestic sphere and into the paid workforce, Marx argued:

However terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system may appear, large-scale industry, by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless create a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and relations between the sexes...[T]he fact that the collective working group is composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages must under the appropriate conditions turn into a source of humane development, although in its spontaneously developed, brutal, capitalist form, the system works in the opposite direction, and becomes a pestiferous source of corruption and slavery, since here the worker exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the worker.[12]

The *starting point* for women's emancipation is their entry into paid labor—a change which breaks women out of their isolation in the home and gives working-class women the collective strength and confidence—alongside the men of their class—to fight for their rights as both women and workers.

Women's oppression cannot be seen as something separate or parallel to capitalism—capitalism depends upon the "private" family, on women's roles as housewives and mothers for its survival. As a more contemporary Marxist analysis of women's oppression lays out:

Marxists argue that under capitalism, women's oppression is rooted in "privatized reproduction," or, in women's role within the nuclear family. In the private family, birthing, child-rearing, and food preparation take place as a "service" to capitalism.

"Privatized reproduction" within the nuclear family consists of bearing and raising the next generation of workers for capitalism, and of preparing present-day workers to "reproduce" their labor each day. This function of the family has become essential to the existence of capitalism, as a cheap means of maintaining the labor force.[13]

Because capitalism knows two tendencies—dependence upon women's unpaid labor in the home *and* the exploitation of women in the paid labor force—it forces women to bear a double burden of work at home and on the job. Nevertheless, Marx's insight remains valid today: the *starting point* for women's emancipation is their entry into paid labor—a change which breaks women out of their isolation in the home and gives working-class women the collective strength and confidence—alongside the men of their class—to fight for their rights as both women and workers.

Moreover, the wealth and means of production created by capitalism can be used, if collectively seized and placed under workers' control, to socialize household functions such as cooking, cleaning and childcare in order to liberate women completely. In his draft for the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels wrote:

It [communist society] will transform the relations between the sexes into a purely private matter which concerns only the persons involved and into which society has no occasion to intervene. It can do this since it does away with private property and educates children on a communal basis, and in this way removes the two bases of traditional marriage, the dependence, rooted in private property, of the woman on the man and of the children on the parents.[14]

Many years later, the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky echoed a similar theme:

The problem of women's emancipation, both material and spiritual, is closely tied to that of the transformation of family life. It is necessary to remove the bars from those confining and suffocating cages into which the present family structure drives women, turning her into a slave, if not a beast of burden. This can be accomplished only through the organization of communal methods of feeding and child-rearing.[15]

Who benefits from oppression?

What most theories of oppression have in common is the idea that working-class unity is impossible because each group benefits from the oppression of some other group. It is now unquestioningly accepted among feminist academics and many activists, for example, that women's oppression stems from "patriarchy," loosely defined as a system (more or less independent of time and place) whereby all men benefit by keeping all women down. To cite just one recent example from a recent anthology on feminist theory and politics: "The first theme is that women as a social group are oppressed by men as a social group and that this is the primary oppression for women. Patriarchy is the oppressing structure of male domination."[16]

Likewise, Black nationalists and academics influenced by "identity" politics tend to view racism as a system where all whites benefit from the oppression of Blacks. The same anthology cited above quotes two Latina feminists: "Racism is societal and institutional. It implies power to implement racist ideology. Women of color do not have such power, but white women are born with it and the greater their *economic privilege*, the greater their power."[17]

If class is talked about at all, it is "classism," that is, how the better-off sections of the oppressed (say, middle-class and rich women) need to learn how to be less elitist so that they can unite in solidarity with their poorer oppressed sisters and brothers. Class is not viewed as a fundamental divide in society, whereby a tiny minority exploit for profit the labor of the majority, but simply as something oppressed groups should recognize in order to overcome any friction inside the movement or organization.

But while it is true that individual workers may hold sexist or racist ideas, it is not at all true that workers benefit from it, even if they think that they do. In fact, when one part of the working class is kept down, it helps the bosses to keep *the entire class down.* Rather than benefiting from oppression, all workers are hurt by it.

Those who argue that male workers have "power" over women, or that white workers have "power" over Black people, have no idea what real power is. In their focus on some particular group oppression, they think that another group has "power." That is a moral conception of power. The ruling class has the real power—through its control of production, of resources, of the means of destruction and of the means of disseminating ideas. It uses that power to maintain its ability to exploit and make profits unhindered. Workers' power—that is, their ability to change their circumstances and challenge the system—comes from their collective organization and the confidence they draw from it. Atomized and separate, encouraged to go for each other's throats, workers are powerless. So when a male worker abuses his wife, he is acting not out of power, but out of powerlessness, out of weakness. And when a white worker acts in a racist manner toward a Black worker, the white worker is not expressing their own power, but the power of the system over them. In defeat, workers are most susceptible to the prevailing ruling-class ideas—racist, anti-immigrant, anti-woman, homophobic, and so on. In periods of large-scale collective struggle, workers find in class solidarity and hatred of all oppression the basis of their real collective power.

The bosses consciously foster divisions among workers in order to weaken and defeat their struggles for better conditions. This is openly evident in the written instructions to a detective firm on how to help break the 1919 steel strike in Pittsburgh:
We want you to stir up as much bad feeling as you possibly can between the Serbians and the Italians. Spread data among the Serbians that the Italians are going back to work. Call up every question you can in reference to racial hatred between these two nationalities; make them realize to the fullest extent that far better results would be accomplished if they will go back to work. Urge them to go back to work or the Italians will get their jobs.[18]

The very conditions of capitalist exploitation and competition also help to foster divisions among workers. As Sharon Smith points out:
While capitalism propels workers toward collective forms of struggle, it also forces them into competition. The unremitting pressure from a layer of unemployed workers, which exists in most economies even in times of 'full employment,' is a deterrent to struggle—a constant reminder that workers compete for limited jobs which afford a decent standard of living.

Without the counterweight of the class struggle this competition can act as an obstacle to the development of class consciousness, and encourage the growth of what Marx called 'false consciousness'—part of which is the ideas which scapegoat other sections of society. The growth of such ideas divides workers, and impedes their ability to focus on the real enemy.[19]

By oppressing a section of the working class on the basis of its sex, race, sexual orientation, language or national origin and driving those workers' conditions of existence down, capitalism is able to drive the conditions of *all* workers down.

By oppressing a section of the working class on the basis of its sex, race, sexual orientation, language or national origin and driving those workers' conditions of existence down, capitalism is able to drive the conditions of *all* workers down. A white worker may *perceive* that their conditions of work and pay are better *because* of the lower pay received by Black workers. The reality, however, is that the bosses use the conditions of the lowest paid workers to drive the conditions of all workers down. The worse the pay and conditions of the most oppressed workers, the more the bosses can lower the pay of *all* workers. Conversely, when the conditions of the most oppressed sections of the working class are improved, the conditions of all workers improve. This explains why in the South, where rampant racism has been used to divide workers and keep unionization rates extremely low, the pay of white workers, though better than that of their Black counterparts in the region, is historically lower than the pay of Black workers in the North.[20]

Clinton's gutting of welfare disproportionately hurts Black people because Blacks are disproportionately poor. However, a majority of people on welfare is white, as are the majority of poor people. Politicians used racial stereotyping in order to whip up anti-welfare

sentiment—in order to attack both poor Blacks *and* poor whites. This attack has repercussions for all workers, who will not only suffer from less access to social aid in times of economic distress, but who will also face employers' attempts to use the cheap labor of former welfare recipients to drive employees' conditions down.

Likewise, some male workers may *perceive* that they benefit from women's oppression—they don't have to do as much housework, for example. But the relative advantage a man gets from this setup doesn't compare either to the benefit capitalism receives from women's unpaid labor in the home, or to the gain for both working-class men and women if the conditions of women's double burden were lifted. Male workers suffer from the fact that women's wages are still on average lower than theirs—both because it drives down the wages of all workers, and because it lowers the financial resources of working-class families. The prime beneficiary of women's role in the privatized family is the capitalist class, who does not have to pay for taking care of today's and tomorrow's generation of workers.

Even in instances where men and women do equally share housework, workers are still stuck in private households, forced to carry a difficult burden that allows no leisure time. One could only laugh at a man who proclaimed his pleasure at the fact that his wife was treated as a sex object at work, could not afford an abortion, could not take paid maternity leave, had trouble finding quality affordable childcare or received low wages.

It is true that oppression—such as racism or sexism—affects all classes in society. But the character and intensity of the oppression is very much shaped by the class you come from. An unemployed white autoworker in Flint, Michigan, for example, is far more oppressed than Gen. Colin Powell (if indeed he is oppressed at all), who is part of the American ruling class. Moreover, a Black autoworker in Flint, Michigan, shares much more in common, in terms of social status, living and working conditions, with a white autoworker than he does with Colin Powell or a Black businessman. More than that, Colin Powell actually benefits from the existing social order. Therefore, whatever Colin Powell's personal views on discrimination or racism, he has a stake in a system that depends upon discrimination
and racism.

Likewise, there is a wide gulf between the oppression experienced by a wealthy woman who can afford maids, cooks and nannies, and the woman who works for her as a maid or a nanny. They stand apart from each other across a yawning class divide. The wealthy woman has no need to fight for all of the things that would free working women from their oppressed condition—such as free and available abortion (and other health care), equal pay, childcare, and so on—because she can pay for these services and hire working-class women to perform these tasks. In fact, complete liberation for all women hurts the interests of her own class, which depends upon women's unpaid labor in the home, the low pay of immigrant workers who tend their lawns, cook their food and work in their factories, fields and hospitals.

Building women's "unity" means, in practice, subordinating the interests of working-class women to bourgeois and middle- class women. "The sisterhood of woman," wrote the socialist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in 1915, "like the brotherhood of man, is a hollow sham to labor. Behind all its smug hypocrisy and sickly sentimentality loom the sinister outlines of the class war."[21]

Rejection of revolution

But the class war is just what many on the left have rejected. The same sections of the left who have rejected Marxism and accepted some form of identity politics have also, since the collapse of Stalinism and the much-touted "triumph" of free-market capitalism, completely rejected the idea that society can be fundamentally transformed. This can be seen even in the case of left-wing writers who consider themselves socialists. Manning Marable, for example, wrote in the February 1993 issue of the Progressive:

We must accept and acknowledge the reality that, for the fore- seeable future, the essential debate will not be about "capitalism versus socialism" but about the character and content of the capitalist social order...This means advancing a politics of radical, multicultural democracy, not socialism. It means, in the short run, that tactical electoral alliances with centrists like Clinton, within the Democratic Party, are absolutely necessary if we are to push back the aggressive, reactionary agenda of the far right.

Urvashi Vaid, director of the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), is quoted in a recent South End Press book, ironically titled *Talking About a Revolution*:

For many years, I thought that we would have a revolution that would overthrow existing structures and replace them with the new thing. I don't believe that now, and I haven't for a long time...

But I really believe that we can make capitalism more responsive, accountable, environmentally sound. We can make it fairer, non-discriminatory. We can take the benefits of the economic system and spread them out, so they can benefit more people rather than the five owners of everything...This is a pragmatic formulation."[22]

Even when unity between different oppressed groups is discussed, the basis of unity is not class, but only some vague sense that oppressed groups cannot achieve their liberation alone. The result is pro-Democratic Party reformism, represented by the quotations above, combined with an argument for cross-class unity. Vaid argues,

I really value identity...And yet, I very much believe I can link up and find common ground with a heterosexual mother who lives in the suburbs. I think I can link up and find common ground with a straight white businessman who's working in a big corporation. I really believe that."[23]

The working class is completely absent from this equation. It is ironic that, in this view, workers cannot unite across racial and sexual lines, yet Vaid (a nonwhite lesbian) thinks nothing of proclaiming her ability

to unite with a "straight white business- man." The middle class can unite, workers cannot.

Marable at least recognizes that there has been a growing class polarization among Blacks in the U.S.:
Despite the legal and political gains African-Americans have achieved, and despite the growth of a Black middle class, the reality is that the basic conditions for the vast majority of Black people—and youth especially—have become strikingly worse in the past 15 years."[24]

Marable also points out that the number of Black political officials in office has risen dramatically since the 1965, from 100 to more than 8,000, at the very same time that conditions for the majority of Blacks have worsened.

But Marable doesn't use these facts to challenge the idea of an undifferentiated "Black community," or to explain that class interest pits poor and working-class Blacks against middle-class and rich Blacks. Instead he argues: "If the Black Community is going to move forward into the next century, we must take aggressive steps, and quickly, to bridge this generation gap."[25] By describing what is a growing class gap as simply a *generational* difference, Marable is then able to argue for *all Blacks* to unite.

Instead of linking the struggle of ordinary Black people against racism and exploitation with the struggle of other workers who face inequality and exploitation, Marable calls for a new fight for "Black empowerment" that unites Blacks across the class divide. "We must also search for common ground—the basic unity of interests that bring together people of different backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, languages and social classes to advance the ideals of democracy."[26]

The Polish-born German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg answered Marable well a century ago in her polemic against reformism. The bourgeoisie, she argues, has long ago abandoned any commitment to real democracy out of fear of any struggle from below :
We must conclude that the socialist movement is not bound to bourgeois democracy, but that the fate of democracy is bound with the socialist movement. We must conclude from this that democracy does not acquire greater chances of life in the mea- sure that the working class renounces the struggle for its emancipation, but that on the contrary, democracy acquires greater chances of survival as the socialist movement becomes sufficiently strong to struggle against the bourgeois desertion of democracy. He who would strengthen democracy should want to strengthen and not weaken the socialist movement. He who renounces the struggle for socialism renounces both the labor movement and democracy.[27]

Centrality of the working class

The working-class struggle cannot be successful unless workers are able to throw off the yoke of oppression that divides them. That is why, as a class, workers not only do not benefit from oppression, but also have a common class interest in fighting oppression. Capitalism would have no need for dividing workers if there were not another dynamic at work—the tendency for capitalism to compel workers to collectively fight back against the various aspects of their oppression and exploitation. Writes Hal Draper, using a quotation from Marx:
Capital "assembles the bourgeois and the proletarians in large cities, in which industry can be carried on most profitably, and by this herding together of great masses in one spot makes the proletariat conscious of their power"...

...The interests of workers, as a group organized by capital, lead them to struggle.

To engage in class struggle it is not necessary to "believe in" the class struggle any more than it is necessary to believe in Newton in order to fall from an airplane. The working class moves toward class struggle insofar as capitalism fails to satisfy its economic and social needs and aspirations...There is no evidence that workers like to struggle any more than anyone else; the evidence is that capitalism compels and accustoms them to do so. [Draper's italics][28]

It is in the course of struggle that the ideas used to divide workers begin to break down, and workers see in practice who the real enemy is. But be- cause capitalism both divides and unites workers, it is necessary to build an organization—a revolutionary socialist party—that brings together the most class-conscious workers and fights to link every small battle against exploitation and oppression in the system with the struggle to overthrow the system as a whole. Writes Tony Cliff:
For any oppressed group to fight back there is need for hope. And that is to be found, not in the isolation of oppression—the housewife trapped in the home, the gay in the closet, the Jews in the ghetto—but in the collective strength of the working class. For Marxists the notion that the working class, by liberating itself, will liberate the whole of humanity, is central. Which is why the revolutionary socialist party must support struggles against all forms of oppression, not only of the working class but of any downtrodden section of society.[29]

Lenin argued that working-class consciousness could not be considered full class consciousness until workers were trained to combat all forms of oppression:
Working-class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to all cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter what class is affected...

Socialists should conduct propaganda that exposes the horrors and abuses of the system, so that the most backward worker will understand, or will feel, that the students and religious sects, the peasants and the authors are being abused and outraged by those same dark forces that are oppressing and crushing him at every step of his life. Feeling that, he himself will be filled with an irresistible desire to react, and he will know how to hoot the censors one day, on another day to demonstrate outside the house of a governor who has brutally suppressed a peasant uprising, on still another day to teach a lesson to the gendarmes in surplices who are doing the work of the holy inquisition.[30]

There has long been a false dichotomy posed on the left: *either* you choose to focus on class questions, to the detriment of issues of oppression; *or* you focus on fighting oppression. In reality, the only way to effectively challenge oppression and ultimately to destroy it is to link the two together. Where oppression and class intersect, it is only the working class who has an interest in sweeping away *all* forms of oppression *and* exploitation, that is, to stand for the complete liberation of the oppressed.

The need for revolution

Revolutions are festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other times are the masses of the people in a position to come forward so actively as the creators of a new social order.

Lenin[31]

What all of the critics of genuine Marxism have in common is the idea that somehow oppression can be ended without ending capitalism. This is essentially the standpoint of middle-class and bourgeois radicalism. Bourgeois as well as middleclass sections of the oppressed always seek to limit the scope of the struggle, to keep it within the bounds acceptable to their class. Their cries for "unity of the oppressed" are ultimately calls for the workingclass sections of the oppressed to not "break ranks" by asking for too much. The middle class—professionals, managers, engineers, and so on—seeks merely to improve their status within the framework of the existing system. As Rosa Luxemburg put it, "Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modification of the old society."[32]

There have been some improvements over the last few decades for middle-class Blacks, Latinos and women—gains that have been partially eroded, but not eliminated. As the class divide has widened, middle-class women and Blacks have moved rightward along with the Clinton Democrats, offering not the slightest challenge to Clinton's rollback of welfare spending and the increasing brutalization of young, predominantly poor Black and Latino men in the criminal justice system. For the majority of working-class and poor people, conditions have worsened. Real liberation must be linked to a *class struggle* for better pay, housing, education, more jobs, more social spending, against police brutality and so on. And those struggles must be linked to a fight to destroy the system that feeds on oppression. A revolution in the U.S. would fuse together struggles against police brutality and the criminal injustice system, struggles of women for equal pay, struggles against immigrant- and gay-bashing, and so on, with the struggle of ordinary workers to seize the reigns of production.

