

Working Class Emancipation

Working Class Emancipation is a fighting socialist propaganda group. We intervene in the mass struggles to forge a revolutionary workers party in the United States. Only the working class, led by its own vanguard party, can emancipate all the oppressed from racism, patriarchy, poverty, and war, all of which are symptoms of inability of the the capitalist class (the big industrialists and bankers) to solve the grave problems which confront us. We welcome all workers and youth who wish to work with us on the task of building the Marxist vanguard party of the working class.

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Workers and oppressed peoples of the world, unite!
WORKING CLASS EMANCIPATION

Labor bulletin:
Throw out the union bureaucrats, betrayers of the workers!
Labor must take the road of class struggle!

October, 2006

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Cover photos:

Top: Sanitation workers on strike in Memphis, TN, March, 1968. The struggle against the racist oppression of blacks is essential to the emancipation of the entire working class. Racism is the key to maintaining the rule of the bosses. Photo by Barney Sellers, *Commercial Appeal*.

Bottom: Supermarket workers on strike and locked out in California, 2003-2004. The failure of the union leaders to expand the strike isolated the workers and led to their defeat. Photos by David Bacon.

3. **Organize the unorganized!** For a massive organizing drive in every sector of industrial, agricultural, and service workers, directed by regional and industry-based democratically-elected rank and file organizing committees. Turn to the women workers, the youth, and all the oppressed: they have the least to lose and the most to gain, and will be the fiercest fighters in the coming struggles.
4. **Unleash labor's power to defeat imperialism; for the formation of workers' self defense guards!** The union bureaucrats strive to sell themselves as model bourgeois patriots, supporters of imperialism's wars and police state. Use the power of workers strikes and boycotts of war cargo to smash the imperialist war drive! Instead of singing praises to the class enemy's military and police forces, organize and arm workers' self defense guards to build powerful picket lines and smash the racist and fascist provocations of the Minutemen and the KKK.
5. **For a revolutionary leadership of the trade unions, committed to the overthrow of capitalism through socialist revolution!** "Democratic unions in the old sense of the term, bodies where in the framework of one and the same mass organization different tendencies struggled more or less freely, can no longer exist. Just as it is impossible to bring back the bourgeois-democratic state, so it is impossible to bring back the old workers' democracy. The fate of the one reflects the fate of the other. As a matter of fact, the independence of trade unions in the class sense, in their relations to the bourgeois state can, in the present conditions, be assured only by a completely revolutionary leadership, that is, the leadership of the Fourth International. This leadership, naturally, must and can be rational and assure the unions the maximum of democracy conceivable under the present concrete conditions. But without the political leadership of the Fourth International the independence of the trade unions is impossible."⁵⁴

A Working Class Emancipation labor bulletin
Throw out the union bureaucrats,
betrayers of the workers!
Labor must take the road of class struggle!

by Fred Bergen

The partial general strike of May Day, 2006 showed the way forward for the labor movement in the United States. The strikers were immigrant workers, most of whom were not represented by any union. The reverberations of the political force and unprecedented mobilization of May 1 are still being felt. But in order for the demands of the immigrant workers and their allies to be achieved, the current reformist and pro-capitalist leadership of the labor movement must be thrown out and replaced with a leadership that is committed to the class struggle and democratically accountable to the rank and file.

An unstable, polarized economic and political situation

In 1936, during the deepest and most politically volatile economic crash yet experienced by US and world capitalism, establishment economist John Maynard Keynes spelled out imperialism's life-support strategy for the coming century: a permanent war economy paid for by government borrowing. The Great Depression was signaled by the catastrophic stock-market collapse of October, 1929, but the market collapse was only a symptom of a crisis of *overproduction* that wreaked havoc on the capitalist economies of the world. In the planned economy of the Soviet Union, where capitalism had been abolished, economic growth continued steadily, despite the abuses and mismanagement of the Stalinist bureaucracy that had strangled Soviet democracy.

Karl Marx explained that the technological innovations that capitalism is constantly applying to increase labor productivity, and thereby profits, inevitably lead to periodic crises in which the masses of workers and poor people are unable to buy back enough of the commodities, products of their labor stolen from them by their bosses, with the wages that the bosses pay them. This is the meaning of overproduction. Factories grind to a halt, mass layoffs devastate the cities, food, housing, and basic necessities are destroyed or put off-limits while millions go hungry and homeless, and the noble words of peace treaties and international accords crumble into dust as imperialist governments mobilize their armies in a mad scramble for new colonial markets to overcome the overproduction crisis. Small investors and pensioners are ruined, and the biggest of the big banks and monopolies gobble up bankrupt properties to strengthen their positions for the next economic cycle.

⁵⁴ Leon Trotsky, *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*, 1940.

Keynes understood that overproduction was at the heart of capitalism's crisis. Unlike Marx, who analyzed capitalism so he could arm the workers with the theoretical and organizational weapons to overthrow the rule of the bankers, bosses, and landlords, Keynes searched for ways to extend the life of a dying system. He advised the imperialist governments to finance the debt of the capitalists in overproduction crises with large government spending projects.

Liberal followers of Keynes hope that these spending projects would be for public works like education, health, and infrastructure. But they can't wish away the fact that the world's imperialist governments are in a constant struggle for hegemony over the oppressed countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and whichever government falls behind in the doomsday arms race will lose the cheap labor, captive markets, and monopolies on raw materials from its oppressed colonies. Keynesianism is therefore the official ideology and theory of the military-industrial complex. But the Keynesian permanent war economy only postpones capitalism's systemic crisis, and makes it all the more catastrophic when it finally breaks out. Keynes himself understood this, and he is famous for his answer to questions about the long-run implications of the massive government debt caused by his deficit-spending strategy: speaking for the parasitic class he dedicated his life to advising, he said, "in the long run, we're all dead". But his dark, cynical prediction applies equally well to the billions of workers and peasants worldwide, unless we organize to end capitalism's mad march toward fascism and war.

Throughout the past year, the capitalist media in the US has obsessed over the prospect of a collapse of the "housing bubble". The US capitalist economy is running on fumes. The national debt is at over eight trillion dollars¹, consumer debt (credit cards, mortgages, tuition and car loans, etc.) is over two trillion dollars². When will the lords of Wall Street and the other imperialist banks call in their loans? The problem for the capitalists is that they can't pay the workers enough to pay the rents and home mortgages back to them. When a capitalist raises wages, he not only loses profits, he loses ability to invest those profits in productivity-increasing technology or in money-making real estate. He stumbles and falls behind in the race against his fellow exploiters. His backers and partners demand a higher return, or his head will roll. The speculative base of the US economy is the reason why the financial markets watch indicators of "consumer confidence" so closely: if

1 US Treasury Bureau of the Public Debt, <http://www.publicdebt.treas.gov/opd/opdpenny.htm> (cited on Sept. 9 2006)

2 US Federal Reserve Bank Statistical Release on Consumer Credit, September 8, 2006.

position of the labor aristocracy and the labor bureaucracy, who fight for a crumb in the share of superprofits of imperialist capitalism. The labor bureaucrats do their level best in words and deeds to demonstrate to the "democratic" state how reliable and indispensable they are in peace-time and especially in time of war. By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism.

The few examples we have presented in this pamphlet should help to convince the reader that, for the workers and oppressed, such an adaptation – the ritual displays of patriotism, the participation in the bosses' racist and chauvinist campaigns against blacks, immigrants, women, gays, or other scapegoats, the perennial hope in the Democratic party or would-be capitalists like the Greens, is not only a betrayal of our fellow workers: it is a fool's errand, which will only increase the misery and exploitation of all workers.

We ask all workers and militant youth who agree with our perspective to join us and fight for our program within the trade unions, by ruthlessly exposing and fighting to throw out the labor bureaucrats who chain our unions and our class to the capitalist enemy.

1. **For union democracy!** All positions in the locals, the international unions, and the AFL-CIO and Change to Win federations to be chosen by free elections by majority vote of the membership. No union official should be paid more than the average wage of the union members. For the unconditional right to recall union officials at any time, by majority vote. For the unions to be governed by committees of delegates elected, mandated, and recallable by the members at any time.
2. **Break with the bourgeoisie and its parties!** No more union money and union endorsements to capitalist politicians – Democrats, Greens, Republicans, or any other party or candidate that makes peace with the exploiters and oppressors. They don't speak for us! No interference of the state's agencies, courts, or police in union affairs, even under the cover of fighting "corruption": labor will clean its own house! No to the co-opting of unions and union democracy by state agencies and boards, fake "dialogs" with the bosses, employer managed charity organizations, or capitalist "non-profit" foundations.

point to the correct strategy for revolutionaries in the trade unions and the workers' movement as a whole.

