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Mid-Term Elections Highlight Political Difficulties of U.S. Bourgeoisie

The 2010 Mid-Term Elections have come and gone with disastrous results for the Democratic Party. The Republicans won a strong majority in the House of Representatives, giving them the ability to obstruct any legislation that must pass both houses of Congress. For the bourgeois media, these elections were nothing sort of a sea-change event putting the Republicans in the driver's seat to defeat Barack Obama in the 2012 Presidential Election. President Obama himself admitted to taking a "shellacking" in the elections and promised to do his best to work with the Republicans in Congress. Meanwhile, "progressive" Democrats sang a different tune, arguing that the election results were best explained by the collapse of the President's electoral coalition due to his fecklessness in the face of Republican obstructionism, his sell-out on national health-care and his pro-Wall Street agenda.

However, it was not all good news for the Republicans as the election served to highlight important and deepening fractures within the GOP. The growing weight of the Tea Party within Republican Party ranks probably cost their party control of the U.S. Senate. Although the Tea Party's right-wing demagoguery was useful in rallying the party base in conservative House of Representative districts; it actually worked to turn voters off to the Republican candidate in a number of Senate races that they might have

otherwise won. Still, a number of firebrand Republicans, such as the extreme libertarian Rand Paul of Kentucky, will take seats in the Senate when the new Congress convenes in January 2011. The GOP will enter the new Congress with growing divisions, as its insurgent right-wing faction often appears to be as much at odds with "mainstream Republicans" as with the Democrats.

It is clear that the bourgeois political system in the U.S. is under severe stress in the face of a persistent economic crisis that no matter what the bourgeoisie does just will not go away. Unemployment remains sky high, credit is still largely frozen, and businesses supposedly sit on mounds of cash that they simply cannot invest profitably, just as the consumption power of the working class is massively reduced by the collapse of the home equity/debt shell game. Meanwhile, the bourgeois class finally begins to take notice of the ominous national debt, at the same time state and local governments face severe budget shortfalls.

So what does all this mean for the working class? As we pointed out in the last issue of *Internationalism*¹ the proletariat has no stake in the outcome of bourgeois elections. Elections are moments in the life of the bourgeoisie through which it attempts to tie the working class to the state through

1.- See: *Mid-Term Election Circus: Workers Have No Side to Choose* in *Internationalism* #156

the electoral circus, settle internal disputes within its ranks and manipulate the machinery of the state and media to bring the best ruling team to state power for a given historical juncture. However, the working class does have a vital need to understand the political strategy of the bourgeois class as it attempts to utilize the state to manage the permanent economic crisis and suppress the mortal threat to its existence that emanates from the class struggle. As we have argued in *Internationalism* for some time now, the deadening weight of social decomposition on the bourgeoisie's political apparatus has resulted in a growing difficulty for the ruling class to manage its political and electoral system to achieve the best possible results from the point of view of the national capital as a whole. The increasing tendency for "everyman for himself" in the arena of bourgeois politics, the growing number of factions, and movements and the increasing unpredictability of bourgeois elections are weighing heavily on the U.S. bourgeoisie at the moment. What depth has the political crisis of the bourgeoisie reached? This is the vital question facing the working class movement when it comes to analyzing bourgeois elections.

The Contradictions of Bourgeois Economic Policy: Austerity or Stimulus?
According to the bourgeois media, econo-

mists are divided on what should be the most pressing economic policy priority at the current juncture. On the one hand, the "deficit hawks" believe that the U.S.'s national debt has spiraled out of control threatening the nation's long-term position as global imperialist leader. For these economists, the most-pressing need facing the state is to enact painful austerity measures to reduce federal spending, enact deep cuts in social programs, reduce the federal workforce, rationalize the tax code and make the state solvent once again. According to this line of thought, if the debt is not brought under control, the U.S. will eventually face a sovereign debt crisis on the order of what Greece and Ireland are now experiencing. Seeing the U.S. as a bad investment, unwilling to take the necessary measures to get its financial house in order, foreign investors will stop buying U.S. government bonds; pulling the rug out from under the "borrow and spend" model that has kept the U.S. afloat for at least the past decade. The recent report of the Presidential Debt Commission, operating in this vein, called for raising the Social Security retirement age, eliminating the mortgage tax credit, cutting the federal workforce and even certain reductions in the military budget in order to reduce the national debt.

On the other hand, economists on the left, such as Paul Krugman and Robert Reich, argue that concern over the federal debt—although a real problem—is overblown. The most pressing priority facing the state is to get the economy moving again by enacting expansionist stimulus programs in order to boost consumer spending and create jobs. According to this perspective, the U.S. economy is suffering from a massive problem of

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WikiLeaks Scandal Reinforces Myth of Bourgeois Democracy

At the close of 2011, for a brief period of time, the "WikiLeaks affair" was at the center of every news media outlet in the States and, presumably, the whole world over. Although by now the barrage of media coverage of WikiLeaks and its founder Julian Assange, have become a trickle, there is still a need to make some remarks about this event that has so much shaken the bourgeois media world.

What was all this excitement about?

The facts are well known. At the end of November, following a well prepared sensationalist media campaign, Wikileaks started to release some of the hundreds of thousands of classified US government diplomatic cables that it claims to have in its possession. At the same time several commercial news media organizations throughout the world (*The New York Times*, France's *Le Monde*, Britain's *Guardian*, Spain's *El Pais*, and the German magazine *Der Spiegel*), to whom

WikiLeaks have given these files in advance of its own release, started running stories based on these documents. If someone had really been fooled into believing that the "State secrets" of the US were on the verge of being exposed, the reality is surely disappointing. Leaving aside the entertaining value of the quasi gossip-mongering of the US diplomatic cadres in their tiresome task of advancing American imperialist interests, from what has been made public so far these documents contribute little new to what is already widely known about the US policies around the world. Embarrassing as these diplomatic cables might be for some individuals caught off guard in their expressed opinions (both American and foreigners), they are far from being the "smoking gun" exposing the top secret policies of US government that some commentators in the left wing of the bourgeois political spectrum claim them to be.

Perhaps the best assessment (besides be-

ing remarkable for its brutal honesty) of the significance of the publication of these documents for the US bourgeoisie was made by the US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who said:

"I've heard the impact of these releases on our foreign policy described as a meltdown, as a game-changer, and so on... I think those descriptions are fairly significantly overwrought. The fact is governments deal with the United States because it's in their interest, not because they like us, not because they trust us, and not because they believe we can keep secrets. Many governments — some governments deal with us because they fear us, some because they respect us, most because they need us. ... Is this embarrassing? Yes. Is it awkward? Yes. Consequences for U.S. foreign policy?"