At the heart of any real revolution is the transformation of the economic relations in society—the socialization of the means of production by the working class in order to produce for human need. But that doesn't mean at all that revolution consists simply of a change in the economic relations of society. Revolution is about a total transformation of all aspects of society. "The history of a revolution," wrote Leon Trotsky in his masterful *History of the Russian Revolution,* "is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of the rulership over their own destiny."33Revolutions bring forward all the downtrodden, the oppressed and the mistreated. They awaken what is best in humanity, that collective spirit of solidarity in which all forms of oppression are laid bare and challenged openly.

This happened in the Russian Revolution of 1917. At the heart of the 1917 October Revolution was the seizure of the factories by the workers and the seizure of the land by the peasants. But the revolution did far more than that. Oppressed nationalities were offered the right to secede from Russia. Homosexuality was legalized. Divorce was made free and easily available to either party, and Soviet Russia became the first country to grant women the right to vote. More importantly, efforts were made to establish the means by which women could be freed from household slavery and dependence in the husband: access to jobs and education and to communal kitchens, laundries and child-care services. The Bolsheviks created a special "Women's Department," which sought to draw millions of women into active social life, combat illiteracy and challenge men's resistance, especially in the countryside, to women's free-dom.

And in a country where anti-Jewish pogroms had recently been commonplace, Jews rose to positions of leadership in the revolutionary government. Kamenev and Zinoviev, both Jews, were prominent leaders in the new government. Trotsky, a Jew, became first commissar of foreign affairs, and then, months later when the revolution was under attack, he became commander of the Red Army, which beat back attacks from 14 different armies.

Isolated and economically backward, the Russian Revolution ultimately failed. But though socialism could not be achieved in Russia, the revolution remains the highest achievement of humanity in this century, showing us all the way to fight for and build a society free from all oppression and misery. The Russian revolution gave us a glimpse of what a society run by workers would mean—for all the oppressed.

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1 Zillah Eisenstein, "Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy," from Eisenstein, ed., Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (Monthly Review, 1979), p. 9.

2 Clarence E. Walker, Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essays and Reappraisals,(University of Tennessee, 1991), pp. 4-5. Walker engages in what is typical for anti-Marxist hacks: he misquotes out of context. The quote from Marx comes from two sources: a series of speeches he made in 1849, which was published as a pamphlet entitled "Wage Labor and Capital," and also from a footnote in Capitalin reference to an argument that capital is "not a thing, but a social relation between persons." Here is Marx's full 1849 quote: "A negro is a negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton-spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It becomes capital only in certain relations. Torn from these relationships it is no more capital than gold in itself is money or sugar the price of sugar." In this comment there is not the slightest hint of racism. On the contrary, Marx's comment implicitly challenges the prevailing ideology justifying the enslavement of Africans.

3 Karl Marx, Capital(New York: Vintage, 1977),p. 915.

4 Capital, p. 918.

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17 Quoted in Weedon, p. 176.

18 Quoted in Jeremy Brecher, Strike! (Boston: South End Press, 1972), p. 125.

19 Sharon Smith, "Mistaken Identity—or Can Identity Politics Liberate the Oppressed," International Socialism 62(Spring 1994), p. 39.

20 See Shawki, p. 97.

21 Quoted in Philip Foner, Women and the American Labor Movement, Volume I (New York: The Free Press, 1979), p. 412.

22 South End Press Collective, eds., Talking About a Revolution (Boston: South End Press, 1998), pp. 108-09.

23 Talking About a Revolution, p. 102.

24 Manning Marable, Black Liberation in Conservative America (Boston: South End Press, 1997), p. 246.

25 Marable, p. 248.

26 Marable, p. 248.

27 Rosa Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution (New York: Pathfinder, 1980), p. 76.

28 Hal Draper, Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution, Volume 3: the Politics of Social Classes(New York: Monthly Review, 1978), pp. 41-42.
29 Tony Cliff, Class Struggle and Women's Liberation (London: Bookmarks, 1984), p. 237.

30 Quoted in Cliff, Class Struggle and Women's Liberation (London: Bookmarks, 1984), p. 238.

31 Quoted in Cliff, p. 139.

32 Luxemburg, p. 78.

33 Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution (Pluto Press, London, 1997), p.17.

The Roots of Racism

By Alex Taylor

For many people coming to radical politics–Blacks and whites alike–hatred of racism and a desire to get rid of it is a huge motivating factor. This is in contrast to some of the common assumptions about where racism comes from.

The first is that racism is part of human nature–that it's always existed and always will. The second is the liberal idea of racism–that it comes from people's bad ideas, and that if we could change these ideas, we could get rid of it.

Both assumptions are wrong. Racism isn't just an ideology but is an institution. And its origins don't lie in bad ideas or in human nature. Rather, racism originated with capitalism and the slave trade. As the Marxist writer CLR James put it, "The conception of dividing people by race begins with the slave trade. This thing was so shocking, so opposed to all the conceptions of society which religion and philosophers had…that the only justification by which humanity could face it was to divide people into races and decide that the Africans were an inferior race."

History proves this point. Prior to the advent of capitalism, racism as a systematic form of oppression did not exist. For example, ancient Greek and Roman societies had no concept of race or racial oppression.

These weren't liberated societies. They were built on the backs of slaves. And these societies created an ideology to justify slavery. As the Greek philosopher Aristotle put it in his book Politics, "Some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter, slavery is both expedient and right."

However, because slavery in ancient Greece and Rome was not racially based, these societies had no corresponding ideology of racial inferiority or oppression. In fact, Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Early Christian societies had a favorable image of Blacks and of African societies.

Septemus Severenus, an emperor of Rome, was African and almost certainly Black. "The ancients did accept the institution of slavery as a fact of life; they made ethnocentric judgments of other societies; they had narcissistic canons of physical beauty," writes Howard University professor Frank Snowden in his book Before Color Prejudice. "Yet nothing comparable to the virulent color prejudice of modern time existed in the ancient world. This is the view of most scholars who have examined the evidence."

Racism originated with the modern slave trade. Just as the slaveholders of ancient Greece and Rome created an ideology that their barbaric slave system was "natural," so did the modern slave-owning class.

There was one important difference. According to them, slavery was "natural" because of race. Africans were not human beings, and therefore, they were born to be slaves. As historian Eric Williams writes in his book Capitalism and Slavery, "Slavery was not born of racism; rather, racism was the consequence of slavery."

Again, history bears this out. If racism had existed prior to the slave trade, then Africans would have been the first group of people to be enslaved. But, in the early years of colonial America, slavery was not racially based. Initially, the colonists attempted to enslave Native Americans. They also imported thousands of white indentured servants. White servants were treated like slaves. They were bought, sold, put up as stakes in card games and raped, beaten and killed with impunity.

Not only was servitude a multiracial institution in the early years of colonial America, there was also a surprising degree of equality between Blacks and whites. For example, in 17th century Virginia, Blacks were able to file lawsuits, testify in court against whites, bear arms and own property, including servants and slaves. In other words, 17th century Blacks in Virginia had more rights than Blacks in the Jim Crow South during the 20th century.

Colonial records from 17th century Virginia reveal that one African slave named Frances Payne bought his freedom by earning enough money to buy three white servants to replace him. Such events prove the point that institutional racism did not exist in the early years of slavery–but was created later.

"Slavery was not born of racism; rather, racism was the consequence of slavery."

Over time, the slaveholding class gradually came to the conclusion that racism was in its interest and that it must be deeply embedded in all of society's institutions.

There were several reasons for this conclusion. First, indentured servitude was no longer sufficient to meet the demand for labor as industry developed in Britain and put new demands on the colonial economy. Also, by the middle of the 17th century, African slaves began to live longer than five to seven years–the standard period for indentured servitude. Put in the cold terms of economic reality, slavery became more profitable than indentured servitude. Finally, Africans, whose children could also be enslaved, were more easily segregated and oppressed than servants or Native Americans.

As Williams summarized this process: "Here then, is the origin of Negro slavery. The reason was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor…This was not a theory, it was a practical conclusion deduced from the personal experience of the planter. He would have gone to the moon, if necessary, for labor. Africa was nearer than the moon."

But the most important reason that the planter class created a racially based slave system was not economic, but politica–the age-old strategy of divide and rule.

The "slaveocracy" was a tiny, extremely wealthy minority surrounded by thousands of people whom it had enslaved, exploited or conquered. Its greatest fear was that slaves and servants would unite against it–and this fear was legitimate.

For example, Bacon's Rebellion of 1676 began as a protest against Virginia's policy against Native Americans, but turned into an armed multiracial rebellion against the ruling elite. An army of several hundred farmers, servants and slaves demanding freedom and the lifting of taxes sacked Jamestown and forced the governor of Virginia to flee. One thousand soldiers were sent from England to put it down. The rebel army held out for eight months before it was defeated.

Bacon's Rebellion was a turning point. It made clear to the planters that for their class to survive, they would have to divide the people that they ruled–on the basis of race. Abolitionist and ex-slave Frederick Douglass put it this way: "The slaveholders…by encouraging the enmity of the poor, laboring white man against the Blacks, succeeded in making the said white man almost as much a slave as the Black himself…Both are plundered, and by the same plunderers." Or, as Douglass also said, "They divided both to conquer each."

Over time, the institution of racism became firmly established--both as a means of legitimizing slavery, but also as a means of dividing poor people against one other. While the Civil War smashed the planters' slave system, it did not end the institution of racism. The reason for this is that racism had further uses for capitalism.

Similar to the slave societies of antiquity and of the early U.S., under capitalism today, a small, wealthy minority exploits and oppresses the immense majority of people. Racism is the main division among workers today, and it provides a convenient scapegoat for problems created by the system. But ordinary people–regardless of their race–don't benefit from racism.

It's no coincidence that the historical periods in which workers as a whole have made the greatest gains–such as the 1930s and the 1960s–have coincided with great battles against racism.

Capitalism created racism and can't function without it. The way to end racism once and for all is to win a socialist society–in which the first priority is abolishing all traces of exploitation and racism.

An Issue of Life and Death...For Women

Abortion is Every Woman's Right

By Sharon Smith

The right to choose is just one aspect of a much larger issue of reproductive rights–women's right to control their own bodies and reproductive lives. Although in recent decades the battle has centered around the right to abortion, this includes more than the right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy–but also the right to have children in the face of racist sterilization programs that targeted African Americans, Native Americans and disabled people in the U.S. throughout much of the 20th century.

Latinos were often obliged to sign consent forms in English instead of Spanish, and were frequently sterilized without their knowledge. By 1968, one-third of all women in Puerto Rico–still a U.S. colony–were permanently sterilized. Today, racist sterilization programs continue to target Black and Brown women and men in poor countries around the world in the name of "population control."

Reproductive freedom is also about abortion rights for poor women. Even when abortion is illegal, wealthy women have–and have always had–the money and private doctors to obtain abortions, while poor women face the choice of carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term or risking their lives with unsafe, illegal abortions.

Large numbers of poor and working-class women die when abortion is illegal. According to the World Health Organization, 78,000 women around the world die from unsafe abortions every year.

And in the U.S., before abortion was made legal in 1973, large numbers of women died from complications from abortion. In New York City, Black women made up 50 percent of all women who died after an illegal abortion, while Puerto Rican women were 44 percent.

Since the 1970s, many of the same states that denied Medicaid funding for poor women's abortions have been perfectly willing to sterilize them, free of charge. These are the reasons why reproductive rights–the right to choose whether and when to have children–is not just a women's issue. It is also a class issue, a racial issue and an issue of global justice.

Crusade of the bigots

Right-wing organizations with names such as the Moral Majority are neither morally superior, nor are they anywhere near the majority. They represent an extremely well-funded minority–with "friends" in high places, like Congress and the White House.

To be sure, these right-wingers–including George W. Bush–couch their opposition to abortion with pious phrases praising "the sanctity of life" and the "sanctity of marriage." But they are hypocrites. Newt Gingrich, for example–a leading spokesperson for "the sanctity of marriage"-is now on his third.

Their crusade is political, not moral. Morality is personal. Those who oppose abortion should be able to follow their own consciences–and at the same time allow other people to follow theirs.

No one in the pro-choice movement has ever suggested that anyone personally opposed to abortion should be forced to have one. Yet the goal of the anti-abortion crusade is to impose–by law–a very conservative set of moral values on the rest of the population.

The rise of the Christian Right

The Chistian Right has its origins in the New Right of the 1980s, which did not even pretend it was religiously motivated. The agenda of the New Right should dispel any myth that it believed in the sanctity of human life. Its agenda included support for the death penalty, support for nuclear weapons and massive cuts in social spending for the poor.

Right-wing Rep. Bob Dornan (R-Calif.) even sponsored the Human Life Amendment–which would have banned abortion under all circumstances, without exceptions for rape and incest victims, or even if the woman would die if she gave birth. So much for respecting human life.

The New Right was formed to oppose all the gains made by the social movements of the 1960s-not just the women's movement, but the Black Power and gay liberation movements. The New Right in the 1980s brought together Protestant fundamentalists with old-time segregationists.

It is no coincidence that at (now deceased) Strom Thurmond's December 9, 2002 birthday celebration, Trent Lott–who fights daily to carry out the Christian Right's agenda in Congress–praised Thurmond's 1948 presidential campaign, whose centerpiece was opposition to integration. "We're proud of it," Lott said. "And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these years either."

The New Right's–and now the Christian Right's–opposition to abortion has its origins in this context. These right-wingers oppose all aspects of women's rights, and believe that the growing numbers of women in the workforce–along with abortion–are undermining the "traditional" nuclear family.

It could reasonably be argued that the "traditional family" ideal–the

breadwinning husband and the stay-at-home Mom–never actually existed, since many working-class women have always worked outside the home. But this ideal–of the "Ozzie and Harriet" and "Leave it to Beaver" variety–was a centerpiece of the reactionary era of the 1950s. And that is exactly the era to which the forces of the Christian Right want to return.

In the 1980s, the hallmark of the New Right was not merely opposition to abortion, but also to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that would have established women's constitutional equality with men. Phyllis Schlafly's Stop ERA organization campaigned as ardently against the ERA as the National Right to Life campaigned against abortion.

In the 1990s, the Christian Right supported Bill Clinton's so-called welfare "reform" that threw millions of poor families, women and children into deeper poverty, and pushed for teen abstinence programs. Today, the Christian Right is not only behind Bush's support for a gay marriage ban and his attacks on abortion, but also his $1.5 billion program to promote marriage in poor Black areas–where it believes the traditional family is most threatened by single motherhood.

Whose family? Whose values?

It is worth asking why the Christian Right is so attached to this rigid ideal of the traditional family when only 9 percent of all U.S. families fit this model. Why can't their idea of "family values" change to reflect the real changes in people's lives?

The vast majority of women today are in the workforce, and half of all marriages end in divorce. And the demand for gay marriage is a result of the fact that many same-sex couples are choosing to live together and raise families.

We need activism to build the kind of movement that can link the right to choose with full reproductive rights for all women. This can become a movement that will settle for nothing less than full equality.

The Christian Right can't adapt to these changes because the ruling class relies on the heterosexual nuclear family–not as a "moral" institution, but an economic unit that is central to capitalism. And while politicians such as Bush and Lott act as spokesmen for the Christian Right, Democrats Bill Clinton and John Kerry also tout "family values."

It was no accident that Bill Clinton signed the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act and promoted teen abstinence as president. He was attempting to appease the Christian Right. Republicans and Democrats alike represent corporate interests–and uphold the nuclear family as an institution that is central to capitalist society.

Preserving the institution of the nuclear family–and, most importantly, women's unpaid labor within it--is of material benefit to the system. Whether they work outside the home or not, inside the family, women perform labor–housework, cooking, laundry and child care–that is free of charge, and therefore invaluable to the continued existence of the capitalist system.

The dead end of electoralism

Turning back the clock is the political program of the Christian Right. States across the U.S. have passed hundreds of laws curtailing women's right to choose–imposing 24-hour waiting periods, requiring teenagers to obtain the consent of their parents even in abusive families and refusing state funding for poor women's abortions even if they have cancer or diabetes.

In November, the attack on abortion reached the federal level, when Congress passed a ban on the intact dilation and extraction abortion procedure (which right-wingers deliberately mislabeled as "partial-birth abortion")–without so much as a clause to protect the health of the pregnant woman. And the Senate's March 25 passage of the Unborn Victims of Violence Act makes it a second crime to harm the fetus of a pregnant woman.

But we have to ask the question: How has the Christian Right been so successful at shifting the political climate? The answer is simple--the anti-abortion crusade has relentlessly pursued an activist strategy that promotes the false impression that women choose abortion for "frivolous reasons," and "selfishly" delay abortions for the sake of convenience.

But if the Christian Right has been campaigning relentlessly to undermine the right to choose-rallying by the thousands and protesting outside abortion clinics–the same can't be said for the pro-choice movement. Instead of mounting an unapologetic defense of women's right to control their own bodies, pro-choice leaders have increasingly spent the bulk of their time and money campaigning for pro-choice Democrats.