With each cycle of boom and bust, peace (for the purpose of re-arming) and imperialist war, economic and political power becomes ever more concentrated in the hands of a few super-rich imperialists, their banks, trusts, and monopolies. As the monopolistic tendency of late capitalism becomes more pronounced, the workers organizations, which previously could make some gains with purely economic strikes by making their bosses vulnerable to the competition from rival capitalists, find themselves up against monopolists who only fear one enemy: the workers. What rival bus or subway line could threaten the Metropolitan Transit Authority when it was paralyzed by the December 2005 strike? When the supermarket workers went on strike in California, the "rival" mega-chains, beholden to the same imperialist banks that financed their debt from the supermarket mergers and acquisitions that created them, clearly saw the union as a bigger threat than the other chains, and banded together to break the strike. The era in which a reformist leadership could secure major gains for the workers has ended. Either the workers have to aim for it all, mobilizing the entire class to decisively and permanently defeat the forces of state repression that the monopoly capitalists array against them, or settle for nothing. This presented an equally stark choice to the reformist leaders of the workers organizations. As Trotsky wrote in *Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay*, a manuscript he was unable to finish before he was killed by a Stalinist assassin,

Monopoly capitalism does not rest on competition and free private initiative but on centralized command. The capitalist cliques at the head of mighty trusts, syndicates, banking consortiums, etcetera, view economic life from the very same heights as does state power; and they require at every step the collaboration of the latter. In their turn the trade unions in the most important branches of industry find themselves deprived of the possibility of profiting by the competition between the different enterprises. They have to confront a centralized capitalist adversary, intimately bound up with state power. Hence flows the need of the trade unions – insofar as they remain on reformist positions, i.e., on positions of adapting themselves to private property – to adapt themselves to the capitalist state and to contend for its cooperation. In the eyes of the bureaucracy of the trade union movement the chief task lies in "freeing" the state from the embrace of capitalism, in weakening its dependence on trusts, in pulling it over to their side. This position is in complete harmony with the social

the economy were organized around providing for actual human needs, instead of generating profits, it would not be vulnerable to crises when workers realize that their wages are not enough to cover their costs of living. But this is not possible under capitalism.

Nor will the capitalists willingly freeze or lower rents and mortgage debt (in effect, increasing wages), because to do so would be to take a loss on their real estate investments, the very same part of their fortunes that they hope will safeguard them through periodic overproduction crises during which they are forced to abandon or sell productive factory and warehouse capacity at a loss. Obviously, something has to break.

And when it breaks, don't expect rents to go down. A major aspect of the systemic crisis in the real estate market is that while rents have gone up (the average rent for urban workers has increased 134% between 1980 and 2005),³ the return on investment for landlords, measured by the inverse of the price-to-rent ratio, has been declining⁴. In other words, the banks are grabbing a bigger share of landlords' profits. So when the landlords feel the pinch of the loss on their investment in the apartment buildings themselves, combined with the shrinking profit margins from their tenants' rents, they will need rents to rise in order to pay their debts and stay profitable. The big banks, using their powerful influence in the legislatures and city halls, can be expected to help the landlords squeeze more out of their tenants in order to protect their own investment in the landlord's mortgage debt. Meanwhile, about 3 million people are homeless in the US every year⁵, and housing reformists estimate that a full-time worker would need a wage of \$15.78 per hour to afford a modest two bedroom apartment.⁶

3 According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index data (CPI-W data set) available at <http://www.bls.gov/>

4 Based on the analysis in the San Francisco Federal Reserve bank's Economic Letter, "House Prices and Fundamental Value", by J. Krainer and C. Wei, October 1, 2004. In the event of a sharp decline in real estate prices, landlords who bought property closer to the peak of the real estate bubble will see a decline in the market price of their property, while their profit of rents collected minus mortgage payments paid to the bank will not improve: it is more likely to worsen in a time of general economic decline, due to the inability of tenants to pay.

5 National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, *Key Data Concerning Homeless Persons in America*, July 2004

6 From the National Low Income Housing Coalition, *Out Of Reach 2005*, the figure is the wage necessary so that no more than 30% of income is spent on the average fair market rate for a two-bedroom apartment. This is the national average, and figures for many cities are even higher.

As with the housing market, which many capitalist economists think could push the economy over the edge into its next collapse, so with every major problem confronting society, the capitalists have no answer but to make the workers and oppressed people pay for the collapse of their speculative adventures with lower wages, union-busting drives, and the massive fraud being committed by the bosses on the retirement pensions of workers in the airline and auto industries.

The Iraqi adventure deepens imperialism's crisis

US imperialism's quagmire in Iraq and Afghanistan looms over the whole political and economic situation. The war is unpopular among the masses of workers and poor people, measured both by opinion polls⁷ and the unwillingness of youth to enlist in the military. Despite the Pentagon's \$4 billion per year recruiting budget and the poor job prospects for high school graduates, the military has had to turn to a de facto draft, indefinitely extending the tours of duty of currently enlisted soldiers with the universally-hated "stop loss" orders.

Democratic critics of the Bush administration's war in Iraq attack Bush from the right. In an August 1 press release⁸, House Democratic party leader Nancy Pelosi said, "Under President Bush ... our Army could not respond to a crisis. ... [T]his failure to maintain military readiness is unacceptable and dangerous." Democratic Senator Jack Reed called for more military spending, saying "The Administration must provide necessary funding to the Army and the Marine Corps to reset and recapitalize their equipment before the readiness of these forces are decisively compromised. And, they must do this without the budgetary gimmicks that they have consistently employed to avoid the hard choices of funding our soldiers and continuing to support our domestic needs."

Neither higher military spending for newer military technology, nor a more intensified recruiting campaign, can overcome the fundamental strategic problem faced by US imperialism in Iraq and Afghanistan: its forces are tired and demoralized, while the resistance fighters enjoy broad popular support that grows with each revelation of imperialism's atrocities.

7 A CNN poll conducted between August 30 and September 2, 2006 found that 58% of adults in the US oppose the war in Iraq.
8 Press Release by Pelosi and Reed: *Democratic Defense Experts Charge Administration With Degrading Army Readiness*, Aug. 1, 2006

We got rid of one bureaucratic obstacle. Now we have to prevent ND from becoming a new entrenched bureaucracy. By placing demands on ND to defend the union and putting forward a strategy of mass action to fight the bosses, I aim to show that the real alternative to bureaucratic betrayals is to build a revolutionary leadership which puts workers' interests before the capitalist system and fights for socialism.⁵²

New Directions had already been tested, and they already failed the test, when they unmistakably demonstrated their union-suing ways. Josephson admits this, ignores it, calls for a "critical" vote for the union-suers, and then this "revolutionary" claims that by "keep[ing] the pressure on" the capitalist ND bureaucrats, and "placing demands" on ND, workers can "prevent ND from becoming a new entrenched bureaucracy". But ND proved they were bureaucrats even before they were elected: the most pathetic kind of bureaucrats, bureaucrats without titles.

What is the union bureaucracy and how do we fight it?

Leon Trotsky, the co-leader with Vladimir Lenin of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, wrote that "In all countries the proletariat is racked by a deep disquiet. The multimillioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines."⁵³ We should not forget that the trade union movement in the United States was born out of mighty workers struggles. There has been no natural degeneration of the capacity of workers in the US for revolutionary struggle, as some cynical middle-class defeatists claim. There is nothing "naturally" conservative about the US working class, especially since it is constantly being refreshed by immigrants, women workers, and youth, and our class has as little to lose and as much to gain as ever from throwing out the bosses. The inevitably deepening crisis of US imperialism, outlined at the beginning of this pamphlet, only makes the objective conditions for workers more urgently favorable to socialist revolution. So why are the workers still bound to their exploiters by the chains of a conservative, racist, and pro-capitalist leadership? Is it simply poor choices on their part? Is it only because not enough of them have been exposed to the correct brand of socialist propaganda? There are deeper material causes to the phenomenon of the union bureaucracy, which

52 Eric B. Josephson, "After Local Elections - Let's Put Our New Leadership to the Test", *Revolutionary Transit Worker* no. 1, January, 2001. See <http://www.lrp-cofi.org/TWU100/RTW/1/test.html>
53 From the *Transitional Program*, 1938.