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The Working Class Bears the Brunt of the Crisis

The bourgeois press greeted the New Year with the usual celebratory narcissism. The carefully crafted rhetoric of the supposed “economic recovery” was continually punctuated by the tacit reminder that hard times are still ahead. The bourgeoisie’s calls for sacrifice are heard more thoroughly and the recent mid-term elections have potentially provided the bourgeoisie with the political pieces necessary to institute a harsher round of austerity. The incoming House majority leader, Mr. Boehner, has referred to the period ahead as an “adult” time for political leaders. Only time will tell whether or not the “freshmen” coming into office can pass the first major test of being responsible bourgeois managers of the US economy. Will they vote to raise the debt limit of the United States again (as is tradition) or will they act in accordance with the lunatic ideology they’ve espoused in the run-up to the election? The pressures upon the Republican Party from the right are analyzed deeper in another article within this issue of Internationalism that deals specifically with these elections. Instead, this article will turn its attention more pointedly towards the elements of austerity that the working class are faced with today and try to present these elements within a historical framework of global capitalism’s permanent crisis.

The Necessity of Historical Perspective

There are layers of mystification whenever the bourgeoisie attempt to analyze and represent the crisis to the working class. One of the first layers is through (mis)-classification. Case-in-point, the crisis as a “financial” crisis that has its roots in the 2008 bursting of the housing bubble and the meltdown of some of the largest financial institutions. This is a necessary layer of deception for the bourgeoisie, whose principle assault on revolutionary consciousness is the stripping away of any historical framework for analyzing the capitalist system. With a degree of calculation characteristic of the Machiavellian class, the reframing of the crisis as a financial one is directly in line with this tactic of isolating historical crises within a-historical frameworks. For revolutionaries, it is therefore necessary to establish and reiterate the historic nature of this crisis before diving into the austerity that the bourgeoisie find compelled to enact.

Make no mistake about it: the “financial” crisis is a material crisis. It is a physical crisis whose roots lie in the limitations of capitalist accumulation as a global system. The crisis can be further understood in the disparate impacts on society. The working class, as always, bears the full brunt of the crisis. One indicator of this truth is the exponential rise of foreclosures. Millions of people have already lost their homes with the onset of this latest deepening of the crisis, and the latest statistics from November 2010 indicates that more than 100,000 people lost their homes that month alone! Furthermore, layoffs continue unabated. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has even formed a program entitled “Mass Layoffs Summary,” whose most recent report begins with the line: “Employers took 1,586 mass lay-off actions in November involving 152,816 workers.”¹ Of course, this only measures those newly added workers filing for unemployment insurance—excluding the droves of proletariat classified as “long-term discouraged workers” who no longer fall into the convenient methodological categories of bourgeois economists. Meanwhile, the bourgeoisie are effectively insulated from the most direct material effects of the crisis. As the New York Times reported, “the truth is that there have been surprisingly few career fatalities among New York developers, even though they have lost billions of

1 <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/mmls.nr0.htm>

investor dollars on overpriced real estate and have littered the city with unfinished apartment buildings. While a homeowner who lost a house to foreclosure would find it difficult to borrow for years, developers who defaulted on enormous loans have still been able to attract money.”²

Presented with this reality, the frantic calls by the bourgeois ideologists of the Friedman ilk fall on deaf ears and reveal their true message: the sacrifices must be made by the working class, while the bourgeoisie enjoy all the protections under the law. In this sense, the illustrated image of sacrifice in the face of the crisis would be a capitalist pig settled upon the mounded corpses of the working class. Ironic that the loathsome Bernie Madoff was criticized so strongly for his pyramid schemes—the entire capitalist system is necessarily pyramidal! However, we must avoid a certain simplification of the crisis that states that the bourgeoisie are completely outside of the material impacts of the crisis. This analysis suggests that the bourgeoisie are completely protected, yet this cannot be further from the truth and a historic framework for understanding the crisis exposes the very real dangers this period of capitalism pose not just for the working class but humanity.

The latest deepening of the crisis is the culmination of decades of desperate measures taken by the bourgeoisie to offset the unraveling of their economic system. The restructuring of the international monetary system arising out of the Bretton Woods conferences, the institutionalization of outsourcing, the extensions of personal consumer debt and the financial gymnastics representative in the mysterious “derivative” instruments—all illustrate the increasingly extreme and abstract actions taken by the bourgeoisie to stave off the crisis. These actions, however, can’t overcome capitalism’s fundamental contradictions, which came to the fore once more in 2008 with frightening clarity. The bourgeoisie have been wrestling with this crisis for a long time, and they are running out of options.

The terrifying impact of social decomposition also weighs heavily on the bourgeoisie’s ability to rule. Segments of the ruling class seem to have gone completely insane and are losing their ability to govern the state and orient it towards the interests of national capital. In decadent capitalism, the state is a vital institution in maintaining capitalist rule in the face of ever sharpening economic contradictions and internal ruling class squabbles. There seem to be insurgent elements of the ruling class that seek to “abolish the state” (while saving capitalism!); all in some highly ideological nostalgia for a period of capitalism that has never existed. For the working class its historical challenge is socialism or barbarism not the abolition of or the limitation of the powers of the state. With the rise of lunatic factions of the bourgeoisie and the gripping terror representative within social decomposition, the importance of this question cannot be emphasized enough.

Who is to be the judge, jury and executioner?

Nationally, the bourgeoisie certainly have appeared quite clumsy in their priorities and capability with regards to enacting austerity. The proposed healthcare plan by President Obama, which from the very beginning was a tool in offsetting the costs from US manufacturers domestically and maintaining US imperialism abroad, was met with vicious and often terrifying populist backlash. This is despite the fact that the healthcare reform proposals certainly were in the interests of national capital, for the mentioned

2.- Real Estate Developers Prosper Despite Defaults, New York Times, January 1, 2011.

reasons. However, Obama has appointed a bi-partisan ‘National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform’, known as the ‘deficit commission’, which is taking a sober look at the state’s finances. The commission’s initial report, entitled *The Moment of Truth*, clearly put the cards on the table: “We cannot play games or put off hard choices any longer... Our challenge is clear and inescapable: America cannot be great if we go broke. Our businesses will not be able to grow and create jobs, and our workers will not be able to compete successfully for the jobs of the future without a plan to get this crushing debt burden off our backs... Together, we have reached these unavoidable conclusions: The problem is real. The solution will be painful. There is no easy way out... If the U.S. does not put its house in order, the reckoning will be sure and the devastation severe... The national interest, not special interests, must prevail.”³

Although the plan did not win enough votes among the members of the commission to be passed along to Congress officially, its austerity proposals for dealing with the budget deficit will likely be part of any future plan for addressing the mounting national debt.