Yet in November, 63 House Democrats and 11 Senate Democrats –many of them "pro-choice"-voted in favor of the misnamed "partial birth" ban. And in March, 47 House Democrats joined forces with Republicans in voting for the Unborn Victims of Violence Act. These results demonstrate the bankruptcy of the pro-choice movement's electoral strategy.

We also need to ask why the pro-choice movement didn't hold Clinton accountable when he broke his campaign promise to pass a Freedom of Choice Act–and when he threw poor women off welfare. Clinton voiced no disapproval as right-wing lawmakers passed state laws

across the country mandating parental consent or notification, and a host of other restrictions on women's right to choose.

During Clinton's first term as president, Congress had the most anti-choice voting record in its history. Yet Clinton's only attention to the abortion issue in his second term was to promote sexual abstinence among teens to lower the country's abortion rate. Clinton's presidency showed why politicians can't be relied on to defend abortion rights–no matter what their campaign rhetoric.

What kind of movement?

If the electoral strategy has been a failure, what kind of movement is needed to turn things around? The grassroots movement for gay marriage is showing the way forward.

In recent months, thousands of gay rights activists around the country have resurrected the strategies of the civil rights movement and refused to take "no" for an answer when demanding marriage licenses. Suddenly, the right to same-sex marriage–which seemed impossible just a few months ago--is within reach.

That is how rapidly the political climate can change when a grassroots movement starts to fight back. We can also learn a lesson from the women's movement of the 1960s and '70s–the movement that won the right to choose in the first place.

At the time, Richard Nixon–an anti-abortion right-winger much like George W. Bush–occupied the White House, and the U.S. Supreme Court was packed with conservative appointees. Yet the first state to make abortion legal was California in 1970–when none other than Ronald Reagan was governor.

Between 1969 and 1973, tens of thousands of women and men held hundreds of protests across the U.S., making women's right to choose a central demand for the women's liberation movement–along with equal pay, child care and an end to discrimination. Today, we need activism to build the kind of movement that can link the right to choose with full reproductive rights for all women. This can become a movement that will settle for nothing less than full equality.

Real people are living lives that are completely out of sync with the so-called family values of the Christian Right. And one out of every three women today has an abortion. That means most people know someone who has needed one.

We are the majority, not the Christian Right. The pro-choice movement should be fighting against everything the Christian Right stands for. Such a movement–that defends the right to abortion without apology –will find millions of people on its side.

Republicans and Democrats Preach "Family Values" Hypocrisy

Behind the Attack on Gay Marriage

By David Thurston and Sharon Smith

"Among the likeliest effects of gay marriage is to take us down the slope to legalized polygamy," wrote Stanley Kurtz in the conservative Weekly Standard. Antigay demonstrations have featured prominent Christian fundamentalists who quote the Old Testament like it was written yesterday.

Using demonstrations, e-mail campaigns and more, Christian Right forces have mobilized pressure on Republicans who were hesitant to take a stand for an antigay marriage amendment. But this "family values" crusade–which hides behind slogans like "Let the People Decide" in Massachusetts–has a clear ideological agenda: stoking homophobia and other forms of bigotry.

This agenda has given confidence to even more dangerous right-wing forces. In Houston, a grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan was photographed with his hood off at a protest against gays seeking marriage licenses. He wore a sign that read: "Gay: Got Aids Yet?"

By promoting a constitutional ban on gay marriage, George W. Bush hopes to firm up his Christian Right voting base to reverse his falling poll ratings. As New York's Gay City News put it, Bush is "Bashing for Votes."

But John Kerry and most Democrats also promote a brand of "family values." Kerry has emphasized his opposition to gay marriage on the campaign trail, while supporting gay civil unions to keep gay voters behind him.

What's behind this commitment to so-called family values, shared by both the Republican and Democratic parties? Clearly, the politicians don't practice what they preach. For example, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich–one of the most self-righteous proponents of the "sanc-

tity of marriage"—is now well into his third, after divorcing his first two wives.

Politicians' promotion of "family values" is often couched in pious phrases, but they have material, not moral, reasons for their crusade. They are trying to uphold the nuclear family as an institution that is central to capitalist society.

From birth, we are all told that the only "normal" way to live is in a nuclear family: a household with two married parents, one male and one female, with multiple children. But few households fit that picture today.

As author and academic Lisa Duggan put it in The Nation magazine: "Marriage is less stable and central to the organization of American life than ever. There are now more unmarried households than married ones, and a variety of formal and informal, permanent and transient...partnership and kinship relationships have displaced any singular, static model of domestic life."

This deterioration of the traditional nuclear family has alarmed conservatives, who want to turn back the clock and resurrect the ideal of the male breadwinner and the woman who sees her main role in life as a wife and mother. For this reason, Bush has proposed a $1.5 billion program to promote marriage among the poor.

Preserving the institution of the nuclear family, particularly among working-class people, is of material benefit to capitalism. Karl Marx used the phrase "privatized reproduction" to describe the role of the family in providing a plentiful supply of cheap labor to capitalists.

Instead of society taking collective responsibility for feeding and caring for its members, the burdens of raising children, cooking and housework are pushed onto the shoulders of working-class families. At no cost to business owners, the nuclear family "reproduces labor"—both in terms of replenishing the current labor force each day, and by raising children, the future generation of workers, to adulthood.

Preserving the institution of heterosexual marriage is a crucial part of maintaining the ideal of the nuclear family as part of the "natural" human order. Both the women's and gay liberation movements of the 1960s threatened to undermine the institution of the nuclear family.

The women's movement, which won legal abortion and promoted an Equal Rights Amendment to make women the equals of men in society, opposed the notion that women have a duty to perform unpaid labor within the family as their main goal in life. The gay liberation movement fought to legitimize gay sexuality, directly confronting the idea that human beings are naturally heterosexual and destined to live in a traditional family.

The New Right, which has since become known as the Christian Right, rose in response to these movements, using "family values" rhetoric to assault the gains of the social movements of the 1960s. As a coalition made up of a variety of organizations—ranging from Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority to the National Conservative Caucus—the New Right's virulent opposition to abortion rights and women's liberation was matched by its hostility to affirmative action and gay rights.

The New Right launched an ambitious campaign that shifted the political climate rightward during the 1980s and 1990s—affecting not only the Republican Party, but the Democratic Party as well. It was no accident that Bill Clinton signed the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act and promoted teen abstinence while president. He was attempting to appease the Christian Right.

The fight for gay marriage has become the focal point for a new discussion about the role of the family under capitalism. Politicians faced with the demand for gay marriage today are recycling their tired rhetoric about the family.

Bush's proposal on marriage education for the poor is typical, blaming single mothers for "irresponsibly" raising children alone and claiming that their poor "marriage skills" cause rising poverty and crime. We should be putting the blame for poverty where it belongs—on the shoulders of corporations and politicians who have systematically gutted working-class living standards.

We can win the fight for gay marriage by explaining that this is an issue of civil rights—and that denying gay marriage is discrimination. We are better able to make those arguments today because the traditional model of the nuclear family no longer fits the reality of most working-class people, straight or gay.

Socialists are for the full liberation of women and gays. Full sexual freedom is a precondition for genuine human liberation. The fight for gay marriage should be linked to the fight for national health care and abortion rights, against racism—and ultimately, the struggle for socialism and a world where human need would be the first priority.

Consequences of bigotry

- Only 13 states prohibit employment discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- Thirty-eight states have passed laws specifically banning same-sex marriage.
- A national survey by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network found that more than four-fifths of gays, lesbian and transgender youths experienced verbal harassment over the period of a year; and 42 percent experienced physical harassment or violence.
- A 1997 Iowa study found that, on average, high school students heard 25 antigay remarks a day.
- As of February 15, 2000, over the previous 12 months, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network documented 968 incidents of anti-gay harassment, including a murder, assaults, death threats and verbal gay bashing--up 142 percent from a record 400 violations the preceding year.

  The group also found that reports of military authorities investi gating service members' sexuality--supposedly prohibited by the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy--increased 30 percent in the same period. The Pentagon discharged people for being gay, lesbian or bisexual at a rate of three per day in 1999.
- A 2002 study estimated that 35 percent of homeless youth were gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.
- According to a study released last year by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, more than one in three gay undergraduate students had experienced antigay harassment in the past year. Almost a fifth of respondents feared for their physical safety, and 51 percent concealed their sexual orienta tion or gender identity to avoid intimidation.
- Sixty-four percent of transgender people in San Francisco made less than $25,000 a year, more than 40 percent did not have health insurance, and one in five didn't have stable housing, according to a study by the Transgender Law Center and National Center for Lesbian Rights.
- Thirty-four percent of gay people have been turned away from renting or buying a home because of their sexual orientation--or know someone who has experienced this--according to a 2001 nationwide survey commissioned by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The Russian Revolution & The Real Marxist Tradition

The Revolutionary Tradition

The ISO stands in the tradition of revolutionary socialism–starting with Karl Marx, who argued more than 150 years ago that only the working class can bring about a society of real equality and democracy (socialism). Our tradition stresses the importance of the working class actively, democratically, and self-consciously transforming society to meet human needs. Democracy is at the heart of Marxism. As Marx himself said of democracy, "This is the law; all the rest is commentary."

Most people don't realize it–we are rarely taught this in schools–but here in the United States, the working class has a long and proud history of fighting back against exploitation and oppression. From the movement that demanded an eight-hour day in the late 1800s, to the sit-down strikes of the 1930s, to the fight against corporate greed today, workers in the U.S. have shown time and again that they will organize and struggle for better working conditions and a better world.

Eugene Debs, the great orator and American socialist, became committed to socialist ideas through his experiences and the lessons he drew from leading the Pullman strike in 1894. Debs went on to win nearly one million votes as the Socialist Party's candidate for president in 1912. Likewise, the experiences of the massive strikes that built the industrial unions in the 1930s turned union activists into socialists, many of whom joined the Communist Party. And people seeking to rebuild the genuine socialist tradition out of the radical movements of the 1960s founded the ISO.

Rather than an alien idea, the class struggle is an ongoing feature of U.S. society. For the first half of the twentieth century, socialists were an influential part of the labor movement, and at any given time, tens of thousands–and sometimes millions–of workers considered themselves to be socialists. U.S. workers, contrary to the claim in many history textbooks, are as combative and potentially radical as are workers anywhere else. The politics of socialism from below seeks to build, on the basis of this collective experience of struggle–from both the victories and defeats–a movement that can unite workers to get rid of capitalism once and for all.

Stalinism

For more than 60 years, socialism was equated with the kind of societies found in the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, or East Germany and other former Eastern Bloc countries. In reality, however, these societies had nothing whatsoever to do with Marxism. They bore a remarkable resemblance to the capitalist societies they claimed to condemn: parasitic and often despotic rulers, an exploited and oppressed working class that had no real say in the running of society or their own lives, and military machines used for imperialistic adventures and to smash workers' struggle.

To equate these regimes with socialism is to deny everything that socialism stands for–most centrally that socialism is about human liberation and about building a society based on fulfilling people's needs rather than creating profits for a few. Since the late 1920s, this lie, that socialism already exists in Russia or China or elsewhere, has been propagated by rulers East and West. In the West, it was useful for our rulers to point to the horrors of Stalinism in Russia as a way to discredit the socialist alternative. In the East, the so-called communists used the language of Marxism to cover up their own atrocities and class interests while pointing at the inequality in the West to discredit market capitalism.

While these perversions of socialism were convenient for ruling classes internationally, they were disastrous for the working-class movement and for the left. Unfortunately, throughout the Cold War, most people who called themselves socialists around the world also argued that one or more of these societies was a model of socialism–and held it up as an example for workers in capitalist countries to emulate or support. To workers and oppressed people struggling here for better conditions and more rights, these countries were hardly attractive alternatives.

Support for these so-called socialist regimes effectively distorted the meaning of Marxism in the eyes of millions all over the world for several generations. Moreover, time and again since the late 1920s, those who claimed to be socialists lined up to defend Communist Party officials against workers' struggles: in Hungary in 1956; Czechoslovakia, 1968; Poland, 1981; and Tiannanmen Square, 1989. These are just a few of the workers' movements drowned in blood by so-called communists.

In the United States, this distortion of Marxism meant that at the height of the Depression-era working-class struggles in 1936—37, the Communist Party urged workers to back Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the Democratic Party, not to build an independent working-class party. By the end of 1937, Roosevelt had betrayed the working class.

The Communist Party was the largest working-class socialist organization ever built in the United States, and it could have led the movement forward. Instead, the Depression-era strike wave ended in a series of defeats–which were followed by a world war–when it could have ended in a working-class victory.

How the Russian Revolution was Lost

To understand the rise of Stalinism, it is necessary to understand what happened to the international socialist movement after the failure of the Russian Revolution. The years that immediately followed the victory of the 1917 Russian Revolution were indeed a model for workers all

over the world. Russian workers provided an example of the power and creativity that working-class people have to end tyranny and build socialism democratically. From Budapest to Seattle, workers who were inspired by the victory in Russia built their own socialist movements.

From the outset, the leaders of the Russian Revolution stressed that if the revolution remained only within Russian borders, it would be weak. The Bolshevik Party, which had become the majority party in the workers' councils and helped to lead the revolution to victory, understood that spreading the revolution internationally was the only way the revolution would survive. To spread the revolution was not an abstract wish but a distinct possibility, especially in Germany. In the words of the Bolshevik leader Lenin, "The absolute truth is that without a revolution in Germany we shall perish."

While there was a revolutionary upsurge—in Germany, there were actually three revolutions in the aftermath of the First World War—none of these movements matched the success of the Bolsheviks in Russia. This left the Russian workers' government isolated and besieged by hostile capitalist countries. Fourteen capitalist governments, including that of the United States, sent armies to invade Russia to overthrow the workers' government. This immersed Russia for nearly three years, until 1921, in a civil war.

While the Russian workers' government won the civil war, it did so at a tremendous cost. Russia was left economically devastated, with industrial production reduced to 18 percent of its pre-war level. Starvation was rampant in the countryside, and disease plagued the cities. The working class itself, which had made the revolution and served as the basis of power in the new society, was physically decimated—reduced to 43 percent of its former size. Half of the working class either had been killed defending the revolution or had fled to the countryside in search of food.

A workers' government cannot exist were the working class itself has been destroyed. And socialism cannot exist in the midst of scarcity on the scale that Russian society experienced after the civil war. The only hope for the revolution in Russia was a successful workers' revolution in an advanced industrialized country, which could have then come to Russia's aid. This hope began to fade as the revolutionary tide ebbed in Europe by the mid-1920s.

The Communist Party in Russia was left standing like a skeleton around a working class that had all but ceased to exist. Bureaucrats, not workers, increasingly staffed the workers' state. In this context, Joseph Stalin came to power after Lenin's death in 1924. Once he had maneuvered himself firmly into power, Stalin led a bureaucratic counterrevolution against the working class in Russia through a bloody purge of all those who had helped to lead the Russian working class to victory in 1917.

Stalin's consolidation of power marked the beginning of massive industrialization in Russia—the decimation of workers' councils, the reintroduction of one-person management in the workplace, the forced collectivization of agriculture into state-run farms, and forced labor camps. Millions of people perished in the decade following Stalin's consolidation of power in 1928.

While Stalinism's victory represented the reintroduction of capitalist production in Russia in competition with the West, he claimed it was under the banner of "socialism in one country." This distortion has haunted the left ever since, with state ownership replacing workers' power as the defining feature of socialism in the USSR, China, and Cuba.

Trotsky and the fight against Stalinism

The rise of Stalinism did not take place without a fight. In particular, Leon Trotsky, the Bolshevik leader of the Red Army, fought the rising bureaucratic elite and, even after he was exiled by Stalin, kept the revolutionary tradition alive during the darkest days of the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. For this, Trotsky was hounded and eventually murdered by Stalinist agents in Mexico in 1940. Trotsky gave his life to keep alive the hope and ideals of revolutionary socialism.

Trotsky laid down the foundations for a revolutionary understanding of and opposition to Stalinism.

Trotsky's ability to influence events was limited during the 1930s—at a time when most of those on both the right and left considered Russia to be a socialist society. In this context, throughout the 1930s, Trotsky and his followers were unable to build large enough organizations to combat the influence of the much larger and more entrenched Communist Parties internationally. Small Trotskyist organizations were built and led some impressive struggles, such as the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters' strike. These organizations also fought tooth and nail against fascism in Europe. But they never reached the size necessary to play a decisive role.

Trotsky's analyses of the 1930s are unequaled. Trotsky alone was able to apply the Marxist method to analyze the rise of fascism in Europe and show how it could be beaten. Moreover, he laid down the foundations for a revolutionary understanding of and opposition to Stalinism. While Trotsky underestimated the impact of Stalinism (he believed that Stalinism represented a political degeneration of the revolution, rather than the reintroduction of capitalism), his contributions to the Marxist tradition were critical. Trotsky's insights and his commitment to working-class struggle internationally meant that the revolutionary socialist tradition was kept alive, if only by a small minority.

The 1930s marked the betrayal of the Russian Revolution and the rise

of fascism in Europe, but it also marked a high point of class struggle and working-class militancy in the United States. While the Communist Party's politics were moving further away from genuine socialism, it still attracted tens of thousands of members and was instrumental to building the industrial unions, which united workers across race and ethnic lines. The potential shown in the 1930s for American workers to unite, struggle, and be won to socialist politics (even if in a distorted form) is proof that socialism is not alien to them.