Socialist Action took advantage of the bureaucrat-engineered defeat for TWU local 100 by tying itself up in another unprincipled, opportunist alliance of union bureaucrats that sought to ride a wave of member anger at the Toussaint leadership, without offering anything better. SA supporter and TWU 100 executive board member Marty Goodman, along with *Socialist Worker*, supported a faction, variously named “Transit Workers for a Just Contract”, the “Vote No Coalition”, and the “Committee for a Better Contract”, which included Bush and Pataki supporter, and Local 100 vice president, Ainsley Stewart, *who voted against the strike in the first place*.⁵⁰ *Socialist Worker* approvingly quotes this labor traitor in a January 27, 2006 article by Hadas Thier.⁵¹ The opportunistic maneuvers of these fake socialists only weaken the struggle to build a militant working-class vanguard in the labor unions.

Throughout the strike, the anti-communist *Proletarian Revolution* and its *Revolutionary Transit Worker* group posed as militant opponents of the sell-out bureaucracy of Toussaint and the other union tops. But *RTW* too gave “critical” support to the union-suing New Directions slate. Eric B. Josephson, the leader of the *RTW* faction, wrote in issue number one of *Revolutionary Transit Worker*:

I voted for ND and urged other TWU members to do so – but not to trust ND for a second. They have long been Division leaders ... but they haven’t consistently tried to mobilize the ranks in any Division. Rather, they call in the anti-worker courts, D.A.’s, and other agents of the capitalists’ government to prosecute the workers’ union. ...

Let’s Put New Directions to the Test

In voting for ND, I solidarized with the ranks’ desire to throw out the old guard and clear the way for further struggles. In no way does this mean any let-up in my hard and consistent opposition to ND’s opportunist leadership. They are now on the hot-seat. They can no longer excuse themselves from working for a militant fightback by blaming the old guard’s obstruction. Transit workers will expect results, and I intend to help keep the pressure on ND. As Track Division Vice-Chair, I will be able to do so more effectively. ...

50 See the February 7, 2006 *Village Voice* article by Tom Robbins, “Toussaint’s Transit Trauma: Union big walked a tightrope between enemies abroad and at home”, available on-line at <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0606,robbins,72099,5.html>

51 “Anger at givebacks in NYC deal: Transit workers reject contract.” See http://www.socialistworker.org/2006-1/573/573_16_NYCTransit.shtml

The Democrats offer no way out of the crisis: their program is *fight imperialism’s wars with more brutality and more troops*

The quagmire of the US occupation is increasingly turning the generals toward the savage tactics of 21st century total war against the civilian population of Iraq and Afghanistan, exemplified by the rape of the Iraqi city of Fallujah by the US generals in 2004. This was a monstrous crime that history will remember along with the bombings of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Tokyo, and Dresden, as incontrovertible proof that the most depraved and menacing terrorist threat facing the people of the world is US imperialism. In the first televised presidential debate of 2004, Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry criticized Bush for hesitating in his initial assault on Fallujah in April, saying “What I want to do is change the dynamics on the ground. And you have to do that by beginning to not back off of the Fallujahs and other places, and send the wrong message to the terrorists. ... You’ve got to show you’re serious in that regard.”⁹

Kerry and the Democrats have repeatedly criticized Bush for not supplying enough troops to occupy Iraq, and for not invading or menacing other countries. The millionaire cable executive Ned Lamont, a darling of the “anti-war” liberals who defeated Bush’s favorite Democrat, Senator Joe Lieberman, to win Connecticut’s Democratic primary, told the readers of the *Wall Street Journal*¹⁰,

“Our national security has ... been weakened, because we stopped fighting a real war on terror when we made the costly and counterproductive decision to go to war in Iraq. ... [T]he bottom line means everything. ... I am a fiscal conservative and our people want their government to be sparing and sensible with their tax dollars. ... We start with the strongest, best-trained military in the world, and we’ll keep it that way. ... [W]e’ll get stronger by changing course. We must work closely with our allies and treat the rest of the world with respect. We must implement the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission¹¹ ...”

9 From the transcript at <http://www.debates.org/pages/trans2004a.html>

10 Ned Lamont: “The Democrats Mean Business: Washington Needs an Entrepreneurial Approach”. *Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2006.

11 The 9/11 Commission report recommended that all people in the US be required to carry a biometric identification card, and called for the prohibition on CIA and military spying on US citizens to be abolished. These and other gestapo-style measures prompted even the ultra-reactionary pundit William Safire to criticize the 9/11 Commission report on the opinion page of the July 26, 2004 *New York Times*. But apparently they’re a-okay with “anti-war” Ned Lamont. We dare not speculate what this fan of

But neither the Democrats nor the Republicans dare to try the remedy that is being whispered by all the military officers, the reinstatement of the draft. Behind platitudes about supporting the “volunteer military” (when there is nothing voluntary about joining the military because there are no good jobs available, and no other way to pay for higher education), the politicians of both capitalist parties fear that the cure offered by conscription would be worse than the disease. They know that if the draft unmasks the completely coercive and unjust nature of this rich man’s war to hundreds of thousands of new working-class conscripts, the level of resistance within the military ranks, which is now confined to a small number of brave individual resisters and has an overall social-patriotic and reformist political character, could grow into a mass movement with more radical goals.

Thus, US imperialism has nowhere to turn but to increase the oppression and exploitation of the working class at home, to make the workers pay to extricate it from its disastrous military adventures abroad and collapsing economic bubble at home. We have already seen how the domestic front of the “war on terror” means a rollback of the elementary rights gained by the workers to pensions, social security, and union contracts. The mounting debt from the permanent war budget is used by both Democrats and Republicans to justify undermining Social Security and Medicare. In 2002, it was then-Homeland Security director Tom Ridge who intervened to break the back of the ILWU West Coast dockworkers, threatening a Taft-Hartley injunction and intervention by federal troops. “Homeland Security” was a convenient pretext for the union-busting bosses at Chicago’s O’Hare airport for the mass firing of latin@ workers in 2002, including Elvira Arellano, who has now become a symbol of resistance to the racist, unjust anti-immigrant laws. It was Iraq-hardened troops who were sent by Bush and Kathleen Blanco, the Democrat Louisiana governor, to “shoot to kill” the stranded survivors of Hurricane Katrina – an ominous lesson for the reformists who refuse to call for the *defeat of US imperialism*, and instead seek to build popular-front coalitions around the demand to “bring the troops home”. *Look what they were brought home to do!*

Both wings of the capitalist party – the Democrats and Republicans – are committed to defending US imperialism and its interests in the Middle East. They both confront the same problems: a fundamental weakness of the domestic economy, based on speculation, debt, and Keynesian government spending, the worldwide popular resistance to their efforts to grab new colonies to offset the crisis (Afghanistan and Iraq) or intensify the exploitation of old colonies (much of Latin America, and the militant labor

government repression and US military might means by “treat[ing] the rest of the world with respect.”

By bringing the city government to its knees with a solid, powerful strike, the TWU members won the battle, but Toussaint and the *New Directions* leadership handed them a defeat. At union rallies, the TWU 100 leadership put cop “union” president Pat Lynch on the platform as a “labor ally”, when he represented the city’s thugs who were enforcing the union busting Taylor law against the strikers and would throw Toussaint himself in jail on April 24, 2006.

Abandoned by the Democratic Party and his fellow union bosses, and under threat from the cops that he posed as his “friends”, Toussaint and the majority of the TWU 100 executive board called off the strike on December 22. The rallying cry of the strike was “no contract, no work,” but the TWU leadership, without consulting the members, sent the workers back to work without a contract, snatching a defeat for the workers from the jaws of victory.

Workers World endorsed Local 100’s leadership’s strike-stopping betrayal. A lying article by Milt Neidenberg began with “The 34,000 members of Transport Workers Union Local 100, led by President Roger Toussaint, decided to suspend their powerful three-day strike today.”⁴⁸ The 34,000 striking members were never allowed to decide, and their rejection of the contract offer that resulted from the cancellation of the strike indicates their widespread discontent with the bum deal that the union tops’ betrayal left them!