Whatever the obstacles the bourgeoisie finds itself ensnared with, these have certainly not slowed down the slew of austerity proposals. The privatization of social security, the proposed extension of the retirement age to 69, are all necessary in the face of the crisis but there is no reason to suspect that these will pass easily. In the face of all of these measures, the working class finds itself again being called upon as the savior of a system that cannot ever operate for anyone except the minority class that the state serves as defender of.

For all the difficulties the bourgeoisie find at the national level in enacting the necessary austerity measures, they have had nothing but comparatively stellar success at the local and state levels. Austerity measures have been brutally instituted across the nation as the individual states seek to reduce their budget deficits in order to continue operating. The venomous assault on the working class coming out of New Jersey Republican governor Chris Christie is a principal example of such effective wielding of power. Among the first targets in periods of austerity is education, and Christie delivered the goods when he cut over \$1 billion dollars from the state’s education funding laying off teachers and privatized a slew of public sector jobs in the year he’s been in office.

All of this in spite of resistance from Democrats with regards to the severity with which he has instituted the cuts. Regardless of the forces that may find disfavor with Christie’s style of enacting the measures, there is little in the way of significant power being mobilized by other politicians to slow Christie’s crusade to “walk the talk.” In fact, there is little which Christie has done which hasn’t been achieved or attempted by Democratic politicians as well. The selective memory displayed by New Jersey Senate Majority Leader Barbara Bruno when she toothlessly criticized Christie for sacrificing jobs and gutting the social safety net is appalling, when nearly a year ago President Obama hailed the laying off of Rhode Island teachers as a necessary part of his education ‘reform’.

New Jersey isn’t the only state in which the bourgeoisie has been able to push through austerity measures with seeming impunity and a complete disregard for human life. Starting in October 2010, Arizona—a state 3.-*The Moment of Truth*, p. 6, NCFRR, December 2010. http://www.fiscalcommission.gov/sites/fiscalcommission.gov/files/documents/TheMomentofTruth12_1_2010.pdf

that certainly hasn’t shied away from increasingly bizarre expressions of bourgeois brutality—began reversing approvals on life saving organ transplants through the state’s Medicaid program. This left patients without coverage for pending transplants and if they couldn’t cough up the cash, often exceeding \$100,000, then they would be denied a transplant and will die.

These two states provide some of the most compelling and drastic examples of how austerity has been viciously enacted at the regional level. These examples show us what may be in store with the recent massive Republican victories across the spectrum, although it must be recalled that the successful campaigns of Jerry Brown and Gavin Newsome as the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of California, despite being Democrats, does not suggest anything remotely more positive. Jerry Brown, who militarized the Oakland police force, and Gavin Newsome, who gutted the public sector workers in San Francisco over the last two years, certainly have the credentials required by capitalism to enact the brutal austerity in this time of added strife and strain

The bourgeoisie only speaks in lies

The bourgeoisie is very careful to enact austerity filtered through a system of propaganda which justifies the measures. As the crisis deepens, the capacity of previous lies to carry the same water weakens and new lies are necessary so that the latest assault against the working class can continue unhindered. At the root, there is no filter greater than that of the much cherished bourgeois ideology of “democracy.” The variations of this theme are many, as both major parties are able to twist the rhetoric to suit their aims, but they are still illustrative as they expose the bourgeoisie’s capacity to distort even its own scandals into bludgeons with which to further batter the working class.

In California, the scandal around the tiny city of Bell erupted when it was discovered that the three top city employees—the police chief, a city council member, and an assistant city manager—each earned over \$300,000 a year and combined their salaries exceeded \$1.2 million! This revelation was revealed by the Los Angeles Times in 2010 and resulted in these three individuals resigning from their posts. The weeks following the scandal saw the story twisted from a story about top city employees (managers) earning too much to a story about “public workers of Bell” getting paid more than they deserve. The actual story was one of corruption; a part-and-parcel element of decadent capitalism, but no opportunity to deflect public outrage and further divide the working class will be lost by the managers of the capitalist economy.

Bourgeois ideologists quickly began clamoring for “transparency” with regards to public sector jobs. This steady drumbeat culminated in the City of Los Angeles publishing, through the LA Times, the salaries of all of its city employees (exempting only the power and water workers) under the guise of “transparency.” By this time, the LA Times had led the charge in rechristening the Bell scandal as a “salary scandal” and quoted Los Angeles City Controller Wendy Gruel’s justification for the publication: “The public’s trust has been broken as a result of the recent scandal in Bell. This is an important step to provide greater transparency and openness in how taxpayer dollars are spent.”⁴ The public’s trust was broken by the exposure of the ruling class’ de-

4.-‘L.A. city employee salaries posted online’, LA Times, August 6, 2010.

<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2010/08/la-city-employee-salaries-posted-online.html>

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US Mid-Term Elections...

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“underconsumption” in which the wages of the working class have been reduced so far in real terms that they simply cannot afford to buy what is produced. While this problem was suppressed during the last 20 years through a massive resort to consumer debt, this logic has now run its course. According to the Reich-Krugman thesis, another round of Keynesian stimulus is necessary to put more money in consumers’ pockets, eventually causing economic growth to resume and unemployment to drop. Only once a “normal economy” prevails again do followers of the Reich-Krugman thesis believe reducing the national debt should become a priority for the national state. To enact austerity too soon and too fast could be a disaster.

It doesn’t take much analysis to recognize that in the short-term these two policies are in complete contradiction to one another. One calls for contracting the economy in order to improve the long-term fiscal position of the state, while the other risks making the national debt worse in order to improve the economy now. However, it shouldn’t be surprising that two different factions of economists produce two contrasting visions of the most important policy priorities for the state. This simply reflects the fundamental contradiction that state capitalism finds itself in on the international level. After nearly one hundred years of full-fledged state capitalism, nearly all states find themselves faced with a fundamental choice in the face of the permanent economic crisis: attempt to stimulate the economy and risk further long-term fiscal damage or enact austerity now and potentially cause a weak economy to become comatose.