The 1960s

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the U.S. emerged as the strongest economic and military superpower. During the 1950s and 1960s, American bosses enjoyed such huge profits that they were willing to grant some wage concessions to workers—in return for higher productivity. While none of these concessions was won without a fight, American workers did enjoy one of the best standards of living in the world during this period.

Of course, not all workers shared in the benefits of this boom economy. Black workers in particular faced legal Jim Crow segregation in the South and de facto segregation in hiring and housing in the North. Black working-class people were all but shut out of the American Dream. If they bought a home in the suburbs, chances were that racists would drive them out. Most Southern Blacks were still denied voting rights in the early 1960s. The civil rights movement showed the entire world the contradictions and oppression at the heart of the free market.

By the late 1960s, a new student movement began to emerge. Inspired by the example of the courageous fight for civil rights and angered by the imperialist war against Vietnam, student demonstrations against the war rocked American campuses and cities. The Black Power movement also emerged in the late 1960s, with the formation of the Black Panther Party and other groups that were committed to fighting for Black liberation. The women's and gay liberation movements emerged soon after. While the radical movements in the U.S. by and large remained isolated from the labor movement, mass strikes shook advanced industrial countries such as France, Britain, and Italy. Revolution once again seemed to be on the agenda, and thousands of activists who were radicalized through the student movement began to look toward socialist politics.

But the socialist movement was still dominated by the distortions of Stalinism in the late 1960s—in particular, by the brand of Stalinism known as Maoism, named after the Chinese nationalist leader Mao Tse-tung. Maoism attracted the (mostly middle-class) student radicals who accepted the idea that American workers were "bought off" by the system and were therefore part of the problem, not the solution.

From a Maoist perspective, the only forces capable of fighting American imperialism were outside it—in poor countries of the so-called Third World (and including "Third World" populations such as African Americans and Latinos living inside the U.S.). Mao's China was considered the model for Third World revolution.

While Maoism is, in all important respects, a variant of Stalinism, it was able to attract some of the most committed activists of the period. The experience of the 1960s showed the possibility of rebuilding the revolutionary left in the United States. Unfortunately, the nationalist politics of Maoism were a dead end for anyone serious about changing the system. Once the social movements collapsed and China made its peace with U.S. imperialism, Maoist organizations collapsed and virtually disappeared.

The Democratic Party

With the decline of the social movements of the 1960s, the politics of liberalism and support for the Democratic Party were once again posed as the only realistic alternative to the right-wing Republican Party. But the lesser of two evils is still evil. The Democratic and Republican Parties are both capitalist parties. Both receive the majority of their funding from big business—and both carry out policies in the interests of big business. Even Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who achieved legendary status as a friend of the working class during the Great Depression, once said of himself, "I'm the best friend the profit system ever had."

While the Democrats and the Republicans differ on specific issues, they both agree on the fundamentals: protecting and serving the bosses' interests. Nowhere is this clearer than in the bipartisan attacks on the social safety net, from welfare to social security. While the Republicans under George W. Bush and the Democrats under Tom Daschle may quibble on the specific size of the cuts, both parties have shown that they are committed to gutting social programs for the working class and the poor in order to give tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans.

No matter how much appears to separate the two parties, when American business interests are threatened abroad, the Democrats and the Republicans always come together to extend U.S. military and economic domination. From Vietnam to the Persian Gulf to Colombia, bipartisan U.S. intervention and war is the rule, not the exception.

And bipartisanship is evident in both parties' attempts to keep third-party candidates out of the running, as with Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader in election 2000.

Traditionally, Democratic Party politicians pay lip service to various groups—from civil rights organizations to organized labor—only to take their money and their votes and then sell out their causes once the election is over. Bill Clinton was no different. He promised abortion rights supporters that he would pass a Freedom of Choice Act. It never saw the light of day. He promised to pass health care reform. However, at the end of Clinton's eight-year term, more than 44 million people had no health coverage, compared with 39 million before his election in 1992. He promised to end the ban on gays in the military

but replaced it with a law that actually increased the level of harassment and discharges of gays.

For this reason, socialists call the Democratic Party the graveyard of social movements. The Democratic Party is a dead end for anyone interested in winning substantial change in the United States. We should have no illusions in the Democrats as allies for our movement. In 1900, Eugene Debs laid out the socialist perspective on the two-party system, which still holds true today:
We hear it frequently urged that the Democratic Party is "poor man's party," "the friend of labor." There is but one way to relieve poverty and to free labor, and that is by making common property the tools of labor. The differences between the Republican and the Democratic Parties involve no issue, no principle in which the working class has any interest, and whether the spoils be distributed by [the Republicans]...or by [the Democrats] is all the same to it. Between these two parties socialists have no choice, no preference.

Social Democracy
Another variant of socialism is what is known as "social democracy" or "reform socialism." The Labour Party in Britain and the Socialist Party in France are parties built on the social democratic model. Social democracy stresses the gradual transformation of capitalism into socialism. It also views electoralism, or electing candidates to office, as the main tool by which workers can have a say in how society is run.

While elections are important, they are not decisive. Under capitalism, politicians are elected by spending enormous sums of money on their campaigns, which guarantees that the rich will have a much bigger say in formal politics than workers do. Most decisions that impact people's lives never come up for a vote–for instance, whether to lay off workers, or whether to allocate more money for the CEO's salary or to improve workplace safety. These decisions are made in corporate boardrooms, not in Congress.

But an even bigger problem presents itself for reform socialists. In countries where reform socialists have won elections and tried to make good on their promise of a gradual and orderly transition to socialism–by nationalizing industry, granting land reform, or broadening the welfare state– the capitalists who control the economy do everything in their power to stop them.

Sometimes, as in France in the early 1980s, big businesses simply moved their investments elsewhere, leaving behind unemployment and misery. Other times, as in Chile in the early 1970s, capitalists and the big landowners actually fought to destroy the emerging organizations of workers' power and killed thousands. Chile's president, Salvador Allende, was killed in a coup in 1973, which restored power to the capitalist class under the totalitarian rule of Augusto Pinochet, who led the coup.

Whether through economic blackmail or outright civil war, the capitalist class has proven time and again that it won't give up any of its wealth or power without a fight.

The Revolutionary Road
The revolutionary road is the only way to get to a socialist society. As historian R. H. Tawney put it, "You cannot skin a live tiger paw by paw." Capitalism will not fall under its own weight but must be swept aside by a mass revolutionary movement.

Well-meaning politicians or an enlightened minority cannot grant socialism from above. It must be fought for and built democratically by the great majority of the population.

In the course of struggles, both small and large, people who have been divided and lacking in confidence learn the lessons of solidarity: When workers stick together, they can win even against the most powerful enemies. For instance, when workers go on strike, racist and sexist ideas are often challenged and overcome as workers are forced to decide who their real friends and enemies are.

A revolution is necessary then, not just because we can't win socialism any other way, but because it is in the course of revolution that the working class throws out old prejudices and backward ideas and, in the words of Karl Marx, "becomes fit to found society anew."

Thus, by its very nature, a revolutionary socialist movement is multiracial and involves men and women, gays and heterosexuals, skilled and unskilled workers, all on an equal footing. In a revolutionary struggle, when the great mass of the population moves into action to change society, the importance of solidarity is learned by millions of people in a relatively short span of time. In a matter of weeks or months, a revolutionary movement can sweep away prejudices that have been around for centuries.

Most importantly, workers learn through their own struggle that they don't need the bosses to run society–they can do it better themselves. Through their own experience in struggle, workers learn how to run society in the interests of the vast majority, to fulfill human needs.

A revolution is necessary then, not just because we can't win socialism any other way, but because it is in the course of revolution that the working class throws out old prejudices and backward ideas and, in the words of Karl Marx, "becomes fit to found society anew."

We are often told that revolutions are violent and bloody and can only result in a new set of rulers who are no better than the present

bunch—or maybe even worse. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Instead, a socialist revolution would involve, for the first time in human history, the vast majority of people deciding how to reorganize society and their own futures. That is why every modern revolutionary movement has had the feel of a "festival of the oppressed," in which people who have been oppressed their entire lives fight for their own liberation and get a sense of their own power and worth.

Nothing is inevitable about the victory of socialist revolution. The last century has seen many revolutionary movements, from Portugal to Iran, but only one in which the working class was able to take power: in Russia in 1917. The decisive difference in Russia was the existence of a revolutionary party that organized itself years before the revolutionary crisis. The ISO aims to build such a party.

"We are the power," protest poster from France, 1968

How the Russian Revolution Was Won By Alan Maass

The standard story we hear about the Russian Revolution of 1917 is that it was a coup.

We're told that a conspiratorial band of hardened revolutionaries known as the Bolsheviks-following orders handed down from their leader, Lenin—coldly overcame all opposition to take power. Maybe the masses of Russian workers and peasants showed up on the streets a time or two, but they were largely dupes—a stage army manipulated by the Bolsheviks.

Oddly enough, this anti-Bolshevik version of history promoted most actively by right-wing ideologues has elements in common with the accounts of some who want to defend Lenin and the Bolsheviks. According to them as well, the Bolsheviks agreed on all important questions from the beginning of the revolution in February 1917—and they could depend on the infallible Lenin to plot their strategy until the seizure of power in a second revolution led by the Bolsheviks in October, which established a workers' state in Russia.

These claims hardened into the official ideology of the USSR after Joseph Stalin's rise to power in the mid-1920s—with worship of the flawless Lenin serving as a main prop to claims that Russia remained socialist long after a repressive hierarchical system had been re-imposed.

The real history of the Russian Revolution is different from both these versions—and can teach us a lot about both the potential for ordinary people to take action and the hope for a better world.

One of the best books to set the record straight is Alexander Rabinowitch's *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*, republished earlier this year by Haymarket Books and Pluto Press. Focused on events in the cradle of the revolution—the Russian capital of Petrograd, now known as St. Petersburg—Rabinowitch uses numerous documents, memoirs and historical accounts to show how the actions of masses of working people were the driving force in 1917.

In fact, some of the most important developments—for example, the initial protests that led to the overthrow of the dictatorial Tsar in February, and the defeat of a counterrevolutionary attack on Petrograd by Gen. Kornilov in August—were nearly spontaneous, and certainly weren't controlled by the Bolsheviks or any other party in Russia.

Likewise, the Bolsheviks were far from a regimented band of palace conspirators, but an organization with deep roots in Petrograd's factories and neighborhoods that thrived on debate. The party's most respected member, Lenin, found himself in a minority at several points in 1917.

Along with fellow Bolshevik leader Leon Trotsky, Lenin did play a decisive role at times—in persuading party members on some issue, or initiating specific strategies. But at other points, it was the initiative of other Bolsheviks, often at the factory and neighborhood level, that carried the day—and fortunately so on several occasions in 1917 where Lenin's or Trotsky's judgments proved wrong.

Most of all, the Russian Revolution is a story of ordinary people coming to life as they discovered their own potential for creating a truly democratic society, free from war, exploitation and oppression. ALAN MAASS tells how the Russian Revolution was won—with excerpts from Rabinowitch's book.

The overthrow of Russia's Tsar Nicholas II in February 1917 wasn't planned out by Lenin. It was the spontaneous result of the accumulated hatred of the Russian people bursting out in mass demonstrations that paralyzed Petrograd and other cities. Within a matter of days, the once all-powerful regime was isolated, its army and security forces refusing orders to defend it-and the Tsar was forced to abdicate.

But the political questions presented by what came next couldn't be solved by spontaneous action.

Russia in 1917 was a society devastated by poverty and the slaughter of the First World War. Just a few years earlier, the start of the war had been accompanied by a patriotic frenzy, and the ranks of socialists committed to the principle of opposing imperialism—not only in Russia, but around the world—were reduced to a tiny few. But the horrors of the war, combined with famine and mass suffering as the regime imposed austerity to keep the war effort going, turned the tide.

At the end of February 1917, women workers from some of the main factories in Petrograd organized strikes and demonstrations to mark International Women's Day, and to demand an end to desperate food shortages. The actions spread quickly in heavily industrial areas of Petrograd like Vyborg, with more and more factories walking out.

Even the Bolsheviks—the most militant and committed to revolutionary socialism among several left-wing parties in Russia—were taken

by surprise, though individual members, on their own initiative, played a central role in spreading the protests in the first days.

Usually, the Tsar could depend on his army—in particular, the brutal Cossacks—to repress any rebellion. But under the weight of the crisis, the army's discipline disintegrated—and with it, the foundation of Tsarism itself. In less than a week, the Tsar was gone, his regime replaced by a Provisional Government.

Within days of the International Women's Day demonstrations, workers in Petrograd and other cities had followed the example of Russia's mass upheaval in 1905, and formed workers' councils—or "soviets" in Russian.

The soviets were a natural development of the struggle. Workers in individual factories had already formed committees to make decisions about participating in demonstrations, what to do at work and so on. These committees made links locally, sending representatives to larger councils representing the different districts of their city, and finally to a citywide soviet. Eventually, other groups in society—most importantly, soldiers and sailors in the Tsar's army-formed similar councils, and sent their representatives to the soviets.

Repeated in similar form around the world during other revolutionary struggles, even to this day, the soviets were the backbone of workers' power and remained in place throughout 1917.

But after the overthrow of the Tsar, the Russian parliament, known as the Duma, created a Provisional Government made up primarily of parties representing Russia's capitalists. The most hated figures of the Tsar's regime were excluded, but so were the radical parties representing Russia's workers and peasants.

Despite the reputation of a few as opponents of the Tsar, the government's new ministers were committed to restoring order in Russia's cities and the authority of factory owners over workers—and above all, to continuing Russia's war effort. So from the beginning, the power of the Provisional Government was on an unavoidable collision course with the power of the workers' councils—a situation of "dual power" that couldn't continue for long.

At first, though, the workers' councils lacked the confidence to assert their authority against the Provisional Government. This was reflected in the makeup of representatives to the soviets, too. When the first national congress of soviets was convened, the Bolsheviks were a minority of delegates. The soviets' elected leadership, both locally and nationally, came from more moderate left parties like the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries (SR).

In fact, most leaders of the Bolshevik Party accepted that the only possible outcome of the February Revolution was already in place—a capitalist regime. When Lenin returned to Russia from exile in Switzerland, he shocked his comrades by demanding that the Bolsheviks reject cooperation with the Provisional Government—and commit themselves to a new revolution that would transfer power to the soviets. It took weeks of argument to convince other leading Bolsheviks—and some, like Lev Kamenev, one of the best-known party leaders after Lenin, in reality remained unconvinced until after October.

But what Lenin recognized was that the masses of workers, while they might not have the confidence to assert their own power now, had shown by their actions that they wouldn't tolerate for long a government that tried to continue policies of war and exploitation.

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The conflict did re-emerge quickly. In mid-May, the Provisional Government's foreign minister, Pavel Milyukov, wrote a secret statement to Russia's allies in the war against Germany, committing the new regime to the same war aims as the Tsar. When this document was revealed, Petrograd exploded in renewed demonstrations.

Milyukov and several other ministers resigned. In the resulting shakeup, leaders of the moderate Mensheviks and SRs were invited to join the Provisional Government, and accepted. Thus, the moderate socialist parties ended up in the position of trying to straddle a widening gap between the Provisional Government and the soviets—leaving the Bolsheviks as the sole major party standing wholly with the workers' councils.

Tensions continued to build, especially after the Provisional Government launched a disastrous military offensive. By early July, anger against the government had reached a fever pitch among some sections of workers and soldiers. But the sentiment for action was uneven. In particular, the mood in Petrograd wasn't matched elsewhere.

This created a crisis for the Bolsheviks when a semi-organized armed uprising against the Provisional Government took place on July 4. Lenin and the party's Central Committee had been united in trying to restrain forces bent on immediate action, since support was so uncertain. The insurrection took them by surprise.

But it had been encouraged by some party members—especially soldiers in the Bolshevik military organization. Many of these were new recruits unused to the idea of party discipline, so it was only with great difficulty that Lenin and other party leaders were able to convince them that the time wasn't right and a retreat was necessary—a stark difference from the common portrayal of the Bolsheviks as always following orders from above.

Meanwhile, the government exploited the opportunity to lash out at the Bolsheviks. Newspapers were filled with slanderous attacks, and the party's offices were seized. Leading members like Trotsky and Kamenev were arrested. Lenin barely escaped the dragnet and fled to Finland.

Joining in the calls for a crackdown against the Bolsheviks as "threats to the revolution" were many leading Mensheviks and SRs—a further sign that the leaders of the moderate socialist parties, if not rank-and-file members, tended to side with the Provisional Government against the champions of soviet power when push came to shove.

The July Days gave momentum to the government—now led by Alexander Kerensky as its prime minister—and the right wing, forcing the Bolsheviks to readjust their strategies. But the impact wasn't devastating as party members at first feared.

After the initial outburst of anti-Bolshevik scapegoating, Alexander Rabinowitch writes, "the repressive measures adopted by the government, as well as the indiscriminate persecution of leftist leaders and the apparently increasing danger of counterrevolution served simply to increase resentment toward the Kerensky regime among the masses and stimulated them to unite more closely around the soviets in defense of the revolution."

This Instinct to unite against any threat to the revolution was decisive in stopping Gen. Kornilov's march on Petrograd at the end of August.