Socialist Worker demonstrated its illusions in the union-suing wannabe bureaucrats of New Directions when it drew up another indecisive “critical support” balance sheet on the TWU 100 strike: their editorial writes “many workers are understandably bitter at Toussaint, who ousted the union local’s old guard for its failure to carry out a strike threat in 1999, but who then broke with his allies in the union’s reform movement and squelched opposition. The organization of rank-and-file activists over many years was strong enough to pressure Toussaint into calling a walkout, but not to take the initiative when the struggle was cut short.”⁴⁹

48 From an article posted on the *Workers World* website on December 22, 2005, “Transit workers end strike”. See <http://www.workers.org/2005/us/twu-dec22-update/>

49 “What We Think: Unnecessary concessions mar gains in NYC transit strike: A glimpse of labor’s power”. From page 3 of the January 6, 2006 *Socialist Worker*, available on-line at http://www.socialistworker.org/2006-1/570/570_03_LaborsPowers.shtml

that invited the bosses' government to fight their own union! We revolutionaries say, ***cops and courts, hands off our unions: labor will clean its own house!***

In the Fall of 2005, the New York City Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), the owner of the city's bus and subway services which serves as a lucrative slush fund for the city's real estate and financial barons, demanded that the members of TWU 100 accept a two-tiered contract full of give-backs to the bosses: raising the retirement age to 65, imposing pay deductions for the pension plans, and a deadly work speedup plan of cutting out conductors, making "one person" trains. The white billionaire city fathers were itching for a confrontation. On December 8, governor George Pataki threatened to bring in the national guard to drive the subways and buses, and the *New York Post* blared the threat on its front page the next day. The TWU membership, 34,000 mostly black, Caribbean, and latin@ workers who were already sick of the dictatorial and racist practices of the MTA bosses, refused to take the contract.

Defying New York's union-busting Taylor law, they walked off the job at 3 AM on December 20, 2005, and within hours their strike demonstrated the awesome potential power in the hands of the workers: New York was paralyzed, gridlock snarled Manhattan's streets that were not closed off by the city authorities, and the city government estimated that it lost one billion dollars in sales taxes in three days.

The bosses bared their fangs: On December 20, State Supreme Court judge Theodore Jones found TWU local 100 in contempt, and fined the union one million dollars per day. The capitalist press pulled out all the stops to whip up a racist lynch-mob frenzy against TWU 100 and its black Caribbean president, Roger Toussaint. "Throw Roger from the train!" screamed a front-page editorial in the December 21 *Daily News*, which openly incited to lynch-mob murder of the union's president. "Jail 'Em!", bellowed the front page of the December 22 *New York Post*. But support for the transit workers remained high in this city of immigrants and oppressed workers who knew first-hand the racist, repressive forces that the TWU members were challenging.

TWU International President Michael O'Brien crossed the picket line even before the strike began, warning Local 100 that the international union would not support their strike. And in the Brooklyn courtroom on the morning of December 20, lawyers for the TWU international sided with the state's attorneys against local 100, disavowing any support for the strike.

movement in South Korea, for example). Their differences are that the Republicans basically defend Bush's failed tactics in the Iraq war, using racist and nationalist demagogy, while Democrats use racist and nationalist demagogy to criticize the Bush administration's war plans from the right: primarily Bush's inability to intervene militarily against Iran, North Korea, and other isolated holdouts against the US capitalists' dreams of uncontested world domination.

Except for a scattered offering of socialist candidates, the upcoming congressional elections will not offer the workers and oppressed people in the US a chance to voice the growing opposition to the war in Iraq. On the contrary, despite the efforts of some Democratic candidates to capitalize on anti-war sentiment, we predict that the aftermath of this November's elections will be an intensified and barbaric offensive by imperialism in Iraq, Afghanistan, and possibly against new targets such as Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Sudan, Somalia, Korea, or even China, combined with a fierce round of union-busting, layoffs, and racist terror against blacks, latin@ immigrants, and other oppressed nationalities on the domestic front.

Whichever capitalist party gains control of Congress must first make good on its campaign promises, not to the millions of workers and poor people, but to those who bankrolled their campaigns and put them in office: Wall Street, the banks, and the big industries. Whichever party this is, it will mean imperialist war abroad and war against the workers and oppressed at home. The presidential election of two years ago provides the model. While the election results were inconclusive, and quite possibly stolen from black voters by corrupt and racist Jim Crow politics in Ohio, they gave Bush and the Democrats the mandate to launch the greatest crime of the Iraq war so far: "Operation Phantom Fury", the bipartisan rape of Fallujah in November-December of 2004.

The Communist Party USA published a statement in the *People's Weekly World* on September 2¹², as part of their campaign to "Take Back Congress," which calls on "a mighty united front of every section of the people being hurt, in the first place labor, African American, Latino, women and youth voters" to put the Democrats back in control of Congress in the 2006 elections, in order to "defend democracy". Even the Stalinists of the CPUSA can hardly support the Democrats with a straight face anymore, and have to justify their support for war hawks like Marine Corps officer and senator John Murtha by explaining that "Even Democrats who don't seem so different from their Republican opponents will shift the balance in Congress". But when even the current standard bearer for the imagined "progressive" wing of the Democratic party, Ned Lamont, is criticizing Bush

for not opening new fronts in the “war on terror”, this hardly seems plausible. The same issue of the *PWW* hails the AFL-CIO’s decision to give an unprecedented \$40 million of union members’ dues to the Democratic Party election campaign in 2006.¹³

If the Democrats, taking advantage of the growing popular hatred for Bush and the political support of the union bureaucrats, are able to take back Congress this November, it will be a mandate for them to carry out their program, the program of the bankers, bosses and landlords – as Ned Lamont promised to the *Wall Street Journal*, an “entrepreneurial approach” of cutting the budget (meaning, cutting social programs that benefit workers and poor people), winning the “war on terror” (meaning, more Fallujahs in Iraq and more imperialist war in general), and “economic recovery” (on the backs of the workers, such as the recent announcement by Ford Motor Co. of ten thousand more firings). Whichever party wins Congress this November will have to respond to the unavoidable realities of the capitalist market and the undeniable demands of the party’s capitalist backers for a way out of their crisis. Labor must prepare for this inevitable confrontation: the stakes could not be higher.

Gearing up for the police state

US imperialism, facing disaster in its current military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan and economic stagnation at home, is like a wounded beast: lashing out desperately against even the slightest provocation. To the police state that is still being fortified with more anti-democratic powers five years after the pretext of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, it doesn’t matter if the enemy is a revolutionary movement or the most tame kind of pacifism and reformism, that in the final analysis props up imperialist rule: Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and the shadowy world of “extraordinary rendition” are imperialism’s rehearsal for ruthless repression against all dissent on the domestic front.

The cruel and arbitrary repression that the police state has long practiced against blacks and other oppressed nationalities in the US is beginning to be employed against even the most mild kind of political dissenters. Liberal environmentalists have been the targets of a “Green Scare” that included wiretaps, grand-jury investigations, police infiltrators, and turncoat informants. The foolish acts of a few middle-class environmentalist vandals have been used to bring extraordinary repression down on a harmless reformist movement. The Department of Defense has been monitoring

13 In the front-page article “Labor’s election plan: Turn up the turnout!” by Roberta Wood.

the unions, however, reveals that this position is nothing but empty fake-Marxist posturing.

In the December, 2000 leadership election of New York City’s Transport Workers Union (TWU) local 100, *Socialist Action*, along with most of the reformist left, supported the “New Directions” slate, headed by Roger Toussaint, as a “reform” alternative to the corrupt leadership of local President Willie James. But the New Directions slate, including *SA* supporter Marty Goodman (who now sits on the TWU local 100 Executive Board), showed early on that they might have offered new *faces* for the union bureaucracy, but no new direction. New Directions was motivated by the shameful endorsement of racist police-state Republican Rudy Giuliani for Mayor by the TWU 100 old guard, but it did not offer a socialist alternative, which effectively made ND the Democratic Party slate. ND came to power, not by honestly fighting for a class-struggle alternative to the disgusting corruption of the TWU 100 bureaucracy, but by *dragging their own union into the capitalist courts*, inviting the courts and the cops to do their dirty work for them, to the detriment of the TWU 100 membership. ND sued local 100 in 1994 for \$12 million, and got a court order forcing the union to mail its election leaflet. Leo Schwartz writes in *Socialist Action*:

The [TWU 100 corruption] scandal deepened when an ND supporter, in an April 27 letter to [New York State] District Attorney Robert Morgenthau, requested a financial investigation of the local in light of the Mack findings. The letter led to an ongoing U.S. Department of Labor audit (with a promise not to indict!) and an investigation by the TWU International.

In June, after a Local 100 Executive Board spending review committee was repeatedly stonewalled, ND – using the threat of legal action – obtained copies of union officers’ credit card charges.⁴⁷

This kind of union-busting behavior by so-called “reformers” is to be expected of a faction that is an unprincipled amalgam of ex-socialists, fake-socialists, and plain-old opportunists. But *SA*’s endorsement of the traitorous union-suing tactics of New Directions shows that, far from organizing a fighting vanguard of union militants in TWU local 100 to “take union power into their own hands to fight the bosses until victory,” *SA* took the opportunist shortcut of joining an unprincipled combination

47 From the October, 2000 issue of *Socialist Action*, “TWU Rebels on Verge of N.Y. Union Takeover?”

union bureaucrats, until the bankrupted and exhausted members voted on Sunday, February 29 to end their strike, giving in to nearly all of Safeway's greedy demands.