Nevertheless, we should not interpret the debate between these two policy positions as evidence of any real difference within the U.S. bourgeoisie over the need to enact austerity against the working class’ living and working conditions. All bourgeois factions recognize that the fiscal crisis of the state is real and will eventually need to be dealt with by making “painful sacrifices.” The policy debates within the bourgeoisie at the moment concern only the timing of austerity and the question of whether or not another round of stimulus—given the long term risks—will actually help the economy recover. Despite a concerted media campaign directed towards the working class around the threat to the nation posed by the national debt, a strong faction within the U.S. bourgeoisie believes that greater stimulus is needed. At the moment, this faction appears to have the ear of the Obama administration.² The recent extension of the Bush era tax cuts, combined with another extension of the federal emergency unemployment compensation program and a cut in the Social Security payroll tax has been marketed by the administration as a “stimulus program” that they believe will add up to 1.3 million jobs in the next two years.³ Of course, all of the tax cuts and the extension of unemployment benefits will have to be charged on the national credit card.

The working class should not be fooled by the Obama administration’s continued resort to Keynesian policies. Behind these short-term policies, all factions of the bour-

2.- In this the U.S. bourgeoisie is bucking the international trend, which has seen most European states commence harsh austerity measures. Just as elements of the U.S. bourgeoisie fear ending domestic stimulus too early, they are also concerned that the European austerity measure might risk the recovery of the global economy.

3.- Even if the economy does add all the jobs advertised, this must be seen in the context of the 8 million jobs that have been lost since 2007, not to mention the debt ridden young generation of workers who arrive in the labor market every year when they can no longer hide in the higher education/student debt complex.

geoisie know that the day of reckoning is coming when the Scylla of debt and fiscal crisis will outweigh the Charybdis of unemployment and economic stagnation.⁴ The question facing the bourgeoisie at the moment is what political faction should hold state power when the assault on the social wage begins?

From the perspective of history, it would appear likely that the U.S. bourgeoisie would attempt to move the Democratic Party out of power so it could play the traditional role of the left in opposition when the Republicans preside over enacting the tough austerity measures that lie ahead. However, given the amount of turmoil that has occurred in the U.S. political system over the last decade; this is no longer either a straightforward decision or such a simple maneuver for the bourgeoisie to accomplish. While social decomposition has affected the entire bourgeois political spectrum over the last ten years, it has not affected both American political parties equally. Over the last decade the Republican Party has become increasingly penetrated by factions of the bourgeoisie that do not necessarily have the capacity to act in the overall interests of the national capital. The Republicans current coalition includes the obscurantist Christian Right, ideological libertarians who want to abolish the Federal Reserve, free-market fundamentalists, the most belligerent anti-immigrant factions the bourgeoisie has to offer and those who relish the legacy of Cowboy diplomacy from the Bush era. On top of this, we now have to add the Tea Party, many of whom are true ideologues who really believe the extreme philosophies they preach.⁵ While “mainstream Republicans” wise to the ways of Washington still control the levers of power in the Republican Party; they are under increasing assault from the right-wing insurgency in their ranks, causing them to pander to this constituency at the same time they manipulate it to improve their electoral position.

There are numerous risks for the bourgeoisie in the period ahead as it attempts to negotiate this difficult political situation. Should it move the Republican Party back into power in preparation for the tough austerity necessary, risking a repeat of the Bush years and empowering the ideological wing of the GOP? Should it rally behind Obama again in 2012 in the hopes of maintaining a more responsible and competent center-right Democratic administration, but risk upsetting the ideological division of labor against the working class?

The 2012 Presidential Campaign

In the days following the Mid-Term elections, Obama looked like a certain one-term President. His party had suffered an historic defeat at the polls. Democratic Congressional candidates in important industrial states Obama won in 2008, suffered defeat after defeat. The Democrats were even unable to hold Obama’s former Illinois Senate seat. The media called these elections a “Republican Tidal Wave.” It was billed as a total rejection of the Obama agenda, especially his controversial health care reform legislation. It was declared certain that the only way the Republicans would lose in 2012 would be to nominate an extreme Tea Party candidate like Sarah Palin. All the Republicans had to do to return to power in 2012 was nominate a credible candidate, who would promptly trounce a discredited and demoralized Obama. The Republicans would obstruct any and all legislation from making

4.- In many respects this attack is already underway at the state and local level, where governments do not have the same ability to resort to debt. See the article in this issue.

5.- For our analysis of the Tea Party see our article in Internationalism #154 *The Tea Party: Capitalist Ideology in Decomposition*.

it through Congress for the next two years, leaving Obama looking weak and ineffective. The public would reject him for sure.

However, just two short months since the election, the political wind has seemed to change once again. Obama is fresh off a series of important legislative victories in the lame-duck Congress and he now looks Presidential once again. He pushed the New START treaty with Russia through the Senate against the obstinate obstructionism of certain Republicans. He has also pushed through legislation ending the “Don’t Ask-Don’t Tell” policy in the military, which caused many qualified gay people to be banished from service. The ending of this policy was endorsed by Obama’s Republican Secretary of Defense against the gratuitous objections of a number of obstinate Republicans, including Obama’s 2008 Presidential opponent John McCain.

Most importantly, Obama has pushed through a compromise with Republicans which extends the Bush era income tax cuts for two years for all Americans—but which also extends the federal emergency unemployment insurance program for another 13 months⁶ and includes another round of tax cuts, which are expected by many economists to provide a decent stimulus to the economy over the next two years. According to some analysts, Obama completely outmaneuvered the Republicans on this legislation, enacting a form of economic stimulus bigger than anything that has preceded it.

Still, this did not stop a mini-revolt from taking place in the Democratic Party over the tax deal Obama struck with Republicans. So-called “progressive” Democrats rose in an angry revolt against their own President, accusing him of selling-out, compromising without fighting and caving into the Republican Party’s demands to continue irresponsible tax cuts for the richest Americans adding to the national debt.

For the better part of the week, left-wing blogs and the MSNBC network were ripe with calls for a 2012 primary challenge to Obama or the launching of a third party challenge from the left.⁷ Congressional Democrats vowed to vote against the tax compromise, while Bernie Sanders—the self-professed Socialist Senator from Vermont—grandstanded on the Senate floor with a mock filibuster against the tax compromise, railing against the decline in living standards of the American working-class, while the richest Americans keep on lining their pockets.⁸ During this period, a sense of shock and disbelief emanated from the base of the Democratic Party as they appeared to form an angry left opposition to their own President.