Kerensky had appointed Kornilov as commander in chief in mid-July, and hoped that the general would help him re-establish the government's authority. But the soviets and other popular organizations—as well as the Petrograd garrison of soldiers and sailors stationed in and around the capital—resisted all attempts to curb their power. Believing that Kerensky would never establish order, Kornilov planned a military offensive for the final days of August to occupy Petrograd, disperse the soviets and smash left-wing organizations.

Yet Kornilov's forces never even made it to the capital. The response from workers and soldiers was immediate when word came of the pending attack. Ad hoc revolutionary committees to organize military defense had formed during earlier crises in 1917. Now, more than 240 sprouted up between August 27 and 30, many of them offshoots of local soviets in the cities, and even rural soviets. The most important was the Committee for Struggle in Petrograd, which had representatives from all the major left parties. It became-without anyone planning it—the national command post for combating the right.

Even more decisive, however, was the spontaneous action taken by organizations of workers and soldiers at every level—from the workplaces and barracks, to the citywide soviet. Without any agreed-upon plan, they prepared a defense of the city, committed resources to vital services, secured food supplies and dispatched agitators to "harangue" Kornilov's approaching troops—a tactic that succeeded in winning over even Cossacks and other feared army divisions to the revolution.

As Rabinowitch writes, "the decisive moments of the Kornilov emergency occurred so quickly

The July Days

Conditions in all of [the prisons] were a good deal less oppressive than in Tsarist days... Raskolnikov recalled that many of his gaurds as the Crosses [prison in Petrograd] were cautiouis toward, indeed even fearfull of, "politicals". After all, following the Febuary revolution, yesterday's high officials suddenly turned up in jail, while some of the previous inmates instantly became cabinet ministers. Prison personnel were naturally wary of such a turnabout happening again.

From *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*

that effective coordination of the campaign against the right, even in the Petrograd area, proved impossible. It was also unnecessary. Spurred by the news of Kornilov's attack, all political organizations to the left of the Kadets, every labor organization of any import, and solider and sailor committees at all levels immediately rose to fight against Kornilov. It would be difficult to find, in recent history, a more powerful, effective display of largely spontaneous and unified mass political action."

The response to Kornilov threat was largely uncoordinated, yet unified. But as Rabinowitch also points out, many of the people who led the way in mobilizing this response were veteran Bolsheviks—revolutionaries whose years of political training and experience in previous struggles had prepared them to take the initiative at the crucial moment.

Lenin was still hiding in Finland in August. By the time he learned of the Kornilov threat, it had been effectively defeated, and his urgent communications recommending a course of action arrived days after that. But the ultimate tribute to the years Lenin devoted to building the Bolshevik Party is that its members, with very little coordination, had responded almost exactly as he recommended when his letters arrived.

The Defeat of Kornilov saved the Kerensky government from the counterrevolution. But it was also a sign that his days were numbered.

It was widely known, at least in Petrograd, that the conflict between Kornilov and Kerensky had been preceded by negotiations and collaboration. As a result, Rabinowitch writes, Kornilov's plot appeared to be a conspiracy "against the revolution on the part of the military high command and Kerensky"—one defeated only thanks to the forces of the soviet.

Kerensky's increasingly frantic attempts to re-impose the authority of the government failed to win mass support.

The Bolsheviks, meanwhile, only gained ground. By September, they had won majorities in the Petrograd and Moscow soviets, and were expected to dominate the upcoming second national congress of soviets, planned for the end of October.

But there were still obstacles to overcome before the seizure of power. For one thing, there was resistance to the idea that the time had finally come to topple Kerensky and claim power for the workers' councils—especially among leaders of the party who feared a repeat of the July Days if an insurrection proved to be premature. Once again, Lenin was in a minority, and had to argue relentlessly to win a majority of the Bolshevik Central Committee to make insurrection against Kerensky the "order of the day."

At the same time, the Bolsheviks nearly committed a colossal blunder at Lenin's insistence. Lenin envisioned the final uprising against the Kerensky regime as a Bolshevik operation that would claim state power in the name of the soviets. Trotsky, on the other hand, recognized that this wouldn't necessarily win the support of most workers and soldiers—whose loyalty lay not with the Bolsheviks as much as the soviets themselves.

As the newly elected chairman of the Petrograd soviet, he developed a strategy of using the authority of the workers councils to seize power.

Trotsky and other Bolsheviks also resisted Lenin's urging to launch an uprising immediately. Instead, throughout September and October, they utilized any attempt by the Kerensky regime to challenge the soviets as an opportunity to assert the authority of the soviets over Kerensky.

Kornilov's Defeat

Within hours after public announcement of the Kornilov emergency, alarm whistles were sounded in factoris throughout Petrograd. Acting on their own, without instructions from higher authorities, workers reinforced security around plant bulings and grounds, and began to form fighting detachments. On August 28-29, long lines of workers could be seen in the factory districts, waiting to enroll in these detachments, referred to with inreasing frequency as "Red Gaurds"

To help arm these recruits, personnel in the cannon shops at the Putilov factory speeded production of a variety of weapons, whcih were dispached directly to the field without even a test-firing; metalworkers simply accompanied their products and adjusted the weapons on the spot.

From *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*

On The Eve

Lenin was unable to restrain himself further... [He] donned his wig and battered cap and wrapped a bandage around his face. Then, violating a direct Central Committee ban on his movement for the seccond time in a month, accompanies by Eino Rakhia, he set off for Smolny [the heaquarters of the Petrograd Soviet].

The two traveled through the Vyborg District as far as the Finland Station in an almost empty streetcar, the frantic Lenin peppering the conductress with questions regrading late political development; when Lenin discovered she was a leftist, he began filling her hears with practical advice on reolutionary action...

Finally, sometimebefore midnight, they safely reached their destination. Smolny upon Lenin's arrival looked like a military camp on the eve of battle... Neither Rakhia nor Lenin had proper passes. Initially denied admission, they managed to loose themselves in an incoming crowd, and so were able to squeeze by the gaurds.

From *The Bolsheviks Come to Power*

The key moment came in late October, when the government announced plans to transfer most of the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison—by this point, as much the heart of the revolution as the factories of Vyborg—to the front. The Petrograd soviet's newly formed Military Revolutionary Committee sent its representatives, known as commissars, to every unit of the garrison and issued an order written by Trotsky: "No directives to the garrison not signed by the Military Revolutionary Committee should be considered valid."

Effectively, the soviet had taken control of the armed forces in Petrograd away from Kerensky- "disarming the Provisional Government without firing a shot," Rabinowitch writes. Thus, the insurrection that began in the early hours of October 25—with Red Guard detachments under the soviet's authority taking control of crucial power centers, such as the state bank, and besieging the Winter Palace, where Kerensky and his cabinet was holed up—was almost anticlimatic.

The next day, when the nationwide Congress of Soviets convened in Petrograd, Trotsky and Lenin could announce that the old regime had been swept away—and the power of the workers' councils over Russia was now absolute.

The accomplishments that followed in the days and weeks after the October insurrection are memorable. The new workers' state ended Russia's participation in the slaughter of the First World War. The oppressed nations of the Tsar's empire were given the right of self-determination. In a country notorious for anti-Semitic pogroms, Jews led the workers' councils of Russia's two biggest cities. Laws outlawing homosexuality were repealed. Abortion was legalized and made available on demand.

And these measures only scratch the surface of the more thorough-going experiments of the Russian Revolution—from workers' given control over their workplaces, to efforts made to make women truly equal and a part of politics, to a new flowering of art and culture.

The tragedy is that the revolution was immediately besieged—and defeated within a very short time. In the years after 1917, more than a dozen countries, including the United States. contributed troops to an invasion force that fought alongside the dregs of Tsarist society—exgenerals, aristocrats and assorted hangers-on—in a civil war to destroy the new workers' state.

The revolution survived this military assault, but only barely—and at a terrible price. By 1922, the working class—the class that had toppled the Tsar, created the soviets as a democratic expression of their power, defeated the Kornilov threat, and taken power away from the Provisional Government—was decimated, physically reduced to half its former size by the horrors of war and famine.

The heart of the Russian Revolution was destroyed—which made it possible for a class of bureaucrats, led by Joseph Stalin, to scramble to power on the ruins of the workers' state and reimpose a hierarchical society with much in common with Western-style capitalism.

Yet that shouldn't take away from the example set by the only socialist revolution to succeed in establishing a workers' state that survived for any length of time. Russian society came alive in the revolution of 1917—and showed us a glimpse of what a socialist future might look like.

How Russia Went from a Workers' State to State Capitalism

Why Did Stalin Rise to Power? By Alan Maass

Even today, 50 years after his death, Joseph Stalin represents one of the most powerful arguments against socialism. How can we socialists say that we're for the "self-emancipation of the working class" when Russian workers had no power whatsoever under "socialism"? How can we champion a system that tolerated and encouraged numerous forms of oppression–based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, nationality and ethnicity, to name a few?

The answer is that we don't. So-called "socialism" in Stalin's Russia –and other countries, like China and Cuba, that modeled their systems on the USSR–is diametrically opposed to the basic principles we stand for. The rulers of the former USSR under Stalin used the rhetoric of socialism and Marxism to justify a different reality–an exploitative system, run by a minority, using forms of authority not that very different to capitalism in the West.

Stalin and his allies established this system by re-imposing class rule over a society that had overthrown the old order in the 1917 Russian Revolution. Though they mouthed socialist phrases, the rise of Stalin's regime represented the victory of the counterrevolution against 1917.

No serious observer in 1917 doubted that masses of Russian workers and peasants supported the overthrow of the hated Tsar–or the establishment of the workers' councils, or soviets, as the basic form of government for a new workers' state. As Martov, a prominent opponent of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, put it at the time, "Understand, please, what we have before us after all is a victorious uprising of the proletariat–almost the entire proletariat supports Lenin and expects its social liberation from the uprising."

But could this system survive? Marxists believe that the basis for socialism is abundance–having enough to go around. Certainly, such a society would be impossible if an economically backward country like Russia remained isolated in a sea of capitalism, without socialist revolutions in other countries to come to its aid.

All of Russia's revolutionaries accepted this. "We are far from having completed even the transitional period from capitalism to socialism," Lenin wrote in January 1918. "We have never cherished the hope that we could finish it without the aid of the international proletariat."

It's telling that the most important idea associated with Stalin in the mid-1920s when he was emerging from obscurity to take over was his theory of "socialism in once country." This rewrote what had been a central pillar for all Marxists–that socialism must be international.

International revolution wasn't a pipe dream either. The years following the Russian Revolution saw massive upheavals in Germany, Italy and other European countries. But none succeeded in putting a workers' government in power. Russia was left isolated. And ultimately, Lenin was proved right–the revolution couldn't survive in these conditions.

But the form that its defeat took was unexpected. The workers' state won a civil war against forces that wanted to bring back the Tsar–and which were supported by the active military intervention of 14 imperialist countries, including the U.S. But the cost of the victory was catastrophic. Russia's economy suffered the worst decline ever known in world history, by one estimate.

And the Russian working class, the class that made the revolution, was effectively destroyed–killed in the civil war, or driven out of the cities by famine. In these desperate conditions, the Bolshevik Party came increasingly to substitute its own rule for that of the decimated institutions of workers' power created in 1917. This was viewed as a temporary necessity to defeat the menace of counterrevolution.

But eventually, the temporary necessities became permanen–and out of the circumstances of war and economic chaos, a group of state bureaucrats came together around Stalin and began to put its hold on power before everything else. Stalin and his allies didn't take over without a fight. In particular, Trotsky led an opposition that aimed to preserve the traditions of 1917.

But the Stalinists defeated this challenge–and from the late 1920s on, they systematically began to take back every gain won in the revolution. Average wages were slashed by 50 percent in seven years following the announcement of the first "five-year plan" in 1928. The population of Russian labor camps increased by 22 times in three years.

Rights won by women in 1917–such as free abortion on demand and liberalized divorce law–were overturned. Homosexuality was recriminalized. And the Stalinists set about rebuilding the Tsar's colonial empire that had won the right to self-determination after 1917.

From this point on, it's impossible to say that Russian workers had any control over society--or that they could regain it without a revolution-

ary transformation of the system. Formally, production was still owned by the state. But the question was: Who owned the state?

Plainly, the state bureaucracy was in command of all important decisions about the resources of society, how they were used and how the labor of the vast majority was organized. And the decisions that the bureaucrats made were actually very similar to the dynamics of Western-style capitalism.

The capitalists who rule over the free market don't spend all their profits on their own luxurious lifestyle–though they do live like kings! The main priority is to plow profits back into production–to try to outdo the competition and accumulate even more profits. "Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!" Marx wrote in Capital. "Therefore, save, save, i.e., reconvert the greatest possible portion of surplus value [profits]...into capital!"

Similarly, Russia's Stalinist ruling class used the surplus extracted at horrific cost from workers and peasants and devoted it to investments in heavy industry–especially, anything to do with the arms industry. This was to meet the demands of competition, not among private capitalists within one country, but among state capitals internationally–that is, to meet the military competition threatened by the advanced countries of the West.

This is the point of Stalin's famous saying: "We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this lag in 10 years. Either we do it, or they crush us." The form was different–a ruling class whose power grew out of its control over the state apparatus. But the logic was straight out of capitalism. That's why the best way to understand Stalin's rule is to recognize it as the re-imposition of capitalism--in the form of state capitalism.

Unfortunately most people continue to assume that the ex-USSR was socialist under Stalin. Certainly, that's what supporters of capitalism encourage us to believe. After all, what better argument could there be against socialism than the idea that any attempt to win change is doomed to produce another Stalin?

But Stalin's triumph in Russia wasn't inevitable. It was the result of a workers' revolution left isolated in a sea of capitalism–strangled until it was finally defeated.

None of this, though, can erase the accomplishments of the 1917 revolution during the short period that workers' power survived. And it certainly can't change our commitment to the struggle for socialism today–for an international revolution that will free all humanity, once and for all.

Dividing the Globe in the Name of Democracy and Freedom

Washington's New Imperialism By Phil Gaspar

As the war in Afghanistan continues, it is increasingly clear that the majority of Afghan people will have little say about what government will be imposed on them when the fighting is over.

Many U.S. politicians and media pundits have decided that Afghan–and other people in the Middle East and Central Asia–are unfit to rule themselves, with some openly calling for a revival of old-style colonialism.

In a recent article titled "The need for a new imperialism," Financial Times columnist Martin Wolf describes Afghanistan as a "failed state" and argues that a United Nations (UN) "protectorate" should be installed to rule the country. Journalist Mark Steyn echoed this theme in a Chicago Sun-Times column headlined "Imperialism is the answer." And George Bush himself says, "It would be a useful function for the United Nations to take over the so-called nation building–I would call it the stabilization of a future government–after our military mission is complete."

Whether or not they try to sugarcoat the message, such statements reveal that this war is about asserting the U.S. government's right to conquer and dominate weaker nations.

The most incisive analysis of imperialism was made by the Russian revolutionary Lenin at the time of the First World War. Lenin described imperialism as "a special stage in the development of capitalism." His analysis was designed to show that antagonisms and wars between the great powers are not the result of bad policies, but arise from the dynamic of capitalist development itself–above all from the tendency that Karl Marx had identified toward the concentration and centralization of capital.

As the major capitalist enterprises within a particular country become bigger and fewer, private monopoly capital becomes closely integrated with the state. At the same time, the internationalization of the productive forces compels capitals to compete for markets, investments and raw materials at the global level. The result is that competition between capitals increasingly takes on the form of military rivalries among nation-states.

Further, because the world economy is characterized by combined and uneven development–in other words, because the relations among states are unequal–a small number of advanced countries come to dominate the rest of the world by virtue of their productive resources and military strength.

As Woodrow Wilson once admitted: "Since trade ignores national boundaries and the manufacturer insists on having the world as a market, the flag of his nation must follow him, and the doors of the nations which are closed against him must be battered down. Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of state, even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process. Colonies must be obtained or planted, in order that no useful corner of the world may be overlooked or left unused."

In the last two decades of the 19th century, the major powers divided most of the world between themselves.

The supposedly civilized imperialists subdued their future subjects with unspeakable brutality. When the British conquered Sudan in 1898, they gunned down 10,000 Sudanese troops and Lord Kitchener used the skull of their leader, the Mahdi, as an inkstand.

During its conquest of the Philippines between 1898 and 1901, the U.S. declared Filipinos "unfit for self-government" and claimed to be fighting "with scrupulous regard for the rules of civilized warfare…with self-restraint and humanity never surpassed" while it killed hundreds of thousands.

The underlying motive for this barbaric imperialist expansion was profit. Colonies offered the capitalists of the colonial powers protected outlets for investment and military bases to protect routes to investment elsewhere.

As the empires spread, however, and there were few new territories left to conquer, the major powers increasingly came into conflict with one another. Each side built up its own armed forces, creating a drive toward war that eventually culminated in two world wars that killed tens of millions.

After the Second World War, imperialism changed in important ways. Competition between a number of different powers was replaced by the division of the world into two global military alliances dominated by two superpowers, the U.S. and the USSR.

Meanwhile, the old colonial empires were slowly dismantled, partly as

a result of struggles for national liberation, and partly because the colonies declined in economic importance for the advanced capitalist countries as the latter reduced their dependence on imported raw materials-with the significant exception of oil.

None of this meant that imperialism had ended, however. The two superpowers found themselves locked into a "cold war" for more than four decades, and they continued to impose their will on lesser states through political, economic and, frequently, military means.