The defenders of the union bureaucracy had a lot to cover for after this terrible defeat. *Workers World* called the strike a "heroic example for all labor". "Bravo to the 70,000 Southern and Central California grocery workers, a work force that is 60-percent women and almost 50-percent people of color, who endured a strike/lockout for nearly five months," writes *Workers World's* John Parker.⁴⁵ At least he didn't call for an *encore!* The article uncritically reprints UFCW President Doug Dority's hypocritical eulogy to the strike he helped to murder, and hails the "unprecedented unity ... from other unions". If there was so much "unprecedented unity" and "heroism", why was the strike such a disastrous failure? The only unity that the labor misleaders demonstrated was their unity with the bosses.

The defeat of the 2003-2004 grocery workers strike showed that the UFCW grocery workers had no revolutionary organization that was capable taking the strike out of the hands of the union bureaucrats and mobilizing the power of all of organized labor to defeat the greedy schemes of the grocery giants. The possibilities demonstrated by the cut-off of the supply warehouses showed that a stronger strike, and a better outcome, was possible. But the union bureaucrats refused to let it happen. Parker places the blame on on the supermarket bosses and the government, which sent a "mediator" to intervene against the union. If an army is defeated in battle because its generals refuse to arm their troops, is the enemy to blame? Parker's conclusion teaches us nothing, but more importantly from the perspective of the Stalinists at *Workers World*, it lets the labor bureaucrats off the hook.

The ostensibly Trotskyist newspaper, *Socialist Action*, took a more left-wing line on the supermarket defeat, placing the blame squarely on the sell-out union bureaucrats "[UFCW members] were betrayed from day one by a hardened bureaucracy that is skilled at maneuver and deception but still fearful that a resurgent membership might see through their pretense and take union power into their own hands to fight the bosses until victory," wrote SA's Jeff Mackler.⁴⁶ *Socialist Action's* actual practice in

45 March 11, 2004 edition of *Workers World*, "As heroic example for all labor: Grocery workers stood firm in health care fight".

46 From the March, 2004 issue of *Socialist Action*, "Bitter Defeat 4 California Grocery Workers".

Quaker meetings.¹⁴ Members of the Green Party, a failed capitalist party that campaigned for John Kerry in the 2004 presidential elections, find themselves on government "no-fly" lists.¹⁵

The wild overreaction of the government to these minor threats is a symptom of its unstable position. As part of the working class, immigrants, especially the large populations from Latin America, are a much bigger potential threat to bourgeois rule. Latin@ workers are a combative layer of the US working class. Immigrants are especially concentrated in low-wage service sectors of the work force¹⁶ due to racist laws that discriminate against immigrants and non-English speakers. These sectors have an even lower unionization rate than the already low rate for US industry¹⁷, and because of this and other obstacles latin@s have a lower unionization rate than black or white workers.¹⁸ On the other hand, latin@ workers have, on average, the most to gain from union membership: the average weekly wage of a latin@ union member is \$224 per week higher than the average non-union wage, a difference of nearly 50%, while for the working class population as a whole, the union wage increase is only \$179 per week, or 29%.¹⁹ The higher union wages also reflect the fact that despite the highly publicized "Justice for Janitors" campaigns and others like them, unions remain concentrated in higher-skilled and white-collar job classifications, especially government jobs. Nevertheless, it is a commonly held belief among professional union organizers that latin@ workers are more willing to join unions and participate in organizing campaigns, despite the personal risks involved.

Especially when it needs to impose cutbacks on the working class in order to extricate itself from its systemic crisis, US imperialism can little afford to allow the combative spirit of the latin@ workers to spread to broader layers of the working class. This motive, along with the super-profits that can be

14 American Friends Service Committee press release, December 19, 2005, "Quaker Organization Calls for End to Government Spying".

15 David Lindorff, "The No-Fly List". *In These Times*, November 22, 2002.

16 The 2005 Current Population Survey data from the U.S. Census Bureau reports that 22.8% of foreign-born workers in the US are employed in the service sector of the economy, compared to 15.2% for native-born workers.

17 Union members make up 11.6% of workers in service occupations, only 4.3% in food services, 11.1% of building maintenance employees, and just 3.9% of farm workers, compared to 18% for production, transportation, and material moving occupations, according to the 2005 Census Bureau CPS.

18 Of any nationality, black workers are the most unionized, at 15.1% unionized versus 12.2% for whites and 10.4% for latin@s (US Census bureau C.P.S.)

19 Current Population Survey, US Census Bureau

gained from the intense exploitation of immigrants, is what is driving the bipartisan campaign of racist persecution against immigrants. And it is in this area that the anti-democratic tendency of US capitalism in decline toward police-state repression is starkly revealed. From the deployment of armed military patrols to the border, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of immigrants every year who cross in harsh, remote desert areas, to the budgeted construction of 40,000 new prison cells for captured immigrants, to the construction of a fortified wall on the Mexican border, police state repression is already a reality for millions of latin@ workers. The immigration bureau of the Homeland Security bureaucracy alone employs 15,000 agents and staff to spy on immigrants in over 800,000 “alien cases”, and kidnaps and deports over 383 people every day.²⁰ As it runs into the built-in collapse of Keynes’ “long run” prognosis, the government that murdered Chicago Black Panther Party leader Fred Hampton in his sleep on December 4, 1969, will not hesitate to turn this immense repressive apparatus against anyone, “citizen” or not, that it considers a threat.

May Day and the labor movement

The combative spirit of latin@ immigrant workers was boldly demonstrated on May 1, 2006, when they went on a one-day general strike to protest HR 4437, proposed legislation that would have increased state repression against immigrant workers and their families. The strike shut down the country’s major meat-packing companies, California’s central valley agricultural zone and other farming areas, truck transport at the port of Los Angeles, and Goya Foods. Thousands of businesses in the tourism and food service industries were shut down or severely restricted. Small businesses in latin@ neighborhoods of major cities closed for the day, and millions of workers filled the streets of every major city and many towns in the US to protest the racist attacks on immigrants.

This was not the first massive, spontaneous explosion of protest against anti-immigrant racism. In 1994, the Republican governor of California, Pete Wilson, pushed Proposition 187 onto the state ballot, a ballot initiative that sought to mobilize the ultra-right racist vote for Wilson’s re-election campaign by blaming cuts in health care, public education, and other services on immigrants, demanding proof of citizenship to receive public services, and requiring teachers, social workers, and medical workers to report suspected illegal immigrants to the INS. Throughout the fall of 1994, hundreds of thousands of immigrant students and their supporters held massive walk-outs to protest Prop. 187, especially in Los Angeles. Most public school teachers and many other social service workers were strongly

20 ICE Office of Detention and Removal fact sheet, <http://www.ice.gov/pi/news/factsheets/dro050404.htm>

drastic cuts in health care and retirement benefits, and the institution of a two-tiered wage and benefit system, with new hires getting a worse deal than those hired before the new proposed contract. The workers went on strike on October 11, 2003. Albertsons and Ralphs (owned by Kroger) locked out their workers in solidarity with their fellow capitalists. The chains admitted that they shared profits with each other to weather the strike and lock-out.

This defensive labor struggle gained wide support in the multinational working class of southern California and the entire US. The UFCW members were workers in one of the lowest-paid industries in the country, and they were fighting to defend health care and retirement benefits that every worker knew were under attack. Solidarity actions against the huge supermarket chains were organized across the country. But the union bureaucrats of the UFCW, the AFL-CIO (of which the UFCW was then a member), and the other unions stabbed the strike in the back. Faced with their greatest fear, the mobilized power of their own members, they acted to starve the strike and make peace with their corporate masters.