Nevertheless, quickly the hoopla died down and the tax compromise *qua* stimulus program won enough Democratic votes to pass both houses of Congress and become law. The drama over this legislation may be a preview of things to come. Should the bourgeoisie decide it is too risky to move the Republican Party into power, is it possible they could attempt to enact austerity through a center-right Democratic administration supported tacitly by “mainstream Republicans,” while the Democratic Congressional base plays the role of the left in opposition. At this time, we cannot say if this will occur. However, the controversy over the tax compromise gives some precedent for how such an arrangement might work.

Still, this governmental arrangement

6.- See the article *Failure to Extend Unemployment Benefits Reveals Impasse of the U.S. Bourgeoisie* at www.internationalism.org.

7.- Noted leftist Michael Moore hinted at a possible third party challenge to Obama from the left on the *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* show on MSNBC.

8.- It was almost as if the U.S. bourgeoisie was saving Sanders—who has quietly served as the only “socialist” in Congress for two decades—just for this occasion.

could risk further radicalizing the right-wing of the Republican Party and possibly evoking a split with the Tea Party and a third party challenge from the right. Many ideological Republicans in Congress will reject the attempts of their leaders to compromise with Obama.

Already a campaign is under way in the media—led by “responsible Republicans” to try to persuade Sarah Palin from running for President in 2012. While she may be useful for raising campaign funds for Republicans and rallying the conservative base to come out and vote, there is a general consensus among the main factions of the bourgeoisie in both parties that she would make a disastrous President—exponentially worse than Bush. Moreover, her candidacy could pose difficulties for moving the Republican Party into power in 2012, as she is likely to reenergize Obama voters from 2008.

In the final analysis, the U.S. political situation is currently characterized by the instability wrought by decomposition. All responsible factions of the bourgeoisie recognize the eventual imperative to enact austerity. However, there is little consensus at the moment about how to accomplish this at the political level. While history tells us that the bourgeoisie would seek to move the Democratic Party into opposition, so the Republicans can enact the needed cuts while the Democrats work with the unions to control the working class’ response; the current situation of decomposition makes this somewhat less than straightforward for the bourgeoisie. The ruling class could opt to try to enact these cuts with a center-right Democratic President in league with the Republican establishment, with the Congressional Democratic caucus, along with the unions⁹, playing the role of the left opposition. This course of action would come with the serious risk of upsetting the traditional ideological division of labor between the Democrats and Republicans. However, given the ideological deterioration of the Republican Party and the potential for a dangerous Presidential candidate emerging from its ranks, the bourgeoisie may have no other choice than to opt for such a policy.

Of course is it also possible that the effects of decomposition have already taken such a toll on the bourgeois political apparatus that in the end the main factions of the bourgeoisie cannot prevent a President Palin—or some similar right-wing cook—from taking office. If Palin decides to run, it is possible that the Tea Party insurgency will carry her to victory in the Republican primaries. As the Republican Party candidate, she may energize the Democratic base to come to the polls—but given the constraints of the American political system, in particular the anachronous Electoral College, it is possible that in a farcical repeat of the 2000 Election, Palin could win the Presidency, but lose the popular vote. While this is only remote possibility at the moment, we can be assured that it is an outcome the main factions of the bourgeoisie are preparing for and trying their utmost to avoid.

For the working class, the message is clear. The bourgeois political system offers us nothing but more pain, austerity and misery ahead. The decomposition of the capitalist political system has reached such a point that ruling the class itself can no longer be certain of obtaining its desired results through the electoral circus. Can there still be any question that this political and electoral circus is absolutely useless to our class? --Henk 12/25/10

9.- We should remark here that the process of decomposition has also affected the unions. Witness the participation of Andy Stern—erstwhile President of the Service Employees Union (SEIU)—in Obama’s Presidential Debt Commission. Stern proudly proclaimed that he would put service to the nation ahead of his loyalties to labor.

Imperialist Tensions Sharpen in East Asia

The shelling of the Yeonpyeong islands on November 23 by North Korea, killing two soldiers and two civilians, has brought tensions on the Korean Peninsula to a new height, with increasing worry throughout the world that the situation will develop into an explosive confrontation. Despite all the public displays of caution and concern for stabilizing the region, both the US and China have been playing a dangerous game of confrontations throughout East Asia over the past year, and each side is seeking to exploit the situation for the advancement of its own imperialist aims. The fact that North Korea, an isolated anachronistic state, is able to enrich uranium while the majority of its population is devastated by famines and droughts speaks to its strategic importance to China as a buffer against the South, where US troops have been stationed for almost 60 years. It is in this broader context that the conflict between North and South Korea must be understood.

After the shelling, the US accelerated plans to send the nuclear-armed USS George Washington aircraft carrier with 5 other warships to the Yellow Sea for joint naval exercises with South Korea. Beijing called for a renewal of the six-party disarmament talks with the US, China, Russia, Japan, and North and South Korea, and refuses to condemn North Korea for the shelling of Yeonpyeong, despite pressure from Washington.¹ In the South, defense officials have been forced to resign, and the defense policy has been changed from “responding in kind” to allowing aerial bombing of North Korea should there be another attack.

On December 20, New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson announced that he had reached an agreement with Pyongyang to allow UN nuclear inspectors back into the country only days before South Korea’s scheduled live-fire land drill, to which North Korea had threatened a response even more dramatic than the shelling of Yeonpyeong. After a weather delay, South Korea’s planned largest-ever live-fire military drills brought tanks, helicopters, fighter planes and hundreds of troops only 12 miles from the border. Despite prior threats of a massive response, Pyongyang was largely silent during the first two days the drills were being conducted and tried to play the role of the restrained, rational state. “The revolutionary armed forces of the DPRK did not feel any need to retaliate against every despicable military provocation,” said the KCNA official news agency. Yet on the third day of drills, North Korea’s minister of armed forces publicly said that his military is ready to wage “holy war,” including the use of the nuclear deterrent, against the South’s attempts to initiate conflict which he characterized as invasion preparations.²

Without the North Korea buffer, US troops would be directly on the Chinese border, and the US is seeking to further inject itself into disputes in the region as a counterpoint to its rapidly rising economic rival. Furthermore, China already paid a heavy price during the 2008 financial meltdown for anchoring its economic growth so firmly to the United States, and has been increasingly seeking to ‘diversify’ its imperialist portfolio, so to speak, in the form of a massive naval buildup, increased military involvement in Africa and Latin America, and the pursuit of

trade and monetary policies independent of Washington’s interests.