With the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 1980s, the U.S. was left far and away the world's most powerful political and military state. But the end of the Cold War also allowed space for new tensions to arise between the U.S. and its major economic and political competitors as each player maneuvers to protect its own interests. As one study concludes, "The rivalry between states and the rivalry between firms for a secure place in the world economy has become much fiercer, much more intense."

Increasingly over the past decade, the U.S. has attempted to use its military power to maintain its global political and economic dominance, and in particular its control over crucial oil supplies.

Just as the 1991 Gulf War was fought to reassert U.S. control over Middle Eastern oil, the current intervention in Afghanistan is motivated in large part by the U.S. ruling class's desire to gain access to Central Asia's oil and natural gas.

The U.S. backed the repressive Taliban regime for years when it was in U.S. interests. As one U.S. diplomat put it in 1997, "The Taliban will probably develop like the Saudis. There will be Aramco [the oil consortium], pipelines, an emir, no parliament and lots of Sharia law. We can live with that."

The U.S. has driven the Taliban from power not because it objected to their treatment of women or their other reactionary social policies, but because it decided its interest will be better served by replacing them with another set of thugs.
Imperialism cannot bring genuine liberation to oppressed people, because by its very nature it is driven by the economic and political interests of the world's most powerful countries.

While claiming to stand for democracy and freedom, for example, the U.S. has for decades backed undemocratic and repressive regimes across the Middle East in order to protect its continued access to cheap oil.

Socialists are implacable opponents of all forms of imperialism and national oppression, and we support all struggles for self-determination and national liberation.

In Afghanistan and the Middle East we argue that people have the right to determine their own future, free from outside domination. If Afghanistan is today a "failed state," that isn't because the Afghan people can't run their own lives, but because of decades of intervention by outside powers--not least the U.S.

At the same time, however, we argue that real freedom is possible only through international working-class solidarity and the abolition of the capitalist system itself, and in the struggle against imperialism, we work to win others to this perspective.

As Lenin put it: "The dialectics of history are such that small nations, powerless as an independent factor in the struggle against imperialism, play a part as one of the ferments, one of the bacilli, which help the real anti-imperialist force, the socialist proletariat, to make its appearance on the scene…We would be very poor revolutionaries if, in the proletariat's great war of liberation for socialism, we did not know how to utilize every popular movement against every single disaster imperialism brings in order to intensify and extend the crisis."

Why We Say: U.S. Out of Iraq Now!

By Eric Ruder

"So what should the U.S. do?" is a question that opponents of the occupation of Iraq are often asked. Many people agree that the U.S. war on Iraq is unjust and that the growing violence in Iraq is further proof that the U.S. shouldn't be there.

But at the same time, they think that the U.S. can't just leave. The U.S. has a responsibility, goes the argument, to see through what it started. To leave now would be to turn our backs on a mess that we created. But demanding that the U.S. immediately withdraw its troops does not mean ignoring Washington's responsibility to the people of Iraq.

The debt that the U.S. owes Iraq is enormous. Iraq has been devastated over the course of two wars and more than a decade of economic sanctions that strangled the economy. The country is littered with radioactive debris from depleted uranium weapons, a generation has been plunged into malnutrition, and Iraq's sophisticated medical facili-

ties have seen the clock turned backward to a time when routine surgeries were performed without anesthesia or sterile instruments.

This is the real legacy of the U.S. in Iraq—no matter how many times George W. Bush claims, as he did during last week's press conference, that the U.S. is a "liberating power." Last year, Congress allocated an astonishing $186 billion for the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan--and only $33 billion of it was for reconstruction.

The U.S. should leave and give the rest of its military allocations--no strings attached--to the Iraqi people. And that would still only begin to approach what the U.S. government owes the Iraqi people.

With the Iraqi resistance reaching new heights, Bush has been forced into ever more tortured justifications for staying in Iraq. "I have directed our military commanders to make every preparation to use decisive force, if necessary, to maintain order and to protect our troops," said Bush.

But the best way—by far—to protect U.S. troops is to bring them home now. To justify deadly force by claiming the need to protect troops who have no right--moral or otherwise—to be in Iraq is utterly twisted.
When Bush lashed out at the Iraqi resistance forces, he said, "The violence we have seen is a power grab by these extreme and ruthless elements." What a fraud! It was Bush who used lied to justify a violent "power grab" in Iraq that has taken the lives of tens of thousands of Iraqis.

The Iraqi resistance to this tyranny more and more enjoys the support of the vast majority of Iraqis, who have only become more hardened in their opposition to the U.S. as they bear the brunt of punitive measures carried out by U.S. forces "teaching a lesson" to resistance fighters.

But doesn't the U.S. at least have an obligation to stay until elections can be organized in Iraq? According to the Bush administration, the practical obstacles to democratic elections are significant, requiring the U.S. to stay for the foreseeable future until the details are worked out.

But the U.S. itself is chiefly responsible for delaying elections--because it fears that the outcome won't serve its economic and strategic goals. "[E]ven while U.S. occupation officials were pointing to the lack of a census as an obstacle to a vote, they were quietly vetoing a detailed plan to conduct one in time for elections," writes Seth Ackerman of the media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting.

"In December, the New York Times revealed that census experts in the Iraqi Planning Ministry had compiled a comprehensive proposal to hold a national population tally followed by elections within the space of 10 months...But the Americans secretly rejected it and never told the Iraqi Governing Council of its existence."

The U.S. has blocked elections from taking place because they fear the result. So much for remaining in Iraq to promote democracy.

The administration and its media mouthpieces have perpetuated the myth that civil war and chaos would be the result of a U.S. withdrawal. But chaos and the threat of civil war are the result of the occupation.

U.S. officials played on divisions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Iraq to try to prevent a united opposition—and then claimed that only their forces were "maintaining peace" between rival groups. But this claim rings increasingly hollow with every new example of Shiites and Sunnis joining forces to fight back against the U.S. occupation.

All the talk about Iraq descending into chaos without the U.S. to bring stability amounts to a 21st-century version of the "white man's burden"—the justification for early 19th and early 20th-century colonialism. At that time, every colonial power justified its domination of less powerful countries with claims that it was bringing democracy and civilization to "savages" who were "incapable" of self-rule.

Calling for a United Nations (UN) takeover of the occupation as a kinder, gentler alternative to the U.S. doesn't change the insulting notions at the core of the idea that Iraq will "descend into chaos" without outside intervention. What's more, this call ignores the reality of whose interests the UN serves.
In fact, the Bush administration is hoping the UN will take a major share of the responsibility in Iraq—because Washington now feels that a UN administration will have more credibility. Because of its dominant influence at the UN, the U.S. can still accomplish its core goals. After all, under the UN's current plan, the U.S. military would stay in Iraq to keep "law and order." And the U.S. would be in a position—as a member of the UN Security Council—to veto any UN proposals that it didn't approve of.

The history of Britain's colonial drive to dominate Iraq in the early 20th century also teaches an important lesson about bringing in "international institutions" to serve as a fig leaf for imperialist powers. The British military invaded Iraq, making the same claims as the U.S.

"Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators," said Gen. Frederick Stanley Maude. But inevitably, the Iraqi resistance to their would-be colonial masters began. In fact, it began after the decision to bring in the League of Nations—the precursor to the UN—and make Iraq a "mandate" instead of a direct colonial possession of Britain.
The U.S., the UN and all foreign troops should leave Iraq. Iraqis themselves should determine their political leaders, how to organize elections and how to rebuild the country. The U.S. government shouldn't be allowed to choose who runs Iraq. Nor should we in the antiwar movement make any demands about this.

We may even disagree with the politics of those who do come to govern Iraq. But that's what self-determination means—Iraqis get to

decide. To demand anything else of the U.S. government other than its immediate withdrawal would give it the political justification to continue the pursuit of its war aims–which it has always cloaked with lofty phrases about democracy, freedom and justice.

Opponents of the U.S. war and occupation have a responsibility to do all we can to force our government to get out now. We don't want another U.S. soldier to die for oil and empire–and we want people of Iraq to have the right to self-determination, so they, and they alone, decide their future

Howard Zinn–the Logic of Withdrawal

In 1967, Howard Zinn published Vietnam: The Logic of Withdrawal *to make a simple case–that the U.S. should get out of Vietnam immediately. At the time, many antiwar activists were hesitant to make this demand, preferring to call for "negotiations" rather than what they considered the "impractical" position of immediate withdrawal. But Washington did undertake negotiations–at the same time that it escalated the war in the name of preserving U.S. "prestige" around the world.*

Here, Socialist Worker reprints excerpts from Zinn's short book that are especially relevant to today's antiwar movement.

A United States military presence is a danger to the Vietnamese and to us. Its withdrawal is neither "abdication of responsibility" nor "isolationism." Our bombing and shooting are irresponsible. In the future, we can show our responsibility by giving economic aid, when invited...

The United States, thus, cannot gain anything for Vietnam by negotiating, and it should not gain anything for itself. Since this country does not belong in Vietnam, it has no moral basis for negotiating any status for itself–certainly not military bases or troops; Vietnam has had enough of that...

For the United States to withdraw unilaterally, leaving the negotiations to the various groups in Vietnam, would avoid the present impasse over negotiations. This impasse is founded on a set of psychological realities which protract the war. The National Liberation Front, imbued with the spirit of patriots driving off an invading army, is willing to continue its guerrilla tactics until the United States is worn down. Besides, the Geneva experience taught it to distrust international agreements; it is confident of its skill in the jungles of Vietnam, not so confident it can outmaneuver great powers at conference tables...

Many critics of our policy, who know very well that the United States should leave Vietnam, do not want to ask for immediate and unilateral withdrawal.

This is not because they find powerful reasons against it, but because it is not a good "tactic," not "popular," not acceptable to the president and his staff. I believe this is based on a false notion of how political decisions are made–the notion that citizens must directly persuade the president by the soundness of their arguments.

This makes two assumptions which I think are unfounded. One is that the interests of the citizens and the president are the same, so that if they both think straight, they will be led to the same conclusions...The other assumption is that the president is a rational being who can be persuaded by rational arguments.

Citizens can create a new self-interest for the president by persuading enough of their fellow citizens, who will then make enough of a commotion to "persuade" the president that he had better make a change. This cannot be effectively done by a citizenry which says only half of what it believes, which dilutes its passion and surrenders its moral fervor.

We have seen–and our recent foreign policy illustrates it–how our highest officials have become the victims of the myths which they themselves help to perpetuate. The so-called "realists" who urge us to speak softly and so persuade the president are working against the reality, which is that the president responds to self-interest rather than to rational argument.

Citizens can create a new self-interest for the president by persuading enough of their fellow citizens, who will then make enough of a commotion to "persuade" the president that he had better make a change. This cannot be effectively done by a citizenry which says only half of what it believes, which dilutes its passion and surrenders its moral fervor. If enough people speak for withdrawal, it can become politically feasible.

The Hidden History of Zionism

By Annie Zirin

The web site of the Anti-Defamation League defines Zionism as:

[T]he Jewish national movement of rebirth and renewal in the land of Israel–the historical birthplace of the Jewish people. The yearning to return to Zion, the biblical term for both the Land of Israel and Jerusalem, has been the cornerstone of Jewish religious life since the Jewish exile from the land two thousand years ago…. Zionism, the national aspiration of the Jewish people to a homeland, is to the Jewish people what the liberation movements of Africa and Asia have been to their peoples…a vindication of the fundamental concepts of the equality of nations and of self-determination. To question the Jewish people's right to national existence and freedom is…to deny to the Jewish people the right accorded to every other people on this globe.[1]

We need to ask: What kind of national liberation movement allies itself in every case and at every moment in its history with the powers of world imperialism? What national liberation struggle built its very existence on the colonization of another people, on the obliteration of that people's history, their culture, and their land? The founding fathers of Zionism were much more honest about what they stood for. Over and over, one word appears in their writing: not national "liberation," but "colonization." Vladimir Jabotinsky, one of the founding fathers of the Zionist movement, wrote in 1923:

[It is the] iron law of every colonizing movement, a law which knows of no exceptions, a law which existed in all times and under all circumstances. If you wish to colonize a land in which people are already living, you must provide a garrison on your behalf. Or else–or else, give up your colonization, for without an armed force which will render physically impossible any attempts to destroy or prevent this colonization, colonization is impossible, not "difficult," not "dangerous" but impossible!... Zionism is a colonizing adventure and therefore it stands or falls by the question of armed force. It is important to build, it is important to speak Hebrew, but, unfortunately, it is even more important to be able to shoot–or else I am through with playing at colonization.[2]

Even among today's peace activists who call for an end to Israel's 35-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, there is still a general assumption that Zionism itself is a legitimate movement and that the State of Israel must be defended. The organization Americans for Peace Now issued this statement in December 2001:

[C]ontinued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip will, within one generation, mean the end to Israel as a democratic state with a Jewish majority….

This scenario would be a nightmare for Israel and all of us who support the Jewish state. It is not the Zionist vision for Israel's future for which APN, or the majority of Jews and Israelis, have fought for generations.[3]

These activists are right to oppose the occupation. But they fail to recognize that the current occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is a continuation of the process of occupation and colonization of Palestine that began with the first Zionist settlers in the 19th century. The entire state of Israel occupies stolen land that is backed up with armed force. Sharon's military invasions, the massacres of Palestinians in Jenin, the widespread call for the "transfer" (i.e. ethnic cleansing) of Palestinians in Israel today, are not aberrations from the Zionist project but are absolutely consistent with "the Zionist vision for Israel's future for which…the majority of Jews and Israelis have fought for generations."

The roots of Zionism

Zionism is not a "two thousand year old yearning," but a modern movement that was born in the last quarter of the 19th century. The development of Zionism as a political movement was entirely a product of European society in the age of imperialism and it is impossible to understand outside of this context. Zionism was one response–the nationalist response–of a section of Jews to the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe.

Modern Jewish history begins with the French Revolution. In the wake of its revolutionary ideals of "liberty, equality and brotherhood," Jews won emancipation throughout Western Europe. The old ghetto walls were torn down. Jews gained new civil rights, and were able to join professions that had been closed to them for generations. The vast majority of European Jews welcomed emancipation. They wanted to be able to assimilate and participate as equal members in society.

But emancipation never reached Eastern Europe, where the majority of the world's Jewish population lived. In the Tsarist Empire, Jews lived in poverty and isolation, confined to industrially undeveloped areas in Poland and the Ukraine called the Pale of Settlement. There was no heavy industry in the Pale so most Jews worked in small shops or were part of the permanently unemployed. Life in the Pale was punctuated by the bloody pogroms–violent race riots against Jewish communities that were stoked by government officials and local police. The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky described the pogroms of 1905:

A hundred of Russia's towns and townlets were transformed into hells. A veil of smoke was drawn across the sun. Fires devoured entire streets with their houses and inhabitants. This was the old order's revenge for its humiliation….[4]

Everyone knows about a coming pogrom in advance. Pogrom proclamations are distributed, bloodthirsty articles come out in the official Provincial Gazettes, sometimes a special newspaper begins to appear…. To start with, a few windows are smashed, a few passers-by beaten up; the wreckers enter every tavern on their way and drink, drink, drink. The band never stops playing "God Save the Tsar," that hymn of the pogroms….

Patrols armed with police revolvers make sure that the anger of the crowd is not paralyzed by fear… If any resistance is offered, regular troops come to the rescue. With two or three volleys they shoot down the resisters or render them powerless by not allowing them within range. Protected in the front and rear by army patrols, with a cossack detachment for reconnaissance, with policemen and professional provocateurs as leaders, with mercenaries filling the secondary roles, with volunteers out for easy profit, the gang rushes through the town, drunk on vodka and the smell of blood.…

A trembling slave an hour ago, hounded by police and starvation, [the rioter] now feels himself an unlimited despot. Everything is allowed to him, he is capable of anything, he is the master of property and honor, of life and death. If he wants to, he can throw an old woman out of a third- floor window together with a grand piano, he can smash a chair against a baby's head, rape a little girl while the entire crowd looks on, hammer a nail into a living human body.… He exterminates whole families, he pours petrol over a house, transforms it into a mass of flames, and if anyone attempts to escape, he finishes him off with a cudgel.…There exist no tortures, figments of a feverish brain maddened by alcohol and fury, at which he need ever stop. He is capable of anything, he dares everything. God save the Tsar![5]

The rise of industrial capitalism across Europe did not bring with it an end to anti-Semitism. On the contrary, the system's violent economic booms and slumps created a climate in which Jews became easy scapegoats for the immiseration of the population. The 1880s saw a resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe, both East and West. Over the next three decades, more than five million Jews left Eastern Europe. Most of these refugees went to Western Europe or to the United States. Significantly, only a few thousand chose to go to Palestine. In Western Europe, a prolonged economic crisis in the 1870s also led to a revival of anti-Semitism. Jews who had been safe and prosperous in those countries for over a generation were shocked to find themselves targets of this virulent racism. For many it shattered their faith in the capitalist system and set them on the road for alternatives. Millions of Jews joined the rising revolutionary socialist movements. The revival of anti-Semitism also provided the context for Zionism to grow.