Two weeks into the strike, the UFCW leaders stopped picketing at Ralphs and urged people to shop there, as a show of “good faith” to the company that was locking out the UFCW’s own members and sharing its profits with Safeway.⁴³ The union leadership did everything it could not to endanger the profits of the national grocery chains. It never sought to extend the strike beyond southern California except with isolated and ineffectual “informational” pickets. In another suicidal gesture of “good will”, the UFCW leadership called off pickets at the supermarket warehouses,⁴⁴ ending a successful alliance with Teamster truck drivers, and allowed these strategic choke-points of the supermarket chains to operate, supplying scab goods to the retail stores. Then just before Christmas of 2003, the UFCW leadership took a stab at the striking workers’ morale by cutting strike pay from \$275 per week to just \$100, all while UFCW local and international tops continued to pull in six-figure salaries. The UFCW put millions of dollars of concessions on the table, offering to make the workers pay \$150 to \$200 each per month for health benefits, but the supermarket chains smelled blood and demanded more: Safeway wanted \$1 billion in savings over the three year contract. The strike dragged on, sabotaged from the start by the class-collaborationist

43 See Nicholas Grudin’s article “Union Pulls Ralphs Pickets: Leaders Hoping to Divide Grocers” in the *LA Daily News*, November 1, 2003, pg. N1

44 See Nicholas Grudin’s article “Teamsters Resume Warehouse Delivery” in the *LA Daily News*, October 25, 2003, pg. N1

Charles Bowden entitled “Holding The Line”⁴¹ (against Mexican truckers). The article warns that new “NAFTA Highways” mean that “Mexican truckers will deliver the freight and freely drive all U.S. highways.” It accuses Mexican truckers of drinking and driving, and buying the services of prostitutes, all in a patronizing tone that, while acknowledging that the Mexican truckers are “pawns in a game”, clearly wants no Mexican truckers driving on US roads. And in a union-bureaucrat refrain that should be familiar to our readers by this point, it demands that the capitalist police step up “enforcement” against Mexican drivers: it demands more drug, alcohol, and safety inspections for Mexicans. After decades of the “war on drugs” bringing racist cop terror to black and latin@ ghettos across the US, *Socialist Worker* is setting up a union leadership that calls for *more* “anti-drug” enforcement against Mexicans as a positive example!

This is no way to fight imperialist capitalism. We revolutionaries oppose “free trade” agreements that trample on the rights of workers and poor farmers, because it is the corporate lords of Wall Street, not Mexicans, who are taking away *everyone’s* jobs. The solution is to **organize the unorganized** and **fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants**, neither of which the Teamster leadership will do because of its treacherous accommodation to the national chauvinism of the US capitalist class.

We should not be surprised that the International Socialist Organization’s *Socialist Worker* overlooks this point, because it is the same ISO that backed the union-busting “green” lawyer Ralph Nader for President in 2000 (and again in 2004), even when he aligned himself with the ultra-right racist Patrick Buchanan and offered himself to the Teamster leadership as a more national chauvinist alternative to Al Gore, promising to hoe a tougher line against normalizing trade relations with China.⁴²

The California supermarket battle and the New York transit strike

Aiming to cash in their profits from a round of mergers and consolidation in the supermarket industry, the Albertsons, Safeway, and Kroger chains conspired to break the United Food and Commercial Workers union in southern California in 2003. Safeway, which owned the Vons and Pavillions chains, offered a poisonous contract to the UFCW members:

41 Available on-line at <http://www.teamster.org/resources/members/TeamsterMagazine/06August/nafta.htm>

42 See Stephen Greenhouse’s June 22 article in the *New York Times*, “THE 2000 CAMPAIGN: THE GREEN PARTY; Teamsters, Wooed by Gore, Will Get Together Today With Another Suitor, Nader”

opposed to the proposition – one LA teacher told the an interviewer on National Public Radio, “My job means nothing if there are people in my school who are going to turn kids over to the INS.”. Over one thousand teachers in Los Angeles alone pledged to disobey the law.²¹ Unions, including the California Teachers’ Association and the AFL-CIO of California, declared their opposition to the ballot initiative. But they never mobilized their rank and file members to struggle against the racist law. Instead, they formed a coalition, “Taxpayers Against 187”, along with bourgeois lobbying organizations and the Sheriff of Los Angeles county (we suspect that the LA cops, remembering the lessons of the LA rebellion against racism two years earlier, feared being associated with such a blatantly racist law). Taxpayers Against 187 campaigned on the premise that there were more efficient ways to oppress immigrants: “Sure there’s an immigration problem,” said Joel Maliniak, the organization’s spokesman, “But the answer is to strictly patrol the border and strictly enforce laws about hiring illegals”.²²

The attempt by the labor bureaucrats to position themselves as reliable friends of of the police and the anti-immigrant racists *demobilized* the mass struggle against Prop. 187 and helped the measure to win in the 1994 elections. Instead of taking the side of the workers and oppressed and leading the fight against this racist law, the labor bureaucracy backed the Democratic challenger to Wilson, Kathleen Brown, who opposed 187 because she thought using federal police and military forces against immigrants was a more reliable method than relying on nurses and schoolteachers to rat on their patients and students: “What we really need is for the Federal Government to properly police our border and enforce laws already on the books.”²³ President Clinton answered her call when he launched Operation Gatekeeper in October of 1994, the military occupation of the Southwest border that has caused the deaths of over two thousand immigrants since then.

The strike of May 1, 2006 was an expansion of the militant defensive struggle against Prop. 187 to a nationwide level. Again, the spark was an odious, racist legislative proposal, HR 4437, that would have threatened millions of immigrants, and even “legal” residents who helped immigrants in one way or another, with arrest, imprisonment, and deportation. HR 4437 was an integral part of the bipartisan campaign to whip up a mass national

21 Source: Transcript of *All Things Considered*, Nov. 1, 1994.

22 B Drummond Ayres, Jr., “The 1994 Campaign: In California; A Ballot Proposition Gives Voters the Opportunity to Influence National Immigration Policy”. From the Sept. 25, 1994 *New York Times*.

23 Ibid.

chauvinist hysteria in support of US imperialism's wars following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Again, latin@ workers and youth boldly took to the streets, shutting down major corporations and school districts. And again, the labor bureaucracy stabbed them in the back. Instead of backing the strike, the union leaders ignored it. When it became clear that the strike was going forward despite the massive raids staged by the government on April 20, they rushed in, not to mobilize their members with anti-racist, working class demands, but to neutralize the movement and contain it within limits acceptable to the bosses.

“Comprehensive reform” vs. full citizenship rights: how labor bureaucrats betray the workers

The militant fight-back mood of many latin@ workers presented the union bureaucrats with some thorny rhetorical choices: how to fake solidarity with the workers while pledging their loyalty to the racist, capitalist state? They needed a slogan that meant nothing, that could allow them to pretend to support immigrants rights while still backing the same racist Democratic party, and the answer was “Comprehensive Immigration Reform”. It's hard to find any politician who's against “Comprehensive Immigration Reform”. President Bush, addressing a racist anti-immigrant rally on the Texas-Mexico border, said, “I'm going to talk today about comprehensive immigration reform. ... There's an important debate facing our nation, and the debate is, can we secure this border and, at the same time, honor our history of being a land of immigrants? And the answer is, absolutely, we can do both. And we will do both.”²⁴ When supporters of Elvira Arellano, the Mexican worker and labor activist famous for her courageous resistance to the government's attempts to deport her, asked the Democratic Senator from Illinois, Ricard Durbin, to intervene in her case, he refused, citing the need for “comprehensive immigration reform”.²⁵

The AFL-CIO leadership clarified what it meant by “comprehensive immigration reform” in a March 1, 2006 resolution²⁶ adopted in San Diego. The resolution had nothing to say about ending the racist police-state repression against immigrant workers. Instead, it complained that “the lax enforcement of labor and employment laws has given too many unscrupulous employers the economic incentive to recruit undocumented

24 White House press release, August 3, 2006, “President Bush Discusses Comprehensive Immigration Reform in Texas”.

25 From the senator's “Statement Regarding Elvira Arellano” of August 15, 2006, available on-line at <http://durbin.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=261747>

26 See <http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheafclcio/ecouncil/ec02272006e.cfm>

We revolutionaries do not give one ounce of support to the labor bureaucrats, because they are the representatives of the bosses within the workers' organizations. We will defend them against the bosses' anti-democratic union-busting attacks, which are actually aimed at the rights of the rank and file, while at the same time insisting that only a revolutionary leadership can reverse US labor's losing streak.