A year of mounting tensions

Almost a year ago, the US permitted weapons manufacturers to sell \$6.4 billion in weapons to Taiwan – including Black Hawk helicopters and Patriot Missiles, leading to the suspension of all military-to-military discussions between Beijing and Washington. In response to the North’s sinking of the Cheonan warship, Washington carried out joint US-South Korean military exercises (originally said to take place in the Yellow Sea) in the Sea of Japan. In July, at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum in Vietnam, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s offer to mediate the conflict between China, Vietnam, and Taiwan over disputed islands in the South China Sea was called “virtually an attack on China” by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jichi.³ At another ASEAN forum in October, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates stressed the United States’ interest in “freedom of navigation” in the South China Sea. The Financial Times summed up aims of the US in the region well, saying “*At a time when governments in the region and beyond are expressing concerns about China’s ambitious naval buildup, the forum gives the US an opportunity to present itself as a natural counterpoint to a rising China.*”⁴

China, for its part, has finally publicly announced its long-rumored plans for building an aircraft carrier, and anti-ship ballistic “carrier-killer” missiles. The State Oceanic Administration’s May 2010 *China’s Ocean Development Report* praised the carrier plans, saying, “*This shows that China has started entering a new historic era of comprehensively building itself into a great naval power. [This] is China’s historic task for the entire 21st century.*”⁵ Monetarily, Beijing and Washington squabbled about the revaluation of the renminbi throughout the year, and the very day after the shelling of the Yeonpyeong Island, a Russian exchange announced that it would begin doing business directly from rubles to renminbi, rather than in dollars.

Tensions on the Peninsula

This is not to say that the conflict on the Korean Peninsula doesn’t involve real tensions and ambitions of North and South Korea. On the contrary, it is because of the internal tensions in both governments that both the US and China and other allied imperialisms are keenly interested in the Korean situation. After Kim Jong-Il’s 2008 stroke, speculation about his chosen successor has filled the press and only this year did his choice of his youngest son, the 27-year-old Kim Jong-Un, become clear. Analysts in the bourgeois media have repeatedly cited this transition as a primary reason for China’s caution in condemning too sharply the shelling of Yeonpyeong. Various analysts have speculated about the popularity of this appointment with the North Korean bourgeoisie at large, with Kim Jong-Un lacking any real military experience, yet being promoted to the rank of four-star general and vice-chairman of the central military commission. A number of analysts have speculated that the Yeonpyeong shelling may have been a reflection of tensions between

the military and the party hierarchy, or that the appointment of Jong-Un necessitated providing him with military “experience” as the population seems to doubt his credentials and has been increasingly dissatisfied with Kim Jong-Il throughout the year as well.

The “Dear Leader’s” chosen successor is not the only issue threatening the stability of the North Korean regime. Early last year Pyongyang executed Chief Finance Minister, Pak Nam-gi over an attempted currency devaluation in November 2009, intended to deal with runaway inflation, which had to be almost immediately reversed after provoking food shortages and raising the price of rice almost 70-fold. All this was an attempt to make good on Kim Jong Il’s promise to revitalize the North Korean economy by 2012, when his youngest son is slated to take over. Thus the shaky transition from father to son, coupled with the economic woes of North Korea, both necessitate the DPRK’s acting out to secure concessions in economic relief and create ample opportunities for the US to try to curb the defiance of the Pyongyang regime if not squeeze it into collapse.

In the South, despite a long history of close relations, the United States has had a contentious relationship with the Seoul government in recent years, involving a number of sharp trade feuds about importing US beef after an outbreak of Mad Cow disease in 2003, and the month-long failure of the Obama administration to secure favorable market access conditions for beef and automobiles last November. South Korea and the United States only reached their trade agreement, which Obama called a “victory” for autoworkers and the environment, after the Yeonpyeong shelling.

In fact what we’ve seen since the collapse of the East-West bloc system which left the US as the sole superpower has been a situation in which individual states try to challenge US hegemony, yet no group of states has been able form a lasting community of interests to do this. Each nation tends to play one of their rivals off the other, creating an increasingly chaotic global situation. Japan had also seemed poised to take steps to pursue ambitions outside the purview of US approval, with a bill passed in late 2006 changing laws regarding its Self-Defense Forces to create for the first time since World War II

a real army, and the most recent Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama running on a campaign promise to relocate the US military bases in Okinawa. Hatoyama had to resign this year, after pledging to Obama that Japan would honor its commitment to keeping the US base, and Tokyo hoped to cut funding for the bases this year but was pressured by Washington to maintain the funding level, putting Japan’s own imperialist ambitions on hold to remain in the good graces of the United States.⁶ This seems to be what the US is hoping for throughout the region – to present itself as the sole power capable of “leading” the rest of East Asia against a rising China and increasingly aggressive North Korea, even attempting to secure a lasting alliance between South Korea and Japan under US tutelage.⁷

All of this gives the lie to the myth that any of the states involved are genuinely concerned with either protecting “democracy” or with the wellbeing of their inhabitants or the human species as a whole. The Korean question is expected to be at the top of the agenda for (Nobel Peace Prize winning) President Obama and Hu Jintao’s January 19 meeting, and restraint seems to be the watchword for the Koreans coming from both Washington and Beijing for the short term, while each side readies its weapons and brandishes its military might in plain view of the other. The challenge, for all imperialisms involved, is to continue with shows of force to pressure their rivals, without losing control of the already explosive situation. Yet in the end, imperialism is not about frightening the rival nation-states into “rethinking” their own aims, conceding strategic territories, and accepting unfavorable trade agreements with mere warning shots and drill. In the age of imperialism, every national bourgeoisie must pursue its own economic, military, and territorial expansion, or risk stagnation and total defeat in the economic war of “each against all,” despite plunging humanity further into the abyss.

-JJ 1/7/2011

6.- “Japan, US Reach Agreement on Military Hosting.” *Voice of America*, 14 December 2010. <<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/usa/Japan-US-Reach-Agreement-on-Military-Hosting-111852179.html>>

7.- Kirk, Donald. “North Korea tests limits of South Korea, Japan cooperation.” *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 January 2011. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/2011/0105/North-Korea-tests-limits-of-South-Korea-Japan-cooperation>>

Workers Pay for the Crisis

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pravity in allotting for themselves the goods of a system that invariably leads to economic insecurity, crisis and war? Corrupt as it was, the combined salary of \$1.2 million between three people pales in comparison to the salaries being meted out to Wall Street insiders and corporate leaders.

These are the necessary elements of capitalism’s historic crisis. It’s no wonder the story had to be redirected to further ensure that the working class is divided. Other cities have followed suit, and not only in California — Philadelphia has similarly “opened up” under the guise of democratic principles. The race to the bottom has always fed calls for austerity, everyone must be dragged down to ever further levels of inhuman, humiliating treatment—everyone, except those who rule.

There is no freedom in bourgeois democracy

There can be no doubt that capitalism’s historic crisis is deepening with a seeming

disregard for the bourgeoisie’s various attempts to buy time. Even where austerity has been viciously enacted, there’s no indication that the crisis is being alleviated. Job cuts lead to more jobs being cut; human life is degraded at a terrifyingly exponential rate. This is a global trend, which even affects the economic “miracles” which the capitalist ideologists love to point to so much—the income disparity, the impact on the environment, the wonton disregard for human life is just as real in the periphery of the advanced capitalist nations as in California—one of the largest economies in the world!

The only alternative for revolutionary minorities and our class is class struggle. The task of the future freedom of mankind is not in some bourgeois notion of “democracy,” but in the working class’ revolutionary consciousness and the struggle it wages to create a society where production is oriented along the principle of: from each according to his ability and to each according to his need. This inability—in the end—to provide for human needs must be seen as the fundamental failing of capitalism. *Sheldon 01/06/11.*

1.- China co-wrote and re-wrote a UN Security Council resolution together with Russia, which condemned the attacks but didn’t name North Korea and was rejected by the US, France, and Japan.
2.- “N. Korea threatens nuclear ‘holy war.’” MS-NBC.com. 23 Dec, 2010. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/40788151/ns/world_news-asia-pacific/
3.- Tan, Hwee Ann & Ben Richardson. “China Plans More Patrols in Disputed Seas, Daily Says.” *Bloomberg Businessweek* 26 December 2010. <<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-12-26/china-plans-more-patrols-in-disputed-seas-daily-says.html>>

4.- Bland, Ben; Geoff Dyer & Mure Dickie. “US warning to China on maritime rows.” *The Financial Times*, 11 October 2010. <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ac600588-d4fa-11df-ad3a-00144feabdc0.html#axzz19w3GJu00>>

5.- Hille, Katherine & Mure Dickie. “China reveals aircraft carrier plans.” *The Financial Times*, 17 December 2010. <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fa7f5e6a-09cc-11e0-8b29-00144feabdc0.html?fcamp=rss#axzz19wT0Thfp>>

A “Shining” Example of Capitalist Collapse

Tourists to Ireland are invited to explore a land of myths and legends. Over the last fifteen years imaginative tales about the state of the Irish economy have added enormously to the available mythology.

From the mid 1990s there was the tale of the Celtic Tiger, the story of how Irish prosperity was becoming so entrenched that even perpetual emigration was being reversed. As George Osborne put it in 2006 “Ireland stands as a shining example of the art of the possible in long-term economic policymaking.”

But since Ireland became the first country in the eurozone to go into recession there has followed, from the emergency budget of October 2008, an escalating series of austerity measures and funds pumped into banks during 2009 and 2010. Far from leading to a happy ending the spending cuts and tax rises have only led to the latest round of cuts and the €85 billion bailout from the IMF, EU and ECB.

There was nothing substantial in the ‘prosperity’ and the imposition of austerity will bring only suffering, offering no solution to the crisis of the capitalist economy.

The latest round of attacks

The most recent measures proposed at the end of November are by no means the last: more are expected in the budget of 7 December. What we have already seen over the last two years are the loss of thousands of jobs and the cutting of services that the majority of the population relies on. One in seven is already officially out of work and workers in the public sector have already seen their wages cut. In the latest package the minimum wage has been cut by 1 euro per hour (that’s 12%). The income tax threshold has been brought down from €18,000 to about €15,300, bringing more of the lowest earners into the tax regime. Pensions have been frozen for the next four years. Pension age will gradually be increased to 68. There will be cuts in a variety of welfare payments,

including unemployment benefit, but the details will not be revealed until 7 December. VAT will go up in 2013 and also 2014. Carbon tax is going to be doubled. A brand new water tax is going to be introduced, as well as a property tax that will affect all households. The government’s calculations rely on 100,000 people emigrating by 2014.

In response to each round of government attacks there has been a major demonstration organized by the unions. This time round the Irish Congress of Trade Unions made sure it got over the message that the austerity measures were unfair and too harsh and it was a pity that Corporation Tax hadn’t been put up. Many protesters insisted that the government were ‘puppets of the EU and IMF’. Even government ministers complained that Ireland, like Portugal, was being pressured into accepting EU/IMF conditions. While financial support came from the IMF, various EU bodies and also the UK, Sweden and Denmark, the Irish state was compelled to make its contribution to the bank bailout by taking €17.5 billion from the National Pension Reserve Fund.

There is no secret in the role of the IMF and EU bodies. After Greece, the bourgeoisie internationally was anxious that the collapse of the economies of Ireland and Portugal would have an impact on the stability not just of the eurozone, but far beyond. The UK is not part of the eurozone, but the government judged its €7bn contribution as a necessary step to take, ultimately in the interests of the British economy. All economies are interrelated; none can function in isolation from the rest of the world economy. After the latest bail-out there was still concern about the possibilities of success with the Irish economy, as well as speculation about whether it would be Spain, Italy or Belgium that would be the next country in need of emergency treatment.

False alternatives

As for the harshness of each round of at-

tacks, the critics might disagree on details, but, as in the UK, there is agreement on the need to deal with the deficit. Sinn Fein, for example, have recently produced a document entitled ‘There is a better way’, which they boast “is fully costed and endorsed by independent economists.” In it they claim that greater taxing of the rich and big corporations will generate billions, and if the government were to “take €7 billion from the National Pension Reserve Fund for a three and a half year state wide investment programme” it would “stimulate the economy and create jobs.” The deficit would be reduced because the stimulus to the economy would bring growth. The experience of the capitalist economy over the last hundred years has shown that whether resorting to debt, investment, spending cuts or tax rises, no government has found a way of escaping the reality of the capitalist economic crisis.

Socialist Worker (27/11/10), writing about the Irish crisis, has a solution that will suit all countries. “Governments could take the banks under full control—taking any profits, sacking the bankers and using the cash for projects society needs... Taxes should be massively increased on the rich and business [...] The expenditure on imperialist war and the military should end tomorrow. Governments such as Greece and Ireland could defy the International Monetary Fund and the European Union’s demands for cuts.”