Until the 1880s, the Zionist movement consisted of a handful of fanatical religious sects. Jews who were enjoying the fruits of emancipation felt no need for religious utopias. For example, in 1862, Moses Hess, a Marxist-turned-Zionist wrote a book called Rome and Jerusalem. It's now considered a Zionist classic, but at the time of its publication, most Jews, if they heard about Hess at all dismissed him as a crank. In its first year the book it sold only 160 copies and the publisher had to ask Hess to buy back the remaining copies!6

The revival of anti-Semitism was epitomized by the Dreyfus Affair, in which the French government framed and convicted a Jewish army officer for treason. The 1894 trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus launched an international movement against anti-Semitism. But for an Austrian journalist named Theodor Herzl, who covered the trial in France, the Dreyfus Affair meant that no matter how assimilated Jews were in society, they would never be safe until they had a state of their own. In 1896, Herzl published The State of the Jews, the manifesto for a new political Zionist movement.

"An outpost of civilization against barbarism"

Herzl's "political Zionism" was secular and pragmatic. He argued that the Jewish state could only be built under the patronage of one of the imperialist powers. Because the Jews would inevitably be a minority wherever they settled, and since they would incur the hostility of whatever indigenous population they were colonizing, they could not succeed without the big guns of a big imperialist power backing them up. In fact, Palestine was only one of several territories Herzl considered for colonization. Argentina, Uganda, Cyprus, and even a couple of states in the Midwest of the United States were discussed as possible locations for the Jewish state. But the religious faction in the Zionist movement fought hard for Palestine and Herzl, never one to miss the power of a symbol, agreed that the ancient Jewish "homeland" would give the movement more emotional power.

However, defining feature of Zionism was not the choice of Palestine, but the Zionists' willingness to ally with European imperialism to achieve its goals. Herzl rejected the most progressive ideals of the 19th century–democracy, socialism, republicanism–and embraced the most reactionary– monarchy, nationalism, chauvinism, and racism. Zionism identified with the imperialist powers who carved up the globe, and accepted racist ideas about the "civilizing" virtues of colonization and "the white man's burden" that made up the ideology of the capitalist class. In The State of the Jews, Hertzl wrote,

The unthinking might, for example, imagine that this exodus would have to take its way from civilization into the desert. That is not so! It will be carried out entirely in the framework of civilization. We shall not revert to a lower stage, we shall rise to a higher one. We shall not dwell in mud huts; we shall build new, and more beautiful, more modern houses, and possess them in safety.… We should there form a part of a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism.… [Europe] would have to guarantee our existence.[7]

Today the media like to say that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East. But democracy was not the political system that Herzl envisioned for the Jewish State. Even a historian sympathetic to Zionism admits, "He preferred a democratic monarchy, or an aristocratic republic. Nations were not yet fit for unlimited democracy.… Politics would have to take shape in the upper strata of the new society and work downwards."[8]

Throughout his career, Herzl was deeply impressed by the power and authority of kings. After a meeting with the German Kaiser, Herzl wrote in his diary that the Kaiser "has truly imperial eyes–I have never seen such eyes. A remarkable bold, inquisitive soul shows in them."[9] And it is clear from his diaries that Herzl saw himself taking his place among

the European rulers at the head of a Jewish state. He once wrote, with typical humility,

On Sunday, while I sat on the platform…I saw and heard the rising of my legend. The people are sentimental; the masses do not see clearly…. A light mist has begun to beat about me, which will perhaps deepen into a cloud in the midst of which I shall walk….[A]t least they understand that I mean well by them, I am the man of the poor.[10]

Zionism and the Jews

If one of the defining features of Zionism was its identification with imperial power, aother was the way Herzl and founders of the movement viewed the very Jews they claimed to represent. The writings of Herzl and his colleague, Max Nordau, are littered with descriptions of European Jews as parasites, social diseases, germs, aliens. They were frustrated and bewildered that most Jews wanted to assimilate and live in their countries of birth. To these men who worshipped power and privilege, the desperate poverty of the Jews of Eastern Europe was a sign of weakness in the Jewish character.

Nordau wrote,

I contemplate with horror the future development of this race of (assimilated Jews of Europe) which is sustained morally by no tradition, whose soul is poisoned with hostility to both its own and to strange blood, and whose self-respect is destroyed through the ever-present consciousness of a fundamental lie…. This is the picture of the Jewish people at the end of the nineteenth century. To sum up: the majority of Jews are a race of accursed beggars.[11]

Nordau's repulsive views flowed quite logically from Zionism's basic assumptions about Jews. Zionists accepted the 19th century view that anti-Semitism–in fact all racial difference–was a permanent feature of human nature. For this reason it was pointless to struggle against it. The solution for Jews was to form a state and convince the European world that Jews belonged to the class of the "superior" colonizers, not to that of the colonized. It was a very short jump from this belief to concluding that Jews themselves were the cause of anti-Semitism. Herzl accepted the idea that Jews were an economic burden on society, that their very presence provoked violence from the rest of society:

Wherever [the Jewish Question] does not exist, it is brought in together with Jewish immigrants. We are naturally drawn into those places where we are not persecuted and our appearance there gives rise to persecution. This is the case, and will inevitably be so, everywhere…. The unfortunate Jews are now carrying the seeds of anti-Semitism into England; they have already introduced it into America…. [But once Jews go to Palestine] the countries of emigration will rise to a new prosperity. There will be an inner migration of Christian citizens in to the positions relinquished by Jews. The outflow will be gradual, without any disturbance, and its very inception means the end of anti-Semitism…. Once we begin to execute the plan, anti-Semitism will cease at once and everywhere…. It is the relief from the old burden, under which all have suffered.[12]

Zionism and imperialism

To acquire the land for his state, Herzl was willing to beg from the table of every imperialist power, no matter how criminal. He courted them all–the German Kaiser, the Turks, the Russian Tsar, and the British Empire. In 1896, Herzl entered into negotiations with the Turkish Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled over Palestine for more than five hundred years. Herzl offered the Sultan a deal–in exchange for giving Palestine to the Jews, the Zionist movement would help soften world condemnation of Turkey for its genocidal campaign against the Armenians. He even pledged to meet with Armenian leaders to convince them to call off their resistance struggle! In his diary, Herzl wrote,

[The Sultan] could and would receive me as a friend–after I had rendered him a service…. For one thing I am to influence the European press…to handle the Armenian question in a spirit more friendly to the Turks: for another, I am to induce the Armenian leaders directly to submit to him, whereupon he will make all sorts of concessions to them…. I immediately told [Hamid's agent] that I was ready a me mettre en campagne [to start my campaign.][13]

As it turned out, the Sultan rejected the offer. But as historian Lenni Brenner notes,

It would have occurred to no one else in the broad Jewish world to have tried to hinder or interfere with the Armenians in their struggle; nor would anyone have thought to support Turkey in any of its wars, and in the end Zionism gained nothing by its actions. But what was demonstrated, early in its history, was that there were no criteria of ordinary humanism that the World Zionist Organization considered itself bound to respect.[14]

Herzl never met a butcher he didn't like, even if they were guilty of slaughtering Jews. In 1903, he went to the Russian Tsar to see if he could convince Russia to pressure the Ottomans into handing over Palestine. In an infamous meeting, Herzl actually sat down with Count von Plehve, the organizer of the pogroms, the butcher of Jews. Herzl argued with von Plehve that Zionism was the solution to Russia's "Jewish problem," namely, the enormous number of Jews who were flooding into revolutionary organizations. Herzl later recalled that he told von Plehve "Help me reach land sooner and the revolt will end. And so will the defection to the socialists."[15]

Herzl kept his end of the bargain. A member of the Russian Social Revolutionary party, Chaim Zhitlovsky, recalled what Hertzl told him soon after the meeting:

I have just come from Plehve. I have his positive, binding promise that in 15 years, at the maximum, he will effectuate for us a charter for Palestine. But this is tied to one condition: the Jewish revolutionaries shall cease their struggle against the Russian government. If in 15 years from the time of the agreement Plehve does not effectuate the charter, they become free again to do what they consider necessary.[16]
Zhitlovsky gave a brilliant response that epitomizes the revolutionary socialist position on Zionism. He told Herzl,

We Jewish revolutionaries, even the most national among us, are not Zionists, and do not believe that Zionism is able to resolve our problem. To transfer the Jewish people from Russia to Eretz-Israel is, in our eyes, a utopia, and because a utopia, we will not renounce the paths upon which we have embarked–the path of revolutionary struggle against the Russian government, which should also lead to the freedom of the Jewish people…. The situation of Zionism is already dubious enough by the very fact of its standing aloof from the revolution. Its situation in Jewish life would become impossible if it could be shown that it undertakes positive steps to damage the Jewish revolutionary struggle.[17]

Herzl's meeting with von Plehve turned out to be a tactical disaster, alienating the very Russian Jews he was trying to recruit to the movement. Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, later wrote "I…believed that the step was not only humiliating, but utterly pointless…. Nothing came, naturally, of Herzl's 'cordial' conversations with von Plehve, nothing, that is, except disillusionment and deeper despair, and a deeper division between the Zionists and the revolutionaries."[18] Weizmann wrote to Herzl with alarm,

In general West European Jewry thinks that the majority of East European Jewish youth belongs to the Zionist camp. Unfortunately, the contrary is true. The lions-share of the youth is anti-Zionist, not from an assimilationist point of view as in West Europe, but rather as a result of their revolutionary mood.

It is impossible to describe how many became the victims of police oppression because of membership in the Jewish Social Democracy–they are sent to jail and left to rot in Siberia; 5,000 are under state surveillance…and I am not speaking only of the youth of the proletariat…. Almost the entire Jewish student body stands firmly behind the revolutionary camp…and all this is accompanied by a distaste for Jewish nationalism which borders on self-hatred.[19]

A land without a people?

Herzl's movement held its first congress in Basel Switzerland in 1897. After that, waves of Zionist pioneers started migrating into Palestine. They came to colonize, but not along the lines of traditional colonialism where the big power conquers a land to create new markets for itself, acquire more resources and exploit the indigenous population as a cheap source of labor. The Zionists did not come to exploit the Arabs but to completely replace them. The goal was to create an exclusively Jewish state with a Jewish majority. In order to achieve this, the Zionists had to destroy the Palestinian economy, steal the land, drive the Arabs out of the labor market, and erase the very memory they'd even been there. This meant carrying out a war on a number of fronts, reflected in the three slogans of the pioneer Zionists: "conquest of land," "conquest of labor," and "produce of the land."[20]

By "conquest of land," they meant buy and steal as much Arab land as possible; by "conquest of labor," they meant force Jewish landowners to employ Jewish-only labor and organize Jewish-only trade unions to dominate the labor market; and by "produce of the land"–boycott and physically harass Arab farms and businesses to drive them out.

Thus the absurdity of the Zionist saying that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without a land." Every Zionist knew that the main obstacle to founding their state was that the land they wanted for themselves was already inhabited. Arab Palestine was a flourishing society with an ancient history and culture. There were over 1,000 villages, thriving towns, abundant citrus and olive groves, irrigation systems, crafts, and textiles. Zionists had to obliterate all traces of this society if they were to build a new one. As the Israeli minister of defense, Moshe Dayan, admitted in a speech to Israeli students in 1969:

We came here to a country that was populated by Arabs, and we are building here a Hebrew, Jewish state. Instead of Arab villages, Jewish villages were established. You do not even know the names of these villages and I do not blame you, because these geography books no longer exist. Not only the books, but all the villages do not exist.

Nahalal was established in place of Mahalul, Gevat in place of Jibta, Sarid in the place of Hanifas and Kafr Yehoushu'a in the place of Tel Shamam. There is not a single settlement…not established in the place of a former Arab village.[21]

"The iron wall of English bayonets"

The First World War and the Russian Revolution caused the collapse of Herzl's three beloved patrons, the Ottoman Empire, the German Kaiser, and Russian Tsarism. Though the Zionists played all sides covertly during the war, the more farsighted leaders anticipated that Britain would emerge as the dominant imperialist power from the war. Weizmann stated as early as 1914, "We can reasonably say that should Palestine fall within the British sphere of influence, and should Britain encourage Jewish settlement there, as a British dependency, we could have in twenty to thirty years a million Jews out there, perhaps more; they would develop the country, bring back civilization to it and form a very effective guard for the Suez Canal."[22]

When the war ended, Palestine became a British colony and the Zionists found they shared many interests with their new colonial masters. In 1917 Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, which was the first official recognition of the Zionist settlements in Palestine. Under the British Mandate Government, Britain privileged the small Jewish population over the Palestinians. In 1917 there were 56,000 Jews in Palestine and 644,000 Palestinian Arabs. Still Britain gave Jewish capital 90 percent of concessions for projects like building roads and power plants and by 1935, Zionists owned 872 out of the 1,212 industrial firms in Palestine.[23]

The British ruling class, which was rabidly anti-Semitic, had its own reasons for this support. Out of the First World War, Arab nationalism had emerged as a major threat to domination of the Middle East and Britain hoped that Zionists could be a useful force for policing the Arabs. But Winston Churchill gave another reason for supporting

Zionism–defeat of the left wing "International Jews." In an astoundingly anti-Semitic article titled "Zionism versus Bolshevism," Churchill wrote,

First there are the Jews who, dwelling in every country throughout the world, identify themselves with that country, enter into its national life and, while adhering faithfully to their own religion, regard themselves as citizens in the fullest sense of the State which has received them.…

In violent opposition to all this sphere of Jewish effort rise the schemes of the International Jews.… This movement among the Jews is not new. From the days of Spartacus…to those of Karl Marx, and down to Trotsky (Russia), Bela Kun (Hungary), Rosa Luxemburg (Germany), and Emma Goldman (United States), this world-wide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization and for the reconstitution of society on the basis of arrested development, of envious malevolence, and impossible equality, has been steadily growing.…

It becomes, therefore, specially important to foster and develop any strongly-marked Jewish movement which leads directly away from these fatal associations. And it is here that Zionism has such a deep significance for the whole world at the present time.… [S]hould there be created in our own lifetime by the banks of the Jordan a Jewish State under the protection of the British Crown, which might comprise three or four millions of Jews, an event would have occurred in the history of the world which would, from every point of view, be beneficial, and would be especially in harmony with the truest interests of the British Empire.[24]

In 1936, the Palestinians began the Great Uprising against British and Zionist colonization. The Uprising lasted three years and was only defeated by savage British repression–drawing in at some points half the British military.[25] It gave the Zionists another opportunity to prove their worth to England. Zionists organized the armed militias called the Haganah and the paramilitary units, which played an important supporting role in crushing the revolt. They also took advantage of the Arab general strike to gain control of new sectors of the economy, replacing more Arab owners and workers with Jews. The British military repression was so severe that it left the Arab population demoralized and exhausted for many years.

This cleared the field for the Zionists to focus on the last remaining obstacle to a Jewish state: the British Mandate itself. After all, the Zionists were colonizers, and had no intention of remaining subjects in someone else's colony. In 1945, they declared war on the British and drove them out. In 1947, the United Nations imposed its criminal partition of Palestine, which granted the majority of the land to the minority of Jewish settlers. For the Zionists, this was a green light to begin a terrible war of ethnic cleansing. In 1948, through systematic terror and murder, they drove 800,000 Palestinians off their land and founded the state of Israel on the ruins of destroyed Arab Palestine.

"I would not accept Arabs in my trade union"

Many of the leaders like Herzl were extremely hostile to socialism. But marxism was enormously influential in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. If Zionism was going to build in that kind of atmosphere, it had to make some accommodation to the mood. Ber Borochov was the father of the movement called "proletarian Zionism," which as its name implies, tried to synthesize Marxism and Jewish nationalism. Borochov's supposedly Marxist analysis was that, because the Jewish proletariat of Eastern Europe worked in economically marginal jobs, they had no social power as workers. Therefore they were powerless to effect change in Russia. Thus, Jewish workers needed to go build their own nation where they could become a "real" proletariat organized in the real centers of production. Only then could they make a socialist revolution. In the meantime, they might have to make some alliances, temporarily of course, with Jewish capitalists. Really this was just giving a pseudo-Marxist gloss to the same pessimistic message that Zionism is all about–you can't fight here at home against oppression, you must organize to go to Palestine and build the state.