The common refrain among the centrists and opportunists, who want to take leftist positions without isolating themselves from the union bureaucracy and the comfortable world of “progressive” non-profits, is that the mighty tide of an upsurge in the workers' struggle will, so to speak, “lift all boats”. In the May 5, 2006 *Socialist Worker*, Lee Sustar measures out varying amounts of praise and criticism for the union tops, and tries to make a positive example of the March 31, 2006 press release⁴⁰ issued by Teamsters President Jim Hoffa, because he criticizes the guest worker program proposed by Bush and the Senate Democrats. “Hoffa's position falls far short of amnesty,” acknowledges Sustar (the ISO doesn't support *full citizenship rights for all immigrants*, only *amnesty*, which leaves the question of equal democratic rights unanswered, and tacitly accepts the racist criminalization of immigrant workers). Damn right it's far short. In fact, Hoffa's superficial opposition to guest worker programs is an accidental result of the Teamster leadership's anti-immigrant national chauvinist politics, and just like his opposition to NAFTA based on national-chauvinist anti-immigrant demagogy, it is poisonous to the working class and the labor movement. Sustar concludes that “[Hoffa's position] does reflect the fact that millions of immigrant workers are on the move. And when it comes to deciding labor's position on immigration issues, that is what will matter most.” *Socialist Worker's* Pollyannish belief is that as long as the workers are “on the move”, things will work out in the end. This is a dangerous misconception. If there is to be a victorious upsurge in the workers struggle, it must consciously aim to sweep out these fakers and betrayers, because the bureaucrats are firmly anchored to the capitalist bedrock.

While today it conceals its chauvinist position against Mexican truck drivers under a gloss of paternalistic concern, the racist position of the Teamster leadership has not fundamentally changed since the time when they, along with the entire AFL-CIO, fought against NAFTA on a basis of racism and chauvinism, claiming it would “steal American [sic] jobs”. The August 2006 issue of the official *Teamster* magazine carries an article by

40 “Teamsters Call for Responsible Immigration Legislation”, available on-line at http://www.teamster.org/06news/nr_060331_1.asp

bureaucracy, despite the many defeats handed to it by the bosses in the past 25 years, is not moving leftward and away from its class-collaborationist politics: every indication shows that it fears the class struggle more than ever. There is a labor party in the US, and even its most fervent boosters among the reformist socialists admit that it is in a sorry state: formed in 1996, the party has not yet run a single candidate in its ten years of comatose existence. Its own rules prevent it from presenting candidates unless an overwhelming level of support is guaranteed before the campaign has even begun. Who ever thought that the point of political campaigning was to gather support!

The Labor Party's extreme timidity at upsetting the apple cart of Democratic Party politics stems from the fact that this party is not a party of the laboring masses and their most militant and radical elements. It is a party of their bureaucratic misleaders, the labor lieutenants of capitalism. As a party of the labor bureaucrats, the Labor Party will not be an instrument of the workers struggle to remove them, and thereby to break the chains binding them to the bosses – in fact, the Labor Party flatly refuses to interfere in “internal” union affairs.³⁹ What the working class urgently needs is something altogether different: a *revolutionary workers party* that fights for a break with the capitalists and their parties. This can not be done without a revolutionary upheaval inside the unions that throws out the dead weight of the union bureaucracy and brings the masses of workers, organized and unorganized, into a class struggle against the bosses and their government. There must be a party to lead this struggle. A party based on the union bureaucracy can't throw out the union bureaucracy, it can't break with the Democrats, and it outright admits it! If only its “socialist” supporters were half as honest.

Centrists won't fight the labor bureaucrats

The majority of self-proclaimed socialist groups have a position on the labor bureaucracy that can be summed up as “critical support” – and when push comes to shove, very light on the criticism and heavy on the support.

the road to its emancipation from capitalism without first breaking from its political subordination to the twin-parties of Capital by forming its own political party.”

39 See “Frequently Asked Questions about the Labor Party”, available on-line at http://www.thelaborparty.org/a_faqs.html: “Does the Labor Party support or endorse candidates or caucuses within local or international unions? No. It is Labor Party policy **NOT** [their emphasis] to interfere in the internal affairs and politics of individual unions.”

workers, and has penalized those employers who abide by the law because it has put them at a competitive disadvantage.”

While the AFL-CIO leaders promote the illusion of the capitalist state as an even-handed mediator between immigrant workers and their bosses, the fact is that enforcement of laws against the hiring of undocumented immigrants means raids, kidnappings, and deportation for the workers. Labor “law enforcement” for the bosses’ government means enforcement of the Taft-Hartley act, a law that violates the 1st amendment protection of free speech and the 13th amendment prohibition of involuntary servitude, by banning strikes. When the government threatened to send federal troops to break the ILWU Pacific coast longshore workers’ union in 2002, that was their kind of “enforcement”.

The resolution asks the imperialist government to be kinder to its subjects in the colonized world, concluding with “Reform of immigration laws must consider the root causes of migration, and must take into account the global economic policies, as well as U.S. foreign policy that are pushing workers to migrate. Without rising living standards abroad for workers and the poor, the pressure for illegal immigration will continue. U.S. foreign policy, as well as trade and globalization policies, must be grounded upon a coherent national economic strategy, as described in An Economic Agenda for Working Families, adopted at the AFL-CIO’s 2005 Convention.” This ridiculously utopian document²⁷ hopes that the United States and the other imperialist powers will “replace ‘free trade’ agreements with fair trade agreements that protect fundamental workers’ rights.”

The March 1 resolution reveals that “comprehensive immigration reform” has nothing to do with full citizenship rights for all immigrants: despite calling the land of slavery, Jim Crow, death row, and the Minutemen a “nation of citizens”, *the AFL-CIO does not propose citizenship rights for anyone*: it limits its demand to “[r]eforms [that] must provide a path to permanent residency for the currently undocumented workers who have paid taxes and made positive contributions to their communities.” In other words, the racist status quo! And who, may we ask, is to determine which immigrants have paid enough taxes and made sufficient “positive contributions to their communities” in order to get on this “path”?

27 See http://www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheaficio/convention/2005/upload/res_5.pdf

Yet this patriotic moralizing is the constant refrain of the labor bureaucrats. AFSCME president Gerald W. McEntee issued a statement on April 10²⁸ supporting “comprehensive immigration reform” which said, “AFSCME calls on Congress to pass legislation that will allow hard-working immigrants to earn their citizenship.” Terrence M. O’Sullivan, general president of the Laborers’ Union, told the National Press Club on January 19, 2006, that “comprehensive” reform was “essential for business and commerce”, and bowed before his police-state masters to endorse the deadly militarization of the border, saying “To be sure our borders must be secure. ... It is not honest or fair to simply ignore the 11 million undocumented workers who are already here.” That is, a “path to citizenship” for workers that are here today, but tough luck for immigrants facing racist “border security” tomorrow.

The March 1 resolution claims to oppose the “guest worker” provisions, but the very same resolution proposes that the bosses be allowed to determine immigration laws and quotas to suit their own needs: “We recognize that our economy may face real labor shortages in the coming years ... [W]e should focus on a meaningful solution that guarantees full workplace rights for all workers, both foreign-born and native, and also permits employers to hire foreign workers to fill proven labor shortages.” The same paragraph that promotes the empty promises of “our democracy” for immigrants shows that the AFL-CIO leadership believes that the bosses should decide who should be allowed to immigrate to the US – in other words, only as the invited “guests” of their exploiters.

The position of Change To Win, a federation that broke away from the AFL-CIO in the summer of 2005, is even worse, if only because Change to Win explicitly supported the alternative to HR 4437 that was backed by Bush and the Democratic Party, the Hagel-Martinez bill, S. 2611. Change To Win chairwoman Anna Burger praised the reactionary police-state measures in Hagel-Martinez, saying “The ... bill will improve our national security by strengthening our borders with more personnel and more advanced technology to prevent illegal immigration.” Advising the government on how best to enforce its racist laws, she says, “We should not squander our enforcement resources arresting and detaining dishwashers, janitors, farmworkers, and nursing home or construction workers.”²⁹

28 See <http://www.afscme.org/press/493.cfm>

29 Change To Win press release of March 29, 2006, “Statement of Change to Win Chair Anna Burger on the Immigration Reform Bill Approved by the

across party lines for comprehensive immigration reform”.³⁶ Just what does “comprehensive immigration reform” mean to Pederson?

Compel the federal government to pay the \$217 million owed Arizona for incarcerating foreign nationals and expand the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) program, which provides grants to border states that bear the brunt of Washington’s failed policies. ... Improve coordination and intelligence-sharing between federal enforcement efforts and state and local law enforcement. ...

Recruit, hire, and train at least 12,000 new, highly-qualified Border Patrol agents over the next five years. ... Expand the capacity for detention facilities for foreign nationals. ...

Undocumented workers would be eligible to participate [in a guest-worker program] if they pay a fine, undergo a criminal and security background check, and pay back taxes. ... After six years, guest workers would be eligible to apply for permanent residency, provided they pay a fine [another fine?!], learn English, and successfully complete a series of U.S. civics courses. After five additional years, they would be eligible to apply for citizenship.³⁷

For a revolutionary workers party

The workers movement has no hope of advancing when it is tied to the Democrats, a capitalist party that represents interests completely alien to the multinational working class. The union bureaucracy is the chain that binds the working class to the Democrats and thus to their enemies, the bosses: not only because union members and other workers might trust the union presidents to be looking out for their interests, but primarily because the conservative union bureaucracy prevents the unions, and the millions of organized workers they represent, from forming the base of a mass workers party.