The nationalization of the banks is already very far advanced in Ireland, as it is in the UK and elsewhere. Following the latest bailout the government stake in the Allied Irish Bank is more than 96%; in the Anglo Irish Bank it’s 100%; in the Bank of Ireland (so diminished that it’s now a smaller financial institution than Paddy Power the bookmaker, but it is still a bank) it’s more than 70%; in the Irish Nationwide it’s 100%, as it is with the EBS. The intervention of the capitalist state in every aspect of economic and life has been a major trend over the last century and in no way represents any gain

for the working class. The Socialist Workers Party does talk about the need for a “powerful mass movement” but only as a way of backing governments. To say that Greece or Ireland could ‘defy’ the IMF and the EU is a denial of the reality of the capitalist economy: beggars can’t be choosers. And, if there were to be a foolish show of ‘defiance’, then the renunciation of military expenditure would be unwise, as capitalist powers very readily resort to military ways of enforcing their will.

As for the increased taxation, behind this lies the idea that if only capitalist society was organized in a different way it could be made to function without exploitation and economic crises. A year ago, in December 2009, Irish Finance Minister Brian Lenihan said: “We have turned a corner . . . If we work together now and share the burden, we can deliver sustainable economic growth for all.” A year later we can see that no corner was turned and that, far from sharing the burden, the poorest are the biggest victims. As for growth and sustainability, wherever they are shown to exist in the world you can be sure it’s at others’ expense.

The large demonstrations that have accompanied each wave of announcements have shown that there is widespread anger in Ireland at how the exploited have to pay for the crisis. In opinion polls 57% think the government should default on all its debts. This would produce no more gain than has resulted from the union controlled demos. As elsewhere the needs of the working class can only be met through workers organizing themselves, from discussing the means and goals of their struggle, and fighting for their own interests. To put any confidence in governments or unions is fatal for workers’ struggles. The history of the workers’ movement shows that government reforms and union processions offer the working class nothing, as the only reliable perspective lies in massive struggles culminating in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. 12/1/10

Revolt in universities, colleges, schools: A beacon for the whole working class

A whole series of demonstrations up and down the country, strikes by university, Further Education, sixth form and secondary school students, occupations in a long list of universities, numerous meetings to discuss the way forward... the student and pupil revolt against the rise in tuition fees and the abolition of EMA payments is still on the march. Students and those supporting them have come to the demonstrations in high spirits, making their own banners and their own slogans, some of them joining protests for the first time, many of them finding new ways of organising the protests. The strikes, demonstrations and occupations have been anything but the tame events which the trade unions and the ‘official’ left are usually given the job of marshalling. Spontaneous walk-outs, the taking of Tory HQ at Millbank, the defiance or creative avoidance of police lines, the invasion of town halls and other public spaces, are just some expressions of this openly rebellious attitude. And the disgust at the condemnation of the Millbank demonstrators by NUS chief Aaron Porter was so widespread that he has had to make a grovelling apology.

This outpouring of barely-controlled resistance has worried our rulers. A clear sign of this is the level of police repression used against the demonstrations. On 24th November in London, thousands of demonstrators were kettled by the police within minutes of setting off from Trafalgar Square, and despite

some successful attempts to break through the police lines, the forces of order detained thousands of them for hours in the cold. At one point mounted police rode directly through the crowd. In Manchester, at Lewisham Town Hall and elsewhere, we have seen similar displays of brute force. The newspapers are playing their usual role as well, printing photographs of alleged ‘wreckers’ after Millbank, running scare stories about revolutionary groups targeting the nation’s youth with their evil propaganda. All this shows the real nature of the ‘democracy’ we live under.

The student revolt in the UK is the best answer to the idea that the working class in this country is going to passively put up with the torrent of attacks being launched by the new government (in continuity with the previous government) on every aspect of our living standards: jobs, wages, health, unemployment and disability benefits as well as education. They are a warning to the rulers that a whole new generation of the exploited class does not accept their logic of sacrifice and austerity. In this they are echoing the massive struggles which have shaken Greece, France, and Italy, and which are threatening to explode in Ireland, Portugal and many other countries.

But the capitalist class, facing the deepest economic crisis in its history, is not just going to cave in to our demands. Not ideology, but the very material logic of their dying system

compels them to make these attacks. And to force them to make even the most temporary concessions, we have to realise their greatest fear: a working class that is organised, united, and conscious of what it is fighting for.

This is no utopia. It’s already taking shape in front of us. The capacity for self-organisation can be seen in the initiatives of demonstrators on the streets, and the insistence on collective decision-making in occupations and meetings, the rejection of manipulation by would-be bureaucrats, however ‘left wing’ they claim to be. The tendency towards the unification of the working class can be seen when teachers and lecturers, parents, pensioners, workers from other sectors or the unemployed take part in general meetings in the occupied university buildings or join the student demonstrations, when students go to the picket lines of striking tube workers. Consciousness about the goals of the movement can be seen both in the formulation of clear demands for today and in the growing recognition that this society cannot offer us a human future.

But we also have to discuss how to take these efforts further, because they are just the beginning. In our view – which we think is based on the experience of both past and present struggles of the working class – there are some concrete steps that can be taken right now, even if their exact form may vary from place to place:

To keep the struggle under our control, to make sure decisions are made collectively and not imposed from above, we need to organise mass meetings in the schools, college and universities, open to both students and employees. All committees and co-ordinations that speak in the names of these meetings have to be elected and recallable;

We need to make direct links between different schools, colleges and universities. Don’t leave it in the hands of the union apparatus or self-appointed leaders;

To broaden the movement beyond the education sector, students need to go directly to the employed workers, to the nearest factories, hospitals and offices, calling on them to come to their meetings, to join their occupations and demonstrations, to walk out alongside them and bring their demands into a common fight against austerity and repression.

David Cameron keeps telling us: we are all in it together. And he certainly is in it ‘together’ with his class and its state and its parties, which includes the Labour Party just as much as the Lib Dems and the Tories. All of them are in it to save the capitalist system at our expense. But we are in it together with all those who are exploited and oppressed by this system, in every country of the world. Today we are in it to defend ourselves from being exploited even more. Tomorrow we shall be in it to end exploitation altogether. ICC, 2/12/10.

WikiLeaks Media Scandal...

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I think fairly modest.”¹

However, notwithstanding the opinion of this highly regarded representative of the US dominant class, there are still highly polarized opinions about WikiLeaks and its release of these and other US government classified documents. On one extreme there are some individuals that consider WikiLeaks as some sort of “cyber” terrorist organization and are calling for the “heads” of the people behind this organization. The US Justice Department itself has said that it is exploring possible charges against WikiLeaks and its main representative Julian Assange, possibly under the Espionage Act of 1917, a draconian World War I era law that calls for death penalty or long terms of prison for those that disseminate information detrimental