The organization Borochov founded, the Workers of Zion (Po'ale Zion) actually played a reactionary role in the Russian labor movement. Zionists in the unions argued against any united action with non-Jewish workers, which in effect put them in the position of strikebreakers. Here was a party claiming to represent Jewish workers that opposed the struggles of Jewish workers! In 1901, members of the Bund, the Jewish revolutionary organization that was bitterly hostile to Zionism, organized to drive the Zionists of their unions, "informing them that, since they lived in Pinsk and not Palestine, such talk in Pinsk was objectively class-treason, as the Jewish workers of Pinsk, were, quite definitely, engaged in a desperate class struggle with the capitalists and the police," writes Brenner.[26]

In Palestine, the "socialist Zionists" built organizations that were invaluable to the process of colonization. They founded the Histadrut, the Jewish-only trade union federation, which organized the exclusion of Arab workers from the job market. They started the kibbutzim, the agricultural collectives that built exclusively Jewish settlements on Arab land and defended those settlements with arms. The reality of "Zionist Marxism" is that it had to stretch Marxism beyond all recognition to justify its colonial project. David Hacohen, a Labor Party leader, recalled the ideological difficulties in 1969:

I had to fight my friends on the issue of Jewish socialism, to defend the fact that I would not accept Arabs in my trade union, the Histadrut; to defend preaching to housewives that they not buy at Arab stores; to defend the fact that we stood guard at orchards to prevent Arab workers from getting jobs there.… To pour kerosene on Arab tomatoes, to attack Jewish housewives in the markets and smash the Arab eggs they had bought; to praise to the skies the Kereen Kayemet [Jewish Fund] that sent Hankin to Beirut to buy land from absentee effendi [landlords] and to throw the fellahin [Arab peasants] off the land–to buy dozens of dunams from an Arab is permitted, but to sell, god forbid, one Jewish dunam to an Arab is prohibited; to take Rothschild, the incarnation of capitalism, as a socialist and to name him the "benefactor"–to do all that was not easy.[27]

"The iron wall of Jewish bayonets"

If the Jewish-only trade unions and kibbutzim were the organizations of the Zionist "left," then Revisionism under the leadership of Vladimir Jabotinsky formed the right wing of the movement. Jabotinsky called his faction Revisionism because it "revised" what he saw as the weaknesses of the movement, its willingness to negotiate with British imperialism, to accept concessions on key questions like immigration and land seizure. In particular, Jabotinsky was quite open and blunt about how Zionists should deal with "the Arab question":

Thus we conclude that we cannot promise anything to the Arabs of the Land of Israel or the Arab countries. Their voluntary agreement is out of the question. Hence those who hold that an agreement with the natives is an essential condition for Zionism can now say "no" and depart from Zionism. Zionist colonization, even the most restricted, must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population. This colonization can, therefore, continue and develop only under the protection of a force independent of the local population—an iron wall which the native population cannot break through. This is, in toto, our policy towards the Arabs. To formulate it any other way would only be hypocrisy.[28]

To the hackneyed reproach that this point of view is unethical, I answer 'absolutely untrue.' This is our ethic. There is no other ethic. As long as there is the faintest spark of hope for the Arabs to impede us, they will not sell these hopes—not for any sweet words nor for any tasty morsel, because this is not a rabble but a people, a living people. And no people makes such enormous concessions on such fateful questions, except when there is no hope left, until we have removed every opening visible in the Iron Wall.[29]

Revisionists were openly sympathetic to fascism. Betar, the Revisionist youth movement, admired Mussolini. They wore brown shirts and did the fascist salute.[30] The Revisionist newspaper carried a regular column called "From the Notebook of a Fascist," and on one occasion when Jabotinsky came to Palestine, the newspaper ran a column called "On the arrival of our Duce."[31] In 1933 a columnist wrote, "Social democrats of all stripes believe that Hitler's movement is an empty shell [but] we believe that there is both a shell and a kernel. The anti-Semitic shell is to be discarded, but not the anti-Marxist kernel."[32]

The Labor Zionists tried at times to distance themselves from the actions of the extremist paramilitaries. But when the time came for united action they showed that their squabbles were all in the family. As Jabotinsky put it, "Force must play its role—with strength and without indulgence. In this, there are no meaningful differences between our militarists and our vegetarians. One prefers an Iron Wall of Jewish bayonets; the other an Iron Wall of English bayonets."[33]

It was Jabotinsky who founded the Haganah, and the Revisionists who formed the paramilitary organizations, the Irgun, as well as the fascist Stern Gang. In 1945 the Revisionists and the Labor Zionists united to form the "Resistance Movement" to wage war against the British and then the Palestinians. The Irgun and the Stern Gang were responsible for the infamous massacre in the village of Dir Yassin in 1948. At least until the 1980s, veterans of the Irgun still returned to Dir Yassin to commemorate their "heroism."[34]

Zionism and the Holocaust

Zionism's most powerful claim to legitimacy is that the State of Israel is necessary to prevent another Holocaust. The legacy of the Holocaust is brought out to justify every atrocity committed by Israel. But it is precisely the record of how the Jewish Agency (the government of the pre-state Jewish settlements in Palestine) responded to the Holocaust that provides the most damning evidence against Zionism.

To the leaders of the Jewish Agency, the rise of fascism had a definite upside. Menahem Ussishkin told a Zionist Executive meeting, "There is something positive in their tragedy and that is that Hitler oppressed them as a race and not as a religion. Had he done the latter, half the Jews in Germany would simply have converted to Christianity."35 In 1934, Labor Zionist Moshe Beilinson went to Germany and reported back to the Labor Party, "The streets are paved with more money than we have ever dreamed of in the history of our Zionist enterprise. Here is an opportunity to build and flourish like none we have ever had or ever will have."36 Specifically, "the opportunity" meant the potential for thousands of new immigrants and their assets to come flooding into Palestine.

However, Zionist officials were quite blunt in stating that they didn't want all the refugees from Hitler's Holocaust. They didn't want the burden of absorbing millions of impoverished sick refugees who had no ideological passion for Palestine. The Agency only wanted young, healthy Jews who could come over and work and fight and build the state. As Israeli historian Tom Segev writes,

Urban life was, in their [Zionist leaders] eyes, a symptom of social and moral degeneration; returning to the land would give birth to the 'new man' they hoped to create in Palestine. In parceling out the immigration certificates, they therefore gave preference to those who could play a role in their program for building the country. They preferred healthy young Zionists.[37]

The German Immigrants Association in Palestine actually complained in 1934 that the Zionist organizations in Berlin weren't being selective enough about who they were sending. Its letter of complaint stated in part, 'The human material coming from Germany is getting worse and worse."38 It even returned some of the refugees to Germany who they felt would be too much of a burden.

The Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency wrote a private memorandum in 1943 about the prospects for their work. When this was written, it still could have been possible to save millions of Jews from Hitler's "Final Solution." But they didn't even try.

Whom to save: Should we help everyone in need, without regard to the quality of the people? Should we not give this activity a Zionist-national character and try foremost to save those who can be of use to the

Land of Israel and to Jewry? I understand that it seems cruel to put the question in this form, but unfortunately we must state that if we are able to save only 10,000 people from among 50,000 who can contribute to build the country…as against saving a million Jews who will be a burden, or at best an apathetic element, we must restrain ourselves and save the 10,000 that can be saved from among the 50,000–despite the accusations and pleas of a million."[39]

Was this position unethical? To paraphrase Jabotinsky, this was their ethic–there was no other ethic. To the Zionists, the needs of the Jewish State came first, second, and last.

The refugees who did make it to Palestine were treated with contempt by the press and public. They were seen as passive victims whose families perished because they failed to stand up for themselves. Everyone knew that most of the refugees, if they had had a choice, would never have come to Palestine at all. The Labor Party newspaper, Davar, published an article saying that the Holocaust was "punishment from heaven" for the European Jews for not choosing Palestine.[40] One German immigrant wrote into the German language press, "We have seen Germany's nationalism gone mad and we trembled; we are on the road to a similar situation here."[41]

The Zionists took these sick, devastated refugees and sent them into the kibbutzim–on the frontlines of the war against the Palestinians. Tom Segev describes,

In 1949 David Ben-Gurion toyed with the idea of sending immigrants to work on development projects under a military or "paramilitary" regimen, in order to get rid of the "demoralizing material" among them and to give them occupational training, mastery of Hebrew and "national discipline"…. The plan, never activated, was often discussed. Eight out of ten Israelis in 1949 said that the concentration of immigrants in the cities endangered the country's economic and social structure; nine out of ten said the immigrants should be "directed" to the agricultural settlements and slightly more than half said they should be "forced" to go to the settlements…. Ha'aretz…contended that the immigrants were "not taking seriously the obligations they took upon themselves before their immigration; and accused them of not feeling any 'personal responsibility' for the Zionist enterprise."[42]

"Why have you done nothing?"

The bottom line was that the Jewish Agency in Palestine had many opportunities to rescue tens of thousands of Jews and perhaps more. But they sabotaged proposal after proposal, choosing to spend their money on land settlements instead of rescue. David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, said, "It is the job of Zionism not to save the remnant of Israel in Europe but rather to save the land of Israel for the Jewish people and the Yishuv."[43]

Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel, was even more blunt: "The hopes of Europe's six million Jews are centered on emigration. I was asked: 'Can you bring six million Jews to Palestine?' I replied 'No.'… From the depths of the tragedy I want to save…young people [for Palestine]. The old ones will pass. They will bear their fate or they will not. They are dust, economic and moral dust in a cruel world…Only the branch of the young shall survive. They have to have to accept it."[44]

In the 1950s, a dramatic court case in Israel revealed that the Zionists had acted with criminal neglect–if not outright complicity–in the destruction of Hungarian Jewry.[45] Evidence produced at the trial showed that Rudolph Kastner, a top official in the Israeli Labor Party, and the person in charge of the Rescue Committee in Hungary during the war, had actively collaborated with the Nazis. Kastner negotiated with Nazi official Adolph Eichmann (the architect of the Holocaust)to get a approval for a "VIP train" of 1,685 Hungarian Jews to leave Hungary safely. Kastner personally selected the passengers for the train, which included several hundred people from his hometown and a dozen members of his family. He worked with SS Officer Kurt Becher to make the financial arrangements.

In exchange for the safe passage of the train, Kastner agreed not to warn the Jews of Hungary (whose rescue was in his hands) about Hitler's plans for their extermination and not to take any action to protect them. Worse, he helped to deceive Hungarian Jews, convincing them that they were simply being relocated. After the war, Kastner testified at the Nuremberg trials on Becher's behalf, which resulted in Becher, murderer of half a million Hungarian Jews, going free. Most damning of all, it became clear that Kastner had not acted alone, but that his plan for the VIP train had the support of the highest leaders of the Jewish Agency. Segev describes the findings of the Israeli court that,

Kastner knew the Nazis intended to exterminate Hungarian Jewry but kept the information from the members of the community. Had he warned them in time, they might have been able to flee to Romania or organize armed resistance. Since they did not know what awaited them, they boarded the death trains without resistance…. He had been given the VIP train in exchange for his silence.[46]

Toward the end of the war a staunch anti-Zionist named Rabbi Dov Michael Weissmandel met with high-level Nazi officials to make a desperate deal. The Nazis knew they were losing the war and needed cash. They told Weismandel that the remaining Jews could buy their freedom for a large sum of money. The Nazis gave Weissmandel a deadline to come up with that money. Weissmandel flooded the Zionist organizations with his pleas. But they chose to do nothing. The deadline passed. In an agonizing letter to the Jewish Agency, Weissmandel wrote,

Why have you done nothing until now? Who is guilty of this frightful negligence? Are you not guilty, our Jewish brothers: you who have the greatest good fortune in the world–liberty?… Twelve thousand Jews–men, women, and children, old men, infants, healthy and sick ones, are to be suffocated daily…. Their destroyed hearts cry out to you for help as they bewail your cruelty.[47]

The socialist alternative

The Nazis murdered the Jewish revolutionary left in Europe; they wiped out its best leaders and organizations. It was these socialists and communists who organized the underground resistance to fascism in countries across Europe, who fought bravely to defend the Warsaw Ghetto against the Nazi assault. With the destruction of these fighters went the memory of what they had accomplished and stood for. It is vital to start with this fact because Zionism has profited enormously from our historical amnesia. The destruction of the strong anti-Zionist tradition among European Jews has meant that Zionism has been able to claim that it represents the unified voice of Jews throughout the world and therefore, anyone who opposes them is an anti-Semite.

We don't learn that, up until the Second World War, vast numbers of Jews supported the parties of revolutionary socialism–a tradition that opposed Zionism. In 1905 Jews were 4 percent of the population in Russia but formed 11 percent of the Bolshevik Party and 23 percent of the Menshevik Party. In 1905, the anti-Zionist Bund, the revolutionary organization of Jewish workers, was roughly the same size as the Bolshevik Party.[48] The socialist tradition condemned Zionism both for its solution to anti-Semitism and for its colonization of the Arabs. In 1910, the Jewish socialist Karl Kautsky defined Zionism as a "sport for philanthropists and men of letters" who wanted to make Palestine "a world ghetto for the isolation of the Jewish race." Later Kautsky expanded, "It is labor that gives people a right to the land in which it lives, thus Judaism can advance no claim on Palestine. On the basis of the right of labor and of democratic self-determination, today Palestine does not belong to the Jews of Vienna, London, or New York, who claim it for Judaism, but to the Arabs of the same country, the great majority of the population."[49]

It is not hard to see why many Jews were hostile to Zionism. Zionism called for a retreat from the struggle against anti-Semitism. But the socialist movement argued that the fight against anti-Semitism was central to the revolutionary struggle against capitalism. Thus on the one side stood the revolutionaries who organized Jews and non-Jews together to fight the pogroms, lead strikes, and overthrow the Tsarist regime that perpetuated Jewish oppression. On the other side stood the Zionists who collaborated with the Tsar and his butchers, stood aside from the struggles for self-defense, and sabotaged work in the unions. It was the revolutionary workers movement–and not Zionism–that offered a genuine hope for liberation for European Jews. Trotsky described how the workers of St. Petersberg came to the defense of Jews during the pogroms of 1905:

The workers made active preparations to defend their city. In certain cases whole plants undertook to go out into the streets at any threat of danger. The gun shops, ignoring all police restrictions, carried on a feverish trade in Brownings. But revolvers cost a great deal and the broad masses cannot afford them; the revolutionary parties and the Soviet had difficulty in arming their fighting detachments. Meanwhile rumors of a pogrom were growing. All plants and workshops having any access to iron or steel began, on their own initiative, to manufacture side-arms. Several thousand hammers were forging daggers, pikes, wire whips and knuckledusters. In the evening, at a meeting of the Soviet, one deputy after another mounted the rostrum, raising their weapons high above their heads and transmitting their electors' solemn undertaking to suppress the pogrom as soon as it flared up. That demonstration alone was bound to paralyze all initiative among rank-and-file pogromists. But the workers did not stop there. In the factory areas, beyond the Nevsky Gate, they organized a real militia with regular night watches. In addition to this they ensured special protection of the buildings of the revolutionary press, a necessary step in those anxious days when the journalist wrote and the typesetter worked with a revolver in his pocket.[50]

Lenin and the Bolsheviks took an uncompromising position against anti-Semitism, seeing it as the key division and source of weakness in the Russian working class. Lenin argued that socialists must be the tribune of the oppressed, willing to fight every instance of anti-Semitism, regardless of what class of Jews were affected. But Lenin argued with equal force that in the revolutionary movement

[T]here must be complete fusion [between the Jewish proletariat and] the Russian proletariat, in the interests of the struggle being waged by the entire proletariat of Russia.... [W]e must act as a single and centralized militant organization, have behind us the whole of the proletariat, without distinction of language or nationality, a proletariat whose unity is cemented by the continual joint solution of problems of theory and practice, of tactics and organization; and we must not set up organizations that would march separately, each along its own track.[51]

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks abolished all racist laws against Jews and severely punished incidents of anti-Semitism. During the Civil War, the imperialist backed White Army in the Ukraine murdered as many as 60,000 Jews while the Bolshevik Red Army became the protectors of the Jewish communities in Poland and the Ukraine. One writer describes:

For the White Cossack cavalry, looting, rape, and murder were a way of life. Looting was forbidden in the Red Army. Anti-Semitism and pogroms were rife in the White Armies; anti-Semitic publications were banned in the Red Army. Pogromists were shot. In the Ukraine whole Jewish communities lived behind the Red Army lines, advancing when it advanced, retreating when it retreated.[52]

We should take pride in the record of the socialist movement and its principled opposition to anti-Semitism and all oppression. Today those same principles require us to side wholly with the Palestinians in their struggle against Israel. Next to the treacherous, counter-revolutionary record of Zionism, we must counterpose the best traditions in the workers movement of struggle and solidarity. Trotsky quotes a socialist observer to the events of 1905:

Side by side with this nightmare [of the pogroms]... see how majestically, with what astonishing fortitude, order and discipline, the workers' movement developed. They did not defile themselves with murders or robberies; on the contrary, they came to the aid of the public everywhere, and, needless to say, protected the public far better than the

police, the cossacks, or the gendarmes…. The workers' armed detachments appeared wherever the hooligans began their foul work. This new force, entering the historical arena for the first time, showed itself calm in the consciousness of its right, moderate in the triumph of its ideals of liberty and goodness, organized and obedient like a real army that knows that its victory is the victory of everything for whose sake humanity lives, thinks, and rejoices, fights and suffers.[53]

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7 Arthur Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), p. 213 and p. 222.

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9 Laqueur, p. 109.

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28 Vladimir Jabotinsky, "The Iron Wall," 1923, online at www.marxists.de/middleast/ironwall/ironwall.htm.

29 Schoenman, pp. 24—25.

30 Tom Segev, The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991) p. 23.

31 Segev, p. 23.

32 Segev, p. 23.

33 Schoenman p. 24.

34 Brenner, p. 142.

35 Segev, p. 50.

36 Segev, p. 18.

37 Segev, p. 42.

38 Segev, p. 43.

39 Segev, p. 99—100.

40 Segev, p. 98.

41 Segev, p. 57.

42 Segev, p. 172.

43 Segev, p. 129.

44 Quoted in Schoenman, p. 51.

45 See Segev, Part V, "The Kastner Affair" for a description of the trial. Ironically, the trial was a libel suit initiated by the Israeli government against Malkiel Greenwald, another Hungarian Jew, for accusing Kastner of collaboration with the Nazis. But in substance it ended up being a trial against Kastner. The trial ended with Greenwald's acquittal, a decision later overturned by the Israeli Supreme Court. Kastner, meanwhile, was assassinated in 1957. Some believe he was killed by the Israeli government, which considered the Kastner affair an embarrassment.

46 Segev, p. 271. Kastner even distributed postcards to Jews awaiting deportation that said, "I have arrived. I am well."Upon arrival at Auschwitz, they were forced to send these cards back home.

47 Schoenman, pp. 52—53.

48 Enzo Traverso, The Marxists and Jewish Question: The History of a Debate (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1990) p. 39.

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