The reformists, such as *Socialist Appeal* and *Socialist Organizer*, call for a *labor party*³⁸, because they choose to ignore the fact that the US labor

36 “Securing Our Border and Getting Results: A Proposal to Reform US Immigration Policy” by Jim Pederson, April 20, 2006. Available at <http://www.pederson2006.com/>

37 Ibid.

38 The program of *Socialist Appeal* calls “For a mass party of labor based on the unions to power with class-independent and socialist policies”. *Socialist Organizer* says “The reason revolutionary socialists support the formation of a Labor Party in the U.S. is that the working-class cannot move forward on

The third step is that on an annual basis, each individual who applies for an orange card would submit to DHS documentation either electronically or by mail that shows what they have been doing in that year, the work they have carried out, that they have, in fact, paid their taxes that year, and whether they have been convicted of any crime during that year, ... and they would pay a \$50 processing fee. These three steps, plus the required wait at the back of the green card line, clearly indicates that this is not an amnesty program.

The legalization in the orange card must be earned, and it must be earned over a substantial period of time. It would be available to all who are here from January of this year.

... assuming there are between 10 and 20 million undocumented aliens already in the United States who would have to pay a \$2,000 fine, if 10 million came forward, that alone would raise \$20 billion.

...

[T]his amendment will ensure that individuals who apply to this program remain productive and hard-working members of their communities. The amendment requires that individuals must work for at least 6 years before they may adjust their status. Realistically, from what we know about the number of green card petitioners legally waiting in other countries for their green card, it is much more likely that they would have to wait a longer time before the process is completed. Again, this is not amnesty. ...³⁵

In New Mexico, the AFL-CIO endorses Democrat Governor Bill Richardson, infamous for his support in 1999 of the racist persecution campaign against Chinese-American scientist Wen Ho Lee, and for his declaration of a “state of emergency” on the Mexican border in August of 2005 in order to fund more troop deployments to the border. The AFL-CIO and the UFCW also endorse Janet Napolitano, the Democratic governor of the neighboring state of Arizona, who joined Richardson’s racist border provocation.

Also in Arizona, Jim Pederson, the Democratic challenger (endorsed by the AFL-CIO) to Republican Senator Jon Kyl, says he will “will work

35 “Senator Feinstein Urges Support For New Orange Card Immigration Plan”, see <http://feinstein.senate.gov/06releases/r-orange-card0522.htm>

When President Bush gave his 2006 State of the Union speech to Congress, calling for “stronger immigration enforcement and border protection [and] a rational, humane guest worker program that rejects amnesty,”³⁰ Burger thanked him, saying, “The President ... addressed the issue of immigration reform. And we welcome an approach that combines border security with a respect for immigrant workers. ... America needs comprehensive immigration reform that creates order, takes control of our borders, sets out a path to legalizations and citizenship and raises standards for all workers.”³¹ How can the government combine deadly armed patrols hunting down immigrant workers in the desert with “respect for immigrants”? It’s simple, when, to the capitalist government and its lackeys in the union bureaucracy, “respect” is just another empty phrase in hypocrisy’s cynical vocabulary.

Their words and their deeds

The May Day strike jolted the political situation in the US with a powerful shock. It sealed the defeat of the ultra-racist Sensenbrenner bill, HR 4437. But it takes more than a one-day general strike to stop the imperialists’ racist war against the workers in the US. This requires an organization that can unite the workers of all nationalities around a program of demands that links the struggle for the most elementary measures of justice and dignity to the struggle against the capitalist state of oppressors and exploiters. As we have shown, far from mobilizing broader layers of the working class for their common interests in solidarity with immigrant workers, the labor mis-leaders rush to sell themselves, and the workers they treacherously misrepresent, as reliable partners of the US capitalists. The most important part of the labor bureaucrats’ class-collaborationist platform is their support for the Democratic party. Their first and last motivation is to turn every episode of working class struggle away from an independent direction and toward the next Democratic party election campaign. And so it was with the immigrants rights movement of 2006.

The Service Employees union and UNITE-HERE (the hotel, restaurant, laundry, and textile workers’ union), both members of the Change to Win federation, have joined with a gaggle of reformist lobbying groups to form the red-white-and-blue “We Are America Alliance,” to promote – you

Senate Judiciary Committee”

30 From the transcript at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/>

31 From the February 1 statement available at <http://www.changetowin.org/for-the-media/op-eds-articles-and-speeches/statement-of-anna-burger-on-the-presidents-state-of-the-union-speech.html>

guessed it – “comprehensive immigration reform”. The WAAA produced thousands of placards for immigrants rights rallies on Labor Day proclaiming, “Today we march, tomorrow we vote”. The WAAA’s “Democracy Summer” campaign promises to bring one million new immigrant voters to the polls in November. “The message in Spanish to Congress that ‘today we march, tomorrow we vote’ was as American as balloons popping at a political convention. For organizers of those nationwide demonstrations over changes to immigration law, *mañana* dawns with the Nov. 7 elections. Whatever action Congress may take, activists are pledging to mobilize 1 million new voters from newcomers to the USA,” says the USA TODAY in an article featured on WAAA’s website.³²

Who can immigrants, that is, those who are not denied their voting rights, vote for? The AFL-CIO and the SEIU have endorsed Lt. Colonel Charlie Brown, a Democrat, for California’s fourth Congressional district, whose campaign says

Charlie believes that in order to adequately address the illegal immigration problem, we must first secure America’s borders with more agents and greater deployment of security technology. Charlie also believes that addressing the root cause illegal immigration begins with enforcement of employers who knowingly hire illegal labor and encourage lawbreakers. Finally, Charlie opposes amnesty, and believes that illegal immigrants who are already here must be fined, punished, and put at the back of the line.³³

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi from California, endorsed by the AFL-CIO and the SEIU, attacks Bush from the right:

The record is clear: for more than five years, the President has failed to secure our borders and to enforce our immigration laws. Republicans in Congress have abetted that failure by repeatedly underfunding the border patrol, refusing to hold the President accountable, and fighting among themselves to destroy real immigration reform.

Seven times over the last four and a half years, House Republicans rejected Democratic amendments to increase resources. Had the Republicans not rejected all these amendments, there would be

- 32 Martin Kasindorf, “Immigrant groups’ aim: Turn marchers to voters”. From the August 14, 2006 USA TODAY.
- 33 “The Values of a Leader” from the Charlie Brown campaign website, <http://www.charliebrownforcongress.org/wp/?cat=4>

6,600 more Border Patrol agents, 14,000 more detention beds, and 2,700 more immigration enforcement agents than there are now.³⁴

Senator Dianne Feinstein, a Democrat endorsed by the AFL-CIO and the SEIU, calls for the “orange card”, a torturous new system of spying on immigrant workers. We’ll let her explain this new system, but it has a familiar Democratic Party refrain: “get to the back of the line.”

[A]ll undocumented aliens who are in the United States as of January 1, 2006, would immediately register a preliminary application with the Department of Homeland Security. At the time of the registration, they would also submit fingerprints at the U.S. Customs and Immigration Service’s facility so that criminal and national security background checks could commence immediately. ... It would also create a more precise registration system that would allow the immediate inflow of information into the Department of Homeland Security to be processed electronically ... This would be the first step.

Under the second step, petitioners would submit a full application for an orange card in person by providing the necessary documents to demonstrate their work history and their presence in the United States. Their application would also require that they pass a criminal and national security background check that would be carried out based on the information and fingerprints from the preapplication; they demonstrate an understanding of English and U.S. history and Government, as required when someone applies for their citizenship; they have paid their back taxes; and they would pay a \$2,000 fine. ...

If the application is approved, each individual would be issued what I call an orange card. I selected orange because the color had no connotation I could think of. This card would be encrypted with a machine-readable electronic identification strip that is unique to that individual. The card itself would contain biometric identifiers, anti-counterfeiting security features, and an assigned number that would place that individual at the end of the current line to apply for a green card. ... It would become their fraud-proof identifier, complete with a photo and fingerprints. ...

- 34 From the August 2, 2006 press release: “GAO Testimony Confirms Republicans Failed to Protect the American People”. Available on-line at <http://www.democraticleader.house.gov/press/releases.cfm?pressReleaseID=1730>