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Midterm Election Circus: Workers Have No Side To Choose

Less than two years after the historic election which brought the first African-American to the White House—ending 8 years under the George W. Bush regime—the Obama administration finds itself in deep political trouble. The electoral circus is in full swing in preparation for the 2010 Congressional elections; which political analysts and pollsters tell us will almost certainly bring the Republican Party back to power in at least one, if not both, chambers of Congress. Media commentators are astounded that just two short years after the economic collapse that threatened to submerge the entire economy, the American people are about to vote in droves for the Party whose “market fundamentalist” policies while they were in power made the collapse inevitable. The anti-Democrat and anti-Obama energy in the electorate is said to be so overwhelming that the President might not survive his reelection campaign in 2012.

What does the current electoral buzz mean for the working class? Have American voters completely lost their mind, as parts of the media seem to conclude from

the Republican and Tea Party’s upsurge? What is the overall political strategy of the bourgeoisie heading into these elections and beyond to 2012? Do the Obama administration’s troubles reflect a growing disquiet within the bourgeoisie about his ability to carry out the tasks it sees necessary to overcome the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression or are they a reflection of the growing inability of the U.S. bourgeoisie to manage its political apparatus in the context of social decomposition?

Working Class Must Reject the Electoral Circus

First, as revolutionaries, we must point out that the working class has no stake in the outcome of this election in terms of which party prevails. As workers, we have no dog in this fight; all factions of the bourgeoisie in this era of capitalist decadence are equally reactionary. Whatever the party, or faction thereof, that finds itself in power will inevitably be forced to adapt its policies to fit the needs of the national capital to impose austerity on the working

class and manage the ship of state. This of course does not mean that all parties can accomplish these tasks with the same effectiveness. Therefore, we must insist that workers resist the siren calls of the various bourgeois parties and their media mouthpieces to take sides in this or any other election. Clearly, the working class must reject the calls of the bourgeois right in this election. It is easy for us to denounce the Tea Party—now almost indistinguishable from the right-wing of the Republican Party—who champion a strange cacophony of free-market libertarianism, anti-immigrant nativism, anti-corporate populism, racist demagoguery and odd conspiracy theories about a “socialist” *qua* “communist” *qua* Islamo-fascist plot centered in Obama’s White House to sell the country out to Al Qaeda.

However, as much as we must reject the right’s blatantly anti-working class program; workers must also not fall for the propaganda of the bourgeois left, which seeks to use the nasty extremism emanating from an increasingly belligerent and paranoid right-wing to scare us into

a defensive strategy of protecting the state against the anti-solidarity rhetoric of the right. We must condemn all factions of the bourgeoisie regardless of their ideological stripe and political rhetoric. It is true that the Republican Party and their Tea Party allies are currently pushing a particularly nasty tone and without a doubt the politicians on the right increasingly actually believe the rhetoric they spew, but this must not blind the working class into taking up the calls of the Democrats to defend the bourgeois state. Once we fall into this trap, we find ourselves on the enemy class terrain and are quite simply lost.

Political Strategy of the Bourgeoisie

Internationalism has developed an analysis of the increasing political difficulties of the U.S. bourgeoisie going back to at least the disputed Presidential Election of 2000, which saw the consensus candidate of the bourgeoisie lose the election in the antiquated Electoral College, ushering in eight difficult years of the Bush Presidency in which the United States’ imperialist prestige on the international level was compromised and the domestic economy was literally run into the ground. The U.S. bourgeoisie was finally able to manipulate its electoral apparatus effectively in 2008, with the election of Barack Obama to the Presidency. The election campaign of 2008 helped the bourgeoisie revitalize its electoral illusion and bring into power a ruling team more capable of enacting the policies it needs to address the deepening economic crisis and strengthen its imperialist image on the international stage. Through a massive electoral campaign centered on elect-

U.S. Workers Return to the Class Struggle

Throughout the United States in recent months there have been a number of important strikes. The working class’ refusal to accept austerity is expressing itself in its increasing willingness to struggle. While these struggles have remained largely within the control of the unions and have mostly ended in defeat, revolutionaries should salute these signs of increasing combativity in the class and follow them closely. With public debt crisis and struggles against austerity in Europe, major struggles in India, South Africa, and Latin America, and China, the recent strikes in the U.S. are part of an international dynamic of the working class’ recovery of solidarity and self-confidence in the world working class beginning around 2003. This dynamic was interrupted by the worldwide financial crisis in 2008 (despite impressive struggles in Greece, Britain, and other countries), but since the beginning of the year, the working class has been returning to the path of class struggle, and shown that it will no longer accept austerity without a fight.

Since late spring, workers have gone on

strike in Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Illinois, Washington State, New York State, and nationally in the aeronautics industry, and as we go to press an unofficial illegal dockworkers strike movement is spreading throughout the East Coast port cities. Significantly, these struggles have taken up many of the central issues of the pre-2008 strikes: health care, benefits, pensions, layoffs, and the general perspective of the future that capitalism has to offer. In 2003, for instance, the grocery workers strike movement in Southern California was concerned primarily with the creation of new tiers of health and pension benefits for new hires, and in 2005 the NYC transit strike over the future of a pension plan for new hires expressed major step forward in the development of inter-generational solidarity in the working class over these same questions.

With the onset of the crisis, workers were at first somewhat paralyzed, like deer in the headlights, with the very real threat of unemployment and plant closure. The decision to go on strike and confront the bosses

was not taken lightly -- no one can afford to be laid off in a country with over 10% official unemployment and over 16% real unemployment¹ -- most workers retreated from the class struggle, sometimes expressing hopes that the next generation could recover lost ground when the time for struggle was better.

Another factor delaying the working class’ response to the attacks associated with the recent financial crisis was undoubtedly the democratic mystification and tremendous hope people had in the newly elected Obama administration to deliver on its promise of “change.” On election night there were parties in the street with elated voters banging pots and pans in celebration. Instead, what we have seen from almost two years of the

1.- See International no. 154, “Against Mass Unemployment The United Struggle Of The Whole Working Class,”

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U.S. Workers Return to The Class Struggle

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Obama presidency is no real drop in unemployment, a real economy that continues to stagnate despite massive injections of credit from the State, health care “reform” that is already beginning to raise workers’ health care premiums, and the return of dramatic increases in the cost of living while employers continue to take advantage of the crisis to attack wages, pensions, benefits, and staffing levels across the board. By and large, the unions had put their hopes in the new Obama regime, hoping for the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act (now dead in the water), selling the health care reform and promising all kinds of other reforms for workers from the new administration. Today workers’ discontent is no longer able to be channeled entirely toward the governmental reforms and the electoral circus—workers are more and more ready to struggle to defend their future.

The first signs of struggle on a massive scale were in the education sector in California this spring. When in the face of the state’s bankruptcy, tuition fees were raised 30% and staff faced serious attacks on their living and working conditions, students occupied universities, blocked roadways and attempts were made at creating assemblies and drawing teachers and staff and other parts of the California working class out in support².

But this was only the beginning. Shortly afterward nurses in Philadelphia struck against employer provocations of removing tuition benefits and instituting a “gag clause” against criticizing their hospital’s administration, drawing significant sympathy from other workers throughout the region. In early June, 12,000 nurses from 6 hospitals in Minneapolis-St. Paul engaged in a one-day work stoppage and voted to authorize an open-ended strike that would have been the largest nurses’ strike in U.S. history. Here nurses were fighting primarily for the restoration of staffing levels and for specific nurse-to-patient ratios to be written into their contract, whereas the hospitals were seeking to institutionalize the low staffing levels they’d had since the onset of the 2008 recession. After the strike authorization, just as the contract was set to expire, the nurses’ union (Minnesota Nurses Association) agreed to non-binding federal arbitration and a 10-day “cooling off period,” during which they announced more than a week in advance their plan for a one-day strike on June 10. Despite the real militancy of the nurses and their willingness to defend their working conditions, the union was given a free hand to conduct the struggle, and immediately after this one-day strike they announced a tentative agreement that dropped the central demand of mandatory nurse-to-patient ratios, took the hospitals’ pay offer, and made no changes to health and benefit plans. Leftists and unionists throughout the country continue to hail this is a major class victory, but the nurses’ own Facebook page revealed a real dissatisfaction at the abandonment of the central demand in exchange for no real gains.³

One month later, more than 15,000 construction workers in two different unions struck in the Chicago area for much needed wage increases to cover health care costs and make up for rampant unemployment

2.- See Internationalism 154 and 155, “Students in California Fight Back Austerity Attacks,” and “Lessons of the California Students Movement,”

3.- Lerner, Maura. “Deal Was ‘a Win for Both Sides.’” *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*. 2 July, 2010.

and decreased hours in one of the industries hit hardest by the recession. In the month of July alone, the Illinois construction industry lost 14,900 jobs.⁴ A statement from International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150 President-Business Manager James Sweeney during the strike reported that hours for their members have been reduced by 40%, and that out of 8500 members, 1000 depend on food banks and 1200 have lost their health care benefits.⁵ After 19 days, workers ended the strike accepting the lowest pay increase in 10 years and no attempts at offsetting rising health care costs or dealing with unemployment and decreased hours. Still, despite the stranglehold of the unions, many workers in other trades honored picket lines and refused to work on struck projects in solidarity. Interestingly, the Illinois Department of Transportation informed the building contractor’s association threatening to refuse deadline extensions for state projects and indicating that it may invoke no-strike requirements against future struggles. Also in Chicago in early September, Hyatt hotel workers staged a one-day strike (just as the nurses’ union had) in protest at layoffs and demanded concessions in their upcoming contract.

The summer also saw 700 workers in Delaware striking for the first time against Delmarva Power and Conectiv Energy against cuts in pension benefits and the elimination of retiree health for new hires, returning to work with a split contract vote and repeated calls for a recount. Teachers struck in Danville, IL, for the rehiring of those laid off in recent emergency budget cutbacks and against a contract including a pay-freeze and the institution of bonuses based on student-performance, and in Bellevue, WA, for wages and against standardized curricula.

4.- Knowles, Francine. “State Loses Jobs but Gains in Manufacturing.” *The Chicago Sun-Times*. 20 August 2010.

5.- Quoted on the Chicago Union News blog

Also in Bellevue, Coca-Cola workers staged a week-long strike over a new contract requiring them to pay 25% of all health-care premiums as opposed to their previous flat rate, but returned to work after the company cancelled their health insurance and the union filed a class-action lawsuit, insisting it was better to go back to work. Bellevue is also home to one of the Boeing plants on strike this summer (plants in St. Louis, MO, and Long Beach, CA also struck) where workers returned to work after 57 days with no changes to the company’s proposed contract except \$1/hr increases for some of the lowest paid.

The longest strike this summer (and the one receiving perhaps the most sympathy from the rest of the class) was at a Mott’s Applesauce plant in Williamson, NY, where the company determined that even though they’d been making record profits, the wage they paid to their 300 employees was out of line with industry standards and demanded \$1.50/hr wage cuts in the new contract. The strike drew national attention as a particularly savage and unnecessary attack by the company and after an isolating, demoralizing 16 week attrition battle, the union “won” a contract that left wage and pension levels for existing employees alone, but eliminated defined pensions for all new hires, cuts matching payments to retirement health plans, and requires workers to pay 20% of health care premiums and half of any increases above the first 10%. Despite the union’s cry of “victory,” even dyed-in-the-wool unionists have asked whether the strike was really a success.⁶

Most recently, in the final days of September, longshoremen in Camden, NJ, and Philadelphia engaged in an unofficial two-day strike against Del Monte who had moved 200 jobs to a non-union port in Gloucester,

6.- See Elk, Mike. “Was the Mott’s ‘Victory’ Really a Victory?” *Huffington Post*. 14 September 2010.

NJ which was joined by dockworkers all the way up New Jersey into Brooklyn refusing to cross the informal picket line. Right at the start of the strike, the New York Shipping Association got an injunction from a federal judge in Newark declaring the strike illegal and on the second day of the action, the International Longshoremen’s Association disavowed any association with the strikers, calling on union stewards to send the pickets back to work, and promising that they had convinced shipping associations and industry heads to meet with them a week later to “discuss” the eliminated positions.

While all of these strike movements have remained either mostly or completely within the union straitjacket, and as such, have been defeated (usually with the declaration of “victory” by the union), the return of the class to the path of struggle is helping the class regain the necessary confidence and relearn the lessons of past struggles. This will throw the role of the unions into stark relief. As the ‘victories’ they are able to win with pre-announced one-day strikes, isolated battles of attrition, federal arbitration, class-action lawsuits, and the rest of the union rulebook are shown to be defeats, the working class through its struggles will have to re-learn the lessons of self-organization and extension that the ruling class has tried so hard to make it forget. These struggles are an expression of the same international movement of the working class that has brought strikes in Britain, Spain, Turkey, and Greece in the face of state austerity measures, a nation-wide strike in India, wildcat strikes in auto plants in China, and important strike movements in Latin America. The return to struggle and recovery of solidarity, the preoccupation with the future and the willingness to strike to defend it are an expression of the international working class’ return to its historic struggle and should be hailed as such by revolutionaries everywhere.

JJ, 10/10/10.

Imperialism Hooked on Drugs

Recent newspaper articles, Simon Jenkins in *The Guardian*, September 10 for example, have expressed some hand-wringing within the bourgeoisie recently over the question of drugs: the obvious failure of the “war on drugs”, whether to legalize this or that drug, whether to decriminalize and so on. It’s all hot air. Drugs and the drugs business are integral aspects of capitalism and, further, integral aspects of militarism, imperialism and capitalist decomposition. Jenkins points to the 28,000 people in Mexico killed in the last four years as a direct result of the drugs trade. He also gives an estimate of half-a-million people directly employed in the Mexican drugs trade - other estimates go up to a million¹. In Mexico the drugs industry is one of the few expanding businesses in an increasingly poverty-stricken country and President, Felipe Calderon, has admitted defeat in his four year “war on drugs”. Drugs, legal or illegal, are not a Latin American problem but a facet of imperialism world-wide.

Drugs and imperialism in Afghanistan

For some years now, the poppy, as a sym-

1.- John Ross, *El Monstruo - Dread and Redemption in Mexico City*.

bol of the carnage wrought by war, has had an added piquancy. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime has detailed Afghan poppy cultivation as increasing from 64% of the world’s heroin production seven years ago to just over 92% today. It also estimated the number of Afghans involved in the whole production and distribution process as between 1.7 to 2.3 million. Over the same period the farm-gate price of dry opium at harvest time has fallen by 69%. The British military occupation of Helmand province has overlooked the largest expansion of the cultivation of poppy production now extending to over 70,000 hectares. In the context of imperialism, the “war on drugs” is just as fraudulent as the “war on terror”. In both cases capitalism is driven to use the decay of its system in order to prop up the self-same system.

When opium production in Afghanistan began to take off in the early 90s, rivaling Colombia and Burma in the heroin trade, the CIA funded and supported the Afghan drugs lord, Ahmed Shah Massoud. MI6 also armed and funded him and British intelligence taught his immediate entourage English²; prior to that the Russian KGB

was involved with him as was French intelligence. Since the west’s direct intervention in Afghanistan from late 2001, Afghan poppy production has increased 33-fold. Before 1979, very little opium came from Afghanistan to the west but then the CIA in its anti-Russian campaign trucked arms to Karachi one way from whence they returned laden with heroin (*The Road to 9.11*, UCP, 2007).

The role of imperialism’s secret services in the drug business has been detailed since World War II: Vietnam, where the CIA’s “Air America” flew drugs between Laos and Hong Kong; the cocaine trade in Haiti in the 80s; the Iran-Contra “guns in, drugs out” policy of the CIA and, more recently, the CIA’s rendition “torture taxis” being used to pick up and transport drugs through Gatwick and other European airports (*The Independent*, 17.1.10) with, one would think, the complicity of those states or at least a blind eye being turned. The CIA and the Pakistani secret service through the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, also used by British intelligence and Mossad, was a major factor in financing from opium profits the US, Pakistani, Saudi, British ji-

2.- Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars*.

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ing the first African-American President the U.S. bourgeoisie was able to instill a profound energy in the electorate (particularly the younger generations) to make sure Obama defeated the decrepit McCain-Palin ticket.

The bourgeoisie's accomplishment in pulling off the electoral circus of 2008 was made all the more important given that it was taking place in the midst of the near total collapse of the U.S. economy, as the bursting of the real estate bubble sent shockwaves through the financial system and led to a massive increase in unemployment. Nevertheless, despite the panache surrounding Obama's "historic" Presidency, in the two years since his election, the U.S. bourgeoisie has proven unable to contain the centrifugal forces of decomposition that have been tearing at the fiber of its political system for at least the last decade.

Almost as soon as Obama was inaugurated, the forces of the right organized themselves in the Tea Party to challenge the President and indeed all of what they call "establishment Washington."¹ Forced to pander to the vicious rhetoric emanating from the Tea Party in order to improve their own electoral prospects, many members of the Republican Party have taken up increasingly odd and ideologically driven behavior, with Congressional Republicans doing their utmost to obstruct the Obama administration from enacting its domestic agenda. Over the last two years, the U.S. bourgeoisie has been forced to deal with a situation, where significant factions of the national political class have actively obstructed the President in his attempts to stimulate the economy, rationalize the nation's bloated and inefficient health care system, streamline the nation's cumbersome and ultimately unproductive immigration laws and restore some level of effective government oversight of Wall Street.

Nevertheless, the Republican Party's obstructionism at the national level has not occurred in isolation from the political mood of U.S. society as a whole. The bank bailouts that marked the final months of the Bush Administration and

1.- See our article in Internationalism #154, "The Tea Party: Capitalist Ideology in Decomposition."

were continued by Obama have proven deeply unpopular in the electorate as a whole, as people see their tax dollars spent to bail-out rich bankers, while they lose their jobs. Moreover, with official unemployment running at over a sky high 9.6 percent for almost two years, anger has seized the working class. For the moment, the Republican Party and its Tea Party allies have been successful in mobilizing much of this anger behind a populist revolt against Washington and the supposedly illegitimate Obama administration.

With all the political chaos at the national level, can we detect an overarching bourgeois strategy in the 2010 Mid-term election that we can project forward to the Presidential Election in 2012? This is difficult to say. There appears to be a general consensus within the bourgeoisie that Obama is effectively prosecuting the nation's imperialist interest on the international level by: quietly drawing down military involvement in Iraq without compromising the U.S. imperialist position there; taking efforts once again to enforce American will in the Israel/Palestine conflict; negotiating an arms treaty with Russia; increasing military resources available in Afghanistan and generally repairing the U.S. imperialist image abroad. On the level of imperialist strategy—although Afghanistan remains an area of concern—the bourgeoisie appears to be quite happy with the Obama administration, evidenced by the uncontroversial sacking of the commanding general in Afghanistan, Stanley McChrystal.

However, on the domestic level, the U.S. bourgeoisie is currently ripped by deep divisions regarding how to respond to the persistent economic crisis that threatens to strain the social and political fabric in the country to the point of breakdown. The Obama administration has been unable to reduce the unemployment rate, turn the economy around, and sell its programs to the public at large. The stimulus program and the health care legislation remain deeply unpopular and not only serve to feed the Tea Party frenzy, but also concern from 'progressive' allies that he's too close to the bankers. The inability of the Obama administration to sufficiently enroll the population behind his policies is one factor the bourgeoisie

must consider in determining the fate of his administration.

Nevertheless, there is serious concern among factions of the U.S. bourgeoisie about how to address the growing crisis of the national debt that has only spiraled deeper and deeper under both Republican and Democratic administrations. There is a growing sense among certain bourgeois factions that the fiscal crisis of the state will need to be addressed through a concerted policy of austerity against the working class. The U.S. has proven unable to create the political conditions to enact this type of austerity, such as has occurred in the UK with the Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition. It would be particularly risky for the U.S. bourgeoisie to enact such austerity measures with the Democratic Party in power. To do so would risk endangering the myth that the Democratic Party is the party of the working class and would possibly further invigorate the Tea Party and other right wing movements. To enact such austerity measures under a Democratic administration would risk upsetting the traditional ideological division of labor within the political system even more than has already taken place.

The U.S. bourgeoisie does not face the same immediate need to enact these austerity measures as other non-hegemonic powers. Bourgeois economists in the U.S. remain deeply divided on how to address the economic crisis with many well-known figures—such as Paul Krugman and Robert Reich—continuing to call for more Keynesian stimulus to boost incomes and prevent a further slide in the economy. For the moment it appears as if the prospect of Congress falling into Republican hands in November would not serve the bourgeois national interest and would only serve to further deepen the obstructionism in Washington. It would appear nearly impossible, given current political reality, for immigration "reform" to make it through a Republican Congress. To fully understand the possibility of a Republican victory in November, we must return to the theme that has emerged in our analysis of U.S. politics since the Bush/Gore election of 2000: the increasing inability of the U.S. bourgeoisie to manage its electoral and political apparatus in the context of social decomposition

Decomposition and the U.S.

Political Apparatus

As we have argued since 2000, the U.S. bourgeoisie is finding it increasingly difficult to manipulate its electoral system in order to bring the best possible team to power for the particular moment in time. We saw how the increasing tendency for certain factions of the bourgeoisie to adopt an "everyman for himself" mentality, coupled with certain archaic features of the U.S. Electoral College, allowed the clumsy administration of George W. Bush to take power in the 2000 Presidential Election over the consensus candidate of the bourgeoisie, then sitting Vice President Al Gore. Moreover, the increasing difficulty of the U.S. bourgeoisie to settle on a consensus strategy in advance of the election, allowed Bush to win reelection in 2004, despite the damage his administration inflicted on the United States' imperialist position.

It was thus a major moment in the recent history of the U.S. bourgeoisie that it was able to organize the successful electoral campaign of 2008 which in one fell swoop reinvented the electoral illusion and gave new life to the idea of the U.S. as a benevolent power on the international stage. However, in the two years since the election it has become clear that the bourgeoisie has been unable to sustain this momentum. Almost from the moment of his inauguration, the Obama administration has actually served to engender further decomposition of the U.S. Political system; most notably in providing a focal point for the paranoid rhetoric of the Tea Party movement. Obama's Presidency has actually served to rile up the racial undertones in American society and inject them into the political life of the bourgeoisie in a manner which hasn't been seen since the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s.

The Republican Party, for its part, has seized on the anger at the Obama administration, in order to improve its own electoral prospects this November and beyond to 2012. However, in order to reap the rewards of this anger, the Republican Party has had to pander to Tea Party rhetoric, in the process granting legitimacy to their lunacy. Nevertheless, the relationship between the Republican Party and the Tea Party has been far from problematic for the GOP. Tea Party activists have infiltrated local Republican Party organizations across the country and several prominent Republican elected officials have fallen to Tea Party backed candidates in primary elections.

While the Republican Party has benefited in its electoral position from the Tea Party upsurge, this has largely been at the expense of its credibility as a ruling bourgeois party. If the George W. Bush administration was a disaster for the U.S. state, one could only imagine the havoc that would be wrecked by an administration headed by one of these quacks! At this moment, it is unlikely that a Republican administration would have the political skill and credibility to effectively impose national austerity in the manner of a Tory/Lib Dem collation. It is for that reason that we must conclude that the possibility of a Republican capture of one of both houses of Congress does not seem to coincide with the overall interests of the national bourgeoisie at this moment. Should the Republicans capture one or both houses of Congress, it would make it almost impossible for the Obama administration to govern effectively over the next two years.

Henk, 10/07/2010

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had against the Russians in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The drugs trade: a noble capitalist tradition

This is just part of the extent of imperialism's role in the drug trade and the abject hypocrisy of the "war on drugs". From further back, in order to underline this point, we have the example of the Anglo-French Opium Wars against China. To quote Karl Marx from the *New York Daily Tribune*, 25.9.1858: (the) "*Christianity-canting and civilization-mongering British government... In its imperial capacity it affects to be a thorough stranger to the contraband opium trade and even enters into treaties proscribing it*". There's nothing new under capitalism's sun; thus we see British Prime Minister Lord Palmerston's "war on drugs" while conducting wars for the forced cultivation, propagation and sale of opium.

Some of this was also sold to the working class in Britain under the benevolent title of "Godfrey's Cordial", an opiate used to dope children while both parents went out to work³, raising a generation of opium addicts. While this was in some respects the "revenge" of China and India, the whole opium trade was totally irrational and at the expense of legitimate commerce. The East India Company ceased to be direct exporter of opium by the end of the 1700s but it became its producer, while the company's own ships were sanctimoniously forbidden from trafficking the drug. Despite the attempts of the Celestial Empire to fight the importation of British production of Indian opium into China, Britain and Palmerston facilitated the "trade" by force of arms. Marx pointed to this irrationality and contradiction of the expansion of capitalism without moralizing. But in the *New York Daily Tribune*, 20.9.1858, in an article titled

3.- Chapter 13 *Capital*, Large Scale Industry.

'Trade or Opium?', he quotes the Englishman Montgomery Martin: "*Why, the 'slave trade' was merciful compared to the 'opium trade'. We did not destroy the bodies of the Africans, for it was in our immediate interest to keep them alive; we did not debase their natures, corrupt their minds, nor destroy their souls. But the opium seller slays the body after he has corrupted, degraded and annihilated the moral being of unhappy sinners, while, every hour is bringing new victims to a Moloch which knows no satiety, and where the English murderer and Chinese suicide vie with each other in offerings at his shrine*".

Today, when the contradictions of capitalism are reaching screaming point and the relationship of imperialism and drugs are just one more expression of this, we are treated to the farcical couplet of the "war on terror" and the "war on drugs". Baboon, 9-24-10

Read a full version of this article in our press in Great Britain: *World Revolution* no.338, October 2010

Withdrawal From Iraq Is Not the End of Imperialist Slaughter

On February 17, 2010, Defense Secretary Robert Gates approved in a memo to Central Command head David Petraeus the rebranding of the American mission in Iraq. He stressed that “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” the US Military’s name for the 2003 invasion and seven-year occupation of that country, “has ended and our forces are operating under a new mission.” Six months later, on August 19, the last American ‘combat’ brigades crossed the Iraqi border into Kuwait, and twelve days after that—over seven years after President Bush made a similar announcement—President Obama announced “the end of our combat mission in Iraq.” As communists, we have a three-fold responsibility to take up in response to this maneuver by the American bourgeoisie. First, we must relate this event to a broader analysis of the international situation. Second, we must examine the real intentions of the US bourgeoisie, the impression this announcement is meant to make in and outside the United States. Finally, a balance sheet for the war must be drawn up, both in terms of its effect on American imperialism, and in terms of how the proletariat has learned to respond to war.

US foreign policy in the post-Cold War era

The early years of the Iraq occupation were difficult ones for the American bourgeoisie. While the initial invasion showcased the ability of the American military to destroy its target state—it would hardly be appropriate to call prostrate, disarmed Iraq a ‘serious’ rival—the American bourgeoisie’s major strategic objectives were not immediately accomplished. In the 1991 Gulf War, the American bourgeoisie’s main concern was to reinforce its control over an imperialist bloc whose secondary members had lost their reason for adhering to the US overlord following the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the reduced threat posed by Russia¹. Back then it was largely successful, drawing not only the NATO countries into the military intervention, but including even the collapsing USSR in the effort, via the UN sanctions. The following decade saw the strengthening of the tendency of ‘every man for himself’ at the level of imperialist tensions, with second and third rate powers increasingly emboldened to defend their own interests (ex-Yugoslavia, Middle East, Africa). The aim of the US in 1991 was thus to establish military control of strategically important zones in Asia and the Middle East that could be used to exert pressure on its rivals, large and small.

The 9/11 attacks provided an opportunity to launch the ‘war on terror’ and justify the first foray into Afghanistan in 2001, but the impetus didn’t last long. In 2003, the US was unable to mobilize its old coalition for the second effort in Iraq. France and Germany, in particular, while unable to marshal their own imperialist bloc, proved unwilling to simply follow the US, seeing the ‘war on terror’ precisely for what it was – an attempt by the US to reinforce its position as the dominant global superpower.

Real intentions of the US withdrawal from Iraq

In 2007 there was a noticeable shift in US strategy in Iraq in the face of several difficulties. First was a bloody counter-insur-

1.- RL. “Crisis in the Persian Gulf: Capitalism is War.” *Internationalism.org*. 5 November 2009. International Communist Current. 1 October 2010. <http://en.internationalism.org/node/3305>

gency that eventually saw 4,400 US troops killed, 36,000 injured and over 100,000 Iraqi civilians dead (though some estimates put the figure at more than half a million – far above the ‘tens of thousands’ mentioned in the mainstream media). The war in Iraq was becoming a veritable quagmire and the mother of all PR disasters, given the non-existence of ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’ used to justify the invasion. The ghost of Vietnam stalked the corridors of Washington. There was also the growing cost of the war: even Obama admits it has cost over a trillion dollars, contributing massively to the budget deficit and hampering the US economy’s ability to deal with the economic crisis. The resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan – expelled by US force in 2001, but not defeated – and the spread of terrorist attacks in Europe and Asia backed by elements based in the Afghanistan/Pakistan border region was another concern.

When Kerry, who focused on reassembling the old imperialist bloc, proved unelectable, America claimed supremacy in the region for itself. The bourgeoisie adopted this strategy, and its debate began to center around the troop numbers appropriate to such a goal. Rumsfeld clung to his project of a leaner, more automated military. The Democrats, allied with certain elements in the right to support the ‘surge’ – a temporary deployment of more troops to Iraq to keep order, defend the fledgling ‘democracy’ and ensure the transition of military responsibility to Iraqi forces. This was the policy of Bush in his last years, and it is now the policy of Obama in Afghanistan.

The overall strategy adopted by the US bourgeoisie has remained essentially the same. While the Obama administration may put more emphasis on diplomacy, there is overall continuity with the previous ad-

ministration. As Obama said in his speech of August 31st, “...one of the lessons of our effort in Iraq is that American influence around the world is not a function of military force alone. We must use all elements of our power – including our diplomacy, our economic strength, and the power of America’s example – to secure our interests and stand by our allies... [T]he United States of America intends to sustain and strengthen our leadership in this young century...”

Balance sheet of the war in Iraq

Does the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq mean the world is now a safer place? Far from it! Defense Secretary Bob Gates was even more explicit than Obama: “Even with the end of the formal combat mission, the U.S. military will continue to support the Iraqi army and police, help to develop Iraq’s navy and air force, and assist with counterterrorism operations.”²

Publically, the administration says it is broadly satisfied with the state of government and civil society in Iraq. However, Iraq now holds the record for the amount of time a modern nation-state has gone without an effective government. While it appears to be strong enough to do without overt occupation, the US still has to strengthen the Iraqi state by training more military and police. It is leaving fifty thousand ‘non-combat’ troops in Iraq for at least another year. These forces will allow it unrivalled domination over the Iraqi government -- no other power has such a large force so near the centers of Iraqi power, or one that is so necessary for that power’s continued existence. There are similarities with the US approach in South Korea after World War 2, where 2.- <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1500>

40,000 troops were stationed to maintain a presence in the region. Having military bases in modern-day Iraq – even on a much reduced scale – will ensure the US can maintain pressure on Iran and other regional powers.

We should be careful not to take the administration’s line too much at face value. In actual fact it is quite possible that Iraq will disintegrate when the US leaves, with all the different parties contributing to the break-up of the country, notably the Kurdish nationalists, or with it simply disintegrating into civil war. Similarly, the situation in Afghanistan is absolutely catastrophic and shows every sign of getting worse, with the disintegration of Pakistan and the war spreading there as well.

Despite its setbacks, the American bourgeoisie, has at least internalized the fact that it exists in a world of each against all, and has learned some valuable lessons on how to wage war and conduct occupation today. The withdrawal of troops from Iraq does not mean the end of war. On the one hand, American troops will have a continuing presence in the country, and the United States, Turkey, Israel, Russia, Iran, and Germany will go on playing their games for imperial influence in the region just as before. On the other, the US will now be more able to focus its efforts on Afghanistan, and will have freed up some capacity to intervene elsewhere in the world. The end of the Iraq War, in the hands of imperialism, is really the continuation of war where it is already raging, and the beginning of war elsewhere. Imperialism’s logical end is the destruction of humanity. In the face of this, humanity’s defender is the proletariat, the bearer of communism. *RW, 10/1/10*

US Imperialist Policy in Latin America

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the Monroe Doctrine, that the US reserved the right to police by any means its “backyard” territories. The American bourgeoisie has done plenty of this policing, through political and military interventions in the ‘internal affairs’ of the Latin American and Caribbean countries. Over the last century it has policed the region to defend its imperialist hegemony from indigenous and foreign challengers.

After World War II and the rise of American imperialism as a world superpower, US policy in Latin America under the banner of ‘anti-Communism’, would take the form of bloody confrontations (through proxy armies) with the Soviet Union- who had become the other world superpower following World War II. This conflict would go on for four decades leaving in its wake an uncountable number of deaths and terrible atrocities against the impoverished masses caught in the fight between pro-American and pro-Russian imperialist bourgeois gangs.

The collapse of the Russian bloc in 1989 and the loss of cohesion holding together the Western imperialist bloc under American leadership upset the international imperialist order. In Latin America, as in the rest of the world, this new situation completely changed the imperialist game and has created a new situation to which US imperialist

policy is trying to adapt.

US imperialist policy in the “new world order”

In contrast with what occurred at the height of the US/Russia imperialist confrontation in Latin America during the 1960’s and 1970’s, since the collapse of the bloc system, this region of the world has not been on top of American foreign policy priorities. In the last 20 years, the US has fought 2 major wars in the Middle East and is still engaged in a major one in Afghanistan/Pakistan in Asia, and was also engaged in a major military operation in the Balkans against Serbia. Compared to this one might say that nothing major has happened in Latin America in the last 20 years.

As in the rest of the world, the US is still the dominant imperialist power in Latin America, but the new situation opened up with the collapse of the bloc system has had at least 2 major interrelated consequences. First, the coming to power of bourgeois factions that don’t really follow Washington’s line (Chavez in Venezuela, Lula in Brazil, Morales in Bolivia, Correa in Ecuador, Kirchner in Argentina) who sometimes express very virulent ideological and political opposition to the US, advancing policies in open contradiction with American interests (such as support for Iran by Chavez and Lula). Second, the revival of European

powers interested in regaining a direct influence in a region they lost to the US many years ago, and the attempts of the ‘new kid in town’, China, to get a piece of the action for itself.

The US is well aware of these developments, but given its involvement in the international challenges to its hegemony in other global hot-spots, it has not made it a priority to respond to the questioning of its authority in Latin America. Nonetheless the American bourgeoisie has, since the Clinton administration, been developing a more or less coherent policy to defend its prerogatives in its territorial backyard: the “Plan Colombia”. This policy has at its center the build up of an American military presence (under the guise of fighting drug traffickers and terrorists, or ‘narco-terrorists’) in a part of South America where the US bourgeoisie has been losing too much of its political influence. However, despite the many billions of dollars spent during the years of the Clinton, Bush and now the Obama administration on “Plan Colombia”, not much seems to have been accomplished: the ‘anti-American’ bourgeois factions are still in power in many of the South American nations and countries like China continue to make inroads in the region- not to mention the drug trafficking which is the official tar-

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We Salute the Emergence of Discussion Circles in the US

Spurred on by the deepening economic crisis, the aggravation of imperialist tensions to a point of paroxysm, and the more and more apparent inability of the bourgeoisie to offer any viable solution to the worsening deterioration of the environment, a maturation of class consciousness has been brewing below the surface for a number of years. This maturation is following a difficult and non-linear path, and in the last few years it has manifested itself not only in the return of the class to the path of struggle, but also in a veritable world-wide explosion of discussion circles, reading groups, internet discussion forums, and individuals in search of political answers and clarification. We have seen this phenomenon surge virtually in every continent, from Latin America to the Philippines and Korea, from Australia to Russia, Turkey, Great Britain, and, finally, here in the US. We think this is a very significant development, deserving great attention and putting great responsibilities on the existing revolutionary organizations of Left Communists. We would like to pay special attention to the emerging discussion groups. As they surge and develop, it is important that they pose the question of who they are, what their role is vis-à-vis the working class, what perspectives they can pose for their future. It is in response to these preoccupations about the discussion circles' nature and function that we decided to write this article.

Why do discussion circles form?

Discussions circles are not a new phenomenon in the working class. They existed during the ascendant period of capitalism alongside the mass parties and the trade unions, as in France and Great Britain, when both structures were true organizations of the workers. But the entrance of capitalism in its decadent phase transformed once and for all the aims, means, and forms of working class organization by turning these organizations which were once instruments of the working class into instruments of the ruling class. Today, there are no permanent political organizations that have a proletarian nature which the working class can turn to or claim their own. Discussion circles re-

appeared at the end of the 1960's, with the massive return of the class struggle, marking the end of the counter-revolutionary period which followed the defeat of the great revolutionary wave of 1917-1921. At the end of the 1960's the return of the open economic crisis provided the material conditions for the reappearance of the class on the historic scene. This is the first historic condition for their existence: the class must have weakened the ideological yoke of the bourgeoisie and re-entered the terrain of class confrontations. However, when the class first returned to the path of the struggle at the end of the 60's, it found a fragmented and dispersed revolutionary movement and the break in the organic link with the revolutionary organizations of the past effected by 50 years of counter-revolution. The small communist fractions that left the degenerating International and which survived the defeat and preserved the lessons of the past were all but wiped out by the counter-revolution. Deprived of their traditional apparatus of support such as it existed during the ascendance of capitalism, i.e. the trade unions and the mass parties, and of their natural framework of organization and debate such as it was the International, workers felt the need to come together to discuss and reflect. This is the second historic condition for the emergence of discussion groups today: the inexistence of the revolutionary party.

The appearance of discussion circles today happens in the same historic context of class confrontations that existed at the end of the 60's, and at a time when the specific conditions and dynamics of the crisis and, more generally, of the life of capitalism in all its aspects have obviously worsened. The Midland Discussion Forum in Great Britain, for example, formed around discussions on the war in Kosovo. The Manchester Class Struggle group, also in Great Britain, formed just over a year ago in the context of the aggravation of the economic crisis. But of course there are also the groups formed in Turkey around the Tekel workers struggles, and many more around the world.

Groups forming on the West Coast of the US come from a reflection on the bankruptcy and dead end of capitalism, and the

California students' movement. In some instances they form as a result of working class struggles, or sometimes come from a critique of leftism. They come from many different political backgrounds and form a heterogeneous terrain. The groups in the US show similar characteristic to those in other parts of the internationalist milieu: they are animated by similar questions and concerns as their class brothers' and sisters' across the oceans, ranging from a desire to resist the present attacks against the working class, to concerns about workers self-organization, the question of solidarity, the culture of debate, the role of the left of capital, but also questions around the party, the different conceptions of the party in Left Communism and Trotskyism, the organizations of revolutionaries, the heritage of the ICC in the Communist Left and how Trotskyism obscured this history (see the article in the present issue for a more in-depth presentation and discussion of this summer's ICC public forums). It is clear that their emergence, observed in other parts of the globe, has spread to the US as well, confirming the inscription of this country in the larger dynamic of the working class internationally.

What are the nature and function of discussion groups?

These groups are animated by the need they feel to link up to the struggles of the working class, to understand what the working class has to do in order to take its struggles to the level of political preparedness for its ultimate historic task of overthrowing capitalism. They want to know how the class struggles and how revolutionaries can contribute to the development of class consciousness. This shows that they are motivated by a militant need the class feels to question capitalism and fight back. As such, they are a product, a secretion of the class itself.

The resurgence of discussion circles show that we are in a period favorable to the development of class consciousness. They express the need the class has to not only clarify political positions through discussion, but also to arm itself politically for its task to offer the revolutionary perspective. In this sense, it is important that they do not get stuck in endless discussions about Marxism, risking becoming academic talk-shops or never develop politically, but rather sharpen their theoretical deepening the better to intervene in the practical, concrete aspects of the class struggle and what it needs to be armed, theoretically and politically, to fulfill its historic task. In other words, discussion circles are fundamental in the effort and process by which the class achieves class consciousness if they are capable of uniting theory and practice, rather than staying locked in academicism. Discussion circles express the necessity and the tendency the class has to form a political organization, not an academic school of Marxism. As we said in *International Review* 7, in an article devoted to drawing a balance sheet of a discussion circle that had emerged in Naples, Italy in 1975, "*In general, discussion or study circles cannot be seen as ends in themselves. One does not search out 'ideas' for their own sake, but as the expression of a social activity. These circles are part of a whole social process within the working class by which the class tends to secrete a political organization.*" This article was written 35 years ago, but its approach is still valid today.

It is important here to underline that while circles express the class' tendency toward

the formation of the party, they are neither the 'ante-chambers' of the party, neither 'schools of the party'. They are not the property of any political organization, and they are not, and neither should they try to be, political organizations themselves. An article in *World Revolution* 207 expressed this idea very well: "*The goal of a discussion circle is the political clarification of the individual participants. The framework of discussion is a common one, corresponding to the collective nature of the working class. The direction and pace of political clarification however, vary according to each person. Since a circle is not an organization regrouping with a political platform, a circle is not a permanent or stable entity. Rather, it is a moment of political clarification, allowing the militants, through participation in a collective discussion process, to find out where they stand politically in relation to the major questions of proletarian politics and in relation to the already existing and international currents of the Marxist proletarian milieu...A political organization of the proletariat is necessarily an internationally orientated organ, a product of the historical effort of the working class fighting for its political clarity. It doesn't arise locally, but is a direct continuation of the political and organizational traditions of the Marxist movement. A circle, however, is a phenomenon that is limited geographically and in time. It is restricted to one area. Elements come together in one area in order to discuss matters of relevance to the proletariat and clarify them...*" We should add that while the temptation to form a political organization may be strong, these groupings should not confuse the process of political clarification with its final goal of political decantation and crystallization in a political organization. This would result into a short-circuiting of the process of clarification and an attempt at creating a 'semi-platform', or setting up local, 'isolated' organizations, or intervening as a political body in the class struggle without any clear political or organizational framework for doing so. Rather than 'defending' their existence as such, the task of discussion circles is to question everything and sift everything through the test of the most open, yet rigorous and fraternal debate. This is how discussion groups can develop an ability to recognize the criteria which unite revolutionaries in spite of their differences.

In order to do so, it is extremely important that they be open to anyone who is willing to discuss working class political positions, including the existing revolutionary organizations. It is vital for the class today to deepen the reflection on the historical impasse of capitalism, what it means for the future of humanity, and the challenges this presents to the class. Clarification occurs through the most open debates among different and even divergent viewpoints. This means that in order to fulfill their function of being spaces for debate and confrontation of different ideas, discussion circles should not start by establishing criteria for joining, and should not create or adapt a platform, which would transform the circle into a semi-organization neither able to fulfill the task of an organization nor that of a circle. This would short-circuit the very process of clarification they were created for. Instead, we urge them to continue deepening, debating, and opening up to the confrontation of ideas which can lead to the clarification of the aims and means of the class struggle. This is the true contribution discussion circles can make to the class. *Ana, 9/29/2010*

US Imperialist Policy in Latin America

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get of the operation!

The Obama administration has insisted that one of the priorities of its administration is to recover time lost in Latin America. However, almost two years after his election Obama has not done anything different than his predecessors. Obama's main tool continues to be "Plan Colombia", which he tried last year to upgrade by asking Colombia for more flexibility in using its territory and military installations for the policing of South America. Even his campaign promise to resolve the 'Cuban Question' and thus tackle the pressing issue of a growing influence of European nations in the island, has been stuck on half-measures and has no chance of moving forward anytime soon given the present domestic political climate dominated by right-wing ideologues.

Obama was elected to the US presidency with the mandate to reverse the

loss of US credibility around the world after 8 years of Bush's war mongering. So far Obama has kept his campaign promise to end the war in Iraq, only to be able to fight at a higher level in Afghanistan and impose a more adequate use of the nations military resources. In any case, the present US administrations ideology of 'multilateralism' and 'human rights', used to cover its imperialist policies, has been very effective in boosting America's international credentials. However, where military might has failed, ideology win at the end of the day.

In the absence of a radical working class response to the growing barbarism that decadent capitalism is imposing on humanity, American hegemony will continue to be challenged around the world sinking societies in a cycle of destruction and death as bourgeois gangs fight for capitalisms spoils. The future is communism or the destruction of humanity. *Eduardo Smith, 10/12/10.*

ICC Public Forums on East and West Coast

This past summer the ICC held a number of public forums across the US, which provided the opportunity for comrades from the ICC to meet a wide range of people and discuss a variety of issues with them. On the West Coast there were two forums in Los Angeles (one organized by the ICC, one by the IDP¹) and one in Oakland, SF, where the central concern was to discuss the student movement in France against the CPE in 2006 and the lessons it may have for the contemporary student movement in California. On the East Coast forums were held in Philadelphia on the lessons of the Tekel strike in Turkey, and finally in New York on the economic crisis. None of these events would have been possible without the practical support and collaboration between our sympathizers. Their efforts, and those of other comrades who participated in the forums, ensured there was a real debate between revolutionaries.

West Coast: Lessons from the student movements

Both forums in LA were attended by student organizers who had participated in the recent struggles in the universities of California. They reported the militant change of mood amongst the students, how they felt that the recent proposal of the authorities were a straightforward attack on their future. As such, the questions were primarily gained at learning more about the anti-CPE movement at the tactical level. The discussions centered first on the importance of the autonomy of General Assemblies (GAs) in order to wage a successful struggle. Many of those present had experienced the typical tactics and proposals of Trotskyists -- proposing 'co-ordination committees' for example -- that effectively take the decision-making powers away from the mass meetings of the GAs, undermining their autonomy. In the anti-CPE movement in France the leftists were not very successful at this, and that was the movements' strength. In California the leftists had succeeded in dividing the movement and downplayed the role of the GAs. So, the movement wasn't yet strong enough to prevent this sabotage.

There was also a reflection on the differences with 1968: today the generation gap is not as large as it was back then. Several generations have experienced years of economic crisis since the 1970s so there is more scope for solidarity. Also, there is a far more equal participation of male and female students, and a effort to make demands that concern the whole of the young generation in relation to the workforce, since a lot of them are working during their studies. There is also a greater concern to reach out to and make contact with the wider working class in struggle. At all the meetings the question was raised: What initiatives were taken towards the urban youth of the suburbs and did it result in anything positive? We were able to give examples of where the students in France sent delegations to the urban youth, linking their problems in the general demands. And slowly but gradually this youth started to join the demonstrations, first the girls then the boys.

On two occasions there was a lively exchange of opinions about how to interpret the struggles in Greece and the difference between the revolt of the youth back in 2009 with efforts towards self-organization and the present movements dominated by the left and the Greek Communist Party and the Unions turning the anger into dead ends. There was also some discussion on the use of violence on the part of some anarchists and terrorists that also derails class activity and autonomy.

There was also an interest in the role of transit strikes (always called for by unions) in derailing struggles and preventing their extension. We discussed about this general type of union tactic, one that claims to support a strike

1.- Insane Dialectical Posse, a loose group of revolutionaries in California. <http://www.flyingpicket.org/>

movement but then boycotts and sabotages it in a subtle way, such as forgetting to distribute solidarity leaflets at all, or distributing them just days or hours before the strike. But above all, declaring strikes in transport and communication sectors when there is a threat of extension of the struggle towards other sectors risks cutting transport and information links for those joining the demonstrations. This did not succeed in France. The students wanted their demonstrations on days and times when the workers were not at work. This explains the mass participation of the working class in the student demonstrations: over 3,000,000 in the final demonstration! Finally, there was a discussion on the strong ability of the American bourgeoisie to manipulate its media, making it a master in the black-out of proletarian movements and being capable of changing the agenda through the media manipulation. An example was give about the 1st of May 2010, when 1,000,000 people participated in the demonstration in LA and not one single word was said on TV!!

During the LA forums (but more so at the Oakland forum) there were discussions of the historical challenges of the present period and the activities of the ICC: What are the conditions for the creation of a 'culture of debate' and what does it really mean? We stressed the importance of creating an atmosphere of open and fraternal debate and collaboration between internationalists -- be they other left communists, anarcho-syndicalist groups like the KRASS in Russia, the joint intervention of the ICC and two anarchist groups in Mexico during the electricity workers strike, fraternal meetings with anarcho-syndicalists in the South of France, etc. Of course, the question of the 'Party' came up and the different meaning it has for Left Communism in contrast to the leftist concepts of the party serving for manipulations of the movements and their strive to power. The ICC strives for the power of the workers' councils.

Another point brought forward in Oakland was how the existence of discussion circles all over the globe demonstrated the need for open non-sectarian debates internationally. We underlined the efforts of the ICC to create arenas for proletarian debate. In this sense, the discussion and collaboration between left communists and internationalist anarchists is one expression of the same striving of the class towards unifying its forces against capitalism. In order to destroy capitalism the working class must have the broadest and widest reflection possible to achieve a level of class consciousness that will ensure it is politically armed for its task to offer its revolutionary struggle as a perspective to humanity. In this sense the aspect of solidarity (shown at the most radical strikes today in China and other places) plays an important role in the working class regaining its identity, which has been weakened after the endless anti-communist campaigns following the collapse of the Eastern Bloc.

After all the meetings there were friendly chats with those present, during which one of the organizers said: 'The ICC has a big shadow', pointing that the ICC is much more known than even the we are aware of! We want to thank the comrades who made these debates possible and invite them to continue the discussions by writing or through our Forums on the website.

East Coast: Lessons from the class struggle

Moving over to the East Coast, our forum in Philadelphia was on the topic, "Lessons of the Tekel workers' struggle in Turkey: How to struggle from below?" Right from the start the discussion took an historical and global approach when one of the audience members, who was in the process of reading Rosa Luxemburg's "Mass Strike" for a reading group, started with a question on 1905, so we could deepen on the real meaning of the soviet form of organization, the mass strike (as opposed

to the planned general strike), and the general assemblies, which have been the shape which every radical strike movement has tended to take ever since.

We also discussed more about the strikes in Tekel as examples of the present strike wave which brings the question of 'solidarity' to the center of struggles much more drastically than in the past: not only solidarity with workers of other sectors, but also between different generations, as shown by the student movements in France who invited pensioners and unemployed to their general assemblies, the NYC and Toronto Transit strikes who fought also for decent contracts for the next generations and were greeted by the public. In the Tekel strike, we saw new expressions of solidarity such as German workers who went to Turkey and Tekel workers who made a tour through Germany, Italy and even to Greece, which was a real blow to the 'nationalists' who have tried their utmost to separate Greek and Turkish workers ever since the beginning of the 20th century. In Turkey itself Turkish and Kurdish workers refused to be separated and overcame heavy cultural borders during the Tekel strike movement.

Another topic was the situation of the working class in the US and if it is weaker here than elsewhere. We said that maybe the ruling class was stronger and able to use the unions, the mass media and the rule of law in a very sophisticated way to quell class anger. This inevitably strengthens the influence and the 'confidence' in the state as an 'impartial' body above class conflicts and ultimately weakens the class identity of the workers.

There was a lively discussion on the union question and the difference between unions in the 19th and the 20/21th centuries. In the 19th century, workers saw the unions as their own organizations and sacrificed for them willingly and enthusiastically, whereas now unions are often hated because dues are paid involuntarily in many workplaces and workers, feeling that they derive no real benefit from the unions and see the dues as a kind of tax. Ever since the beginning of the decadent period of capitalism around the turn of the 20th century unions went gradually over to the other camp, supported the nationalist reformist framework, ended up mobilizing the workers for the First World War and ever since have belonged to the class enemy. The audience admitted that the unions certainly have a role in leading workers to defeat, but still wondered about the situation of workers in the US Southeast, where unions are illegal and workers are exploited very harshly. The question was asked whether the unions, despite their conservative and counter-revolutionary nature, could help those workers as an intermediate step before self-organization. Comrades responded that generally you have unions where the ruling class needs them and that better conditions are not the result of having a union but rather that both the existence of a union and better conditions are results of workers' combativity in a given sector. The example of the recent wildcat strikes in the automobile industry in China was given as ample evidence that workers don't need a union in place to struggle. In this country the unions are explicitly part of the state and workers were still able to struggle and win on their own.

This led to a discussion of how workers can organize outside the unions and the question of the IWW. We detailed also more about the IWW in the past and today: being an expression of radical class activity through its mass activities in the past and today being torn between 2 tendencies: one that seems to want the IWW to act as a union, represent workers in negotiations, sign contracts, etc., and another that wants the IWW to act more as a struggle committee aimed at stimulating solidarity in the class. All the audience agreed that this debate has to be deepened more in future discussions, and that the issue of the IWW will come up more and more both among revolutionaries

and potentially among the working class at large as it looks for historical alternatives to the traditional union-controlled struggle.

In New York where the presentation was given on the latest phase of the crisis, the discussion tended to move very quickly toward the struggle against austerity. The first comments on the crisis asked: 'Does it have to get worse for workers to react?' as the leftists say, and all agreed that the answer is NO -- misery is not a good condition, that's why we have to fight back, but why is the working class' level of struggle not corresponding to the level of the attacks? The discussion advanced various reflections: first we have to look at the struggle from an international perspective; second, we have to take in account that there is a certain fear compared to the 1970s and 80s, when wildcat strikes were a common phenomenon and a much smaller rate of structural unemployment meant that workers risked much less by engaging in struggle, as they could quickly find other work if victimized by employers; third, the setback after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc is still present

Another discussion was about the loss of class solidarity. Also this question was deepened from different angles. Globally strikes now increasingly start for reasons of solidarity: the New York transit strike for a decent contract for future workers, the Tekel strike in Turkey, and solidarity strikes in Spain in support of immigrant workers. Also, historically, there was a difference in mood between the period around 1968 and since class struggle 2003. Back then the feeling was that revolution was possible, but maybe not necessary, and now that it is more obviously necessary, but might not be possible. There is a fear to overcome and a class identity to regain and his passes necessarily through to expression of solidarity, a capacity only the proletariat can develop.

Another discussion was on the role of leftists, who approach the working class struggle in order to derail it to hopelessly 'reformist' perspectives that lead ultimately to defeat. Also discussed was the upsurge of Capital reading groups and discussion circles, in many places in the US, which are part of an international phenomenon and a sign of revival of the reflection on how to overcome capitalism

JZ/AS/JJ, 14/10/10.

Tribute to Ben Epstein

On the morning of Tuesday, October 5, 2010, communists in the San Francisco Bay Area lost a comrade who was our direct link to multiple generations of past class struggle. That comrade was Ben Epstein, who passed away at the age of 92. He embodied the history of those fights, having participated in them himself, and was one of the last in the tradition of self-educated working class militants. When the current crisis hit in the summer of 2008, our study group was groping for historical references. Ben told us inspiring stories of the early Depression when workers and farmers joined in his hometown of Sioux City, Iowa to thwart auctions of foreclosed homes and farms, returning them to their former owners in "penny sales." His town had been the epicenter of the movement of farmers' councils that spread throughout the Midwest, in some places becoming near-insurrections. Most of us only knew Ben in the last 5 years of his life, but his influence went well beyond those few years and will always stay with us. But it was reciprocal. There were times when Ben would get giddy with excitement while we were reading texts like Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* or Luxemburg's *The Mass Strike*. When asked why, he'd say "because it's been such a long time since young people understood Marx and its implications for class struggle." Ben always helped us see the concrete ways those theories could inform the struggles of our class. I will never forget the wisdom he so generously shared. HH, 10/17/10.

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Capitalism has reached a dead-end: neither austerity packages nor recovery plans can change anything

What are workers' councils? (Part 3): The revolution of 1917 (July to October)

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Latin America: A Privileged Playground for American Imperialism

In November 2008, Obama's election to the US presidency was enthusiastically welcomed in many Latin American capitals by the capitalist strongmen of the moment. Even Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, who has made a name for himself based on his anti-American, "anti-Imperialist" rhetoric, welcomed the change and expressed his hope, "to build a constructive bilateral agenda." Two years after Obama's "historical election," the excitement in the region about the new US administration had quieted down. Obama's promises of "change" to the discredited foreign policy of the Bush administration, that helped him get elected as the representative of American capitalism, have come up short of satisfying the illusions that his demagogic propaganda generated around the world. In essence, the imperialist foreign policy of the US has not changed in Latin America. Rather than a "hands off" approach on what America considers its exclusive sphere of influence (which some of his supporters wanted), what is driving Obama's policy toward Latin America is an urgency to win back terrain lost in the region during the previous decades.

Latin America is still America's Backyard

In the context of the bicentennial commemoration of "political independence" of several Latin American countries this year and during the next decade, there has been a lot of talk on the internet and in the specialized press about the history, current political and economic situation, and future of the region. For instance, the prestigious weekly magazine *'The Economist'* ran in its September issue a special report advertised on its front page with the ludicrous headline, "Nobody's Backyard: The Rise of Latin America." Despite evidence to the contrary we are told that Latin American countries (or at least some of them) have made great economic progress since they won independence from their European colonizers and have a great future ahead of them. The

truth is that instead of something to celebrate, the population, always under attack by whatever bourgeois clique in power, is fed a barrage of nationalist propaganda aimed at strengthening the capitalist ideological domination over society; and thus maintaining their dictatorship over this region of the world.

Marxists recognize the formation of nation-states as the historical framework for the bourgeoisie to establish its political supremacy and to further develop the capitalist mode of production. But history has not been kind to the Latin American states that emerged from the ruins of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. For reasons still being debated by historians which make little difference to their populations today, none of these nations became a first rate capitalist country; remaining since their creation in a state of relative backwardness, afflicted with political instability and dependence on more powerful countries.

Where the Latin American countries lay dormant, their neighbor to the North developed fully around the same time to become the global capitalist leader. This dynamic has influenced the relations between the US and the Latin American countries and their dominant classes for almost two centuries; where the US bourgeoisie considers the region as its personal hunting ground with the local bourgeoisie either an ally or enemy according to how well or willing they are to align behind American interests.

Already in 1823 US president James Monroe, in the context of the threat of the 'Holy Alliance' (Russia, Prussia and Austria) to roll back history and restore Spanish power to Latin America, would boldly announce that the US would consider any effort by any European countries to re-colonize or interfere in the affairs of Latin America as an act of aggression requiring American intervention (a move bordering on impertinence since

the US was no match for the 'Holy Alliance' militarily). Although the US did not have the military means at the time to make good on its audacious declaration (though the real teeth of the declaration was provided by the military power of Great Britain, which had become the world superpower of the day and had suggested this strategy to its American counterpart), what was to become the 'Monroe Doctrine' has served the American bourgeoisie well as a guiding principle for Latin American policy ever since.

This kind of 'birth right' exclusivity of the Western Hemisphere for American capitalism has been a constant theme of US foreign policy for almost two hundred years; encompassing both its progressive period of expansion as it created its national borders and helped develop the world market and the historical period of capitalist decadence which marked the end of capitalism as a progressive mode of production.

At the time of progressive American development, Engels would write in 'The Movements of 1847':

"In America we have witnessed the conquest of Mexico and have rejoiced at it. It is also an advance when a country which has hitherto been exclusively wrapped up in its own affairs, perpetually rent with civil wars, and completely hindered in its development, a country whose best prospect had been to become industrially subject to Britain -- when such a country is forcibly drawn into the historical process. It is to the interest of its own development that Mexico will in the future be placed under the tutelage of the United States. The evolution of the whole of America will profit by the fact that the United States, by the possession of California, obtains command of the Pacific. But again we ask: "Who is going to profit immediately by the war?" The bourgeoisie alone. The North Americans acquire new regions in California and New Mexico for the creation of fresh capital, that is, for calling new bourgeois into being, and enriching those already in existence; for all capital

created today flows into the hands of the bourgeoisie."

One could debate from a revolutionary perspective if Engels (and Marx who was also of the same opinion) was right in his assessment of Mexico's situation and by extension that of the rest of Latin America, but what remains valid is the fact that in this period the expansionist policies of the US (in this case through war) contained the possibility of a move forward in world historical progress and thus in the creation of the conditions needed for a new mode of production, communism, which will be brought about by the working class. However with the benefit of hindsight we can say that the founders of Marxism were proved wrong in their projection that, "The evolution of the whole of America," would take place on the back of successful American expansionist policies. This success would benefit primarily US capitalism, not just in the short term (which Engels noted) but also historically. Thus the conquest of half the territory of Mexico would be central both for the rising of the US to a first rate economic power and later on to the dominant imperialist power in the region. Meanwhile the Latin American countries would remain in a state of relative capitalist backwardness and social and political instability. Instability caused largely by the bloody settling of accounts between various bourgeois factions allied either to US imperialism or the enemies of US imperialism.

By the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, with the conquest of the last possessions of Spain in the region (during the Spanish-American War that landed Cuba and Puerto Rico in US hands) the last meaningful vestiges of the Old World bourgeoisie in Latin America went to the dustbin of history. The US president Theodore Roosevelt would feel the need to make clear to the world this US supremacy in the region; by in essence saying in his 'Corollary' to

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POLITICAL POSITIONS OF THE ICC

Internationalism is the section in the U.S. of the **International Communist Current** which defends the following political positions:

* Since the First World War, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

* The stratified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc. and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place

in the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

* All the nationalist ideologies - 'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination' etc. - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called 'workers', 'Socialist' and 'Communist' parties (now ex-'Communists'), the leftist organizations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism's political apparatus. All the tactics of 'popular fronts', 'antifascist fronts' and 'united fronts', which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.

* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union organization, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working

class and sabotage its struggles.

* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organization through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organized mass action by the proletariat.

* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalization of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labor, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

* The revolutionary political organization constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active factor in the generalization of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organize the working class' nor to 'take

power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat's combat.

OUR ACTIVITY

Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organized intervention, united and centralized on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organizations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organizations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International* 1884-1914, the *Communist International*, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular *the German, Dutch and Italian Lefts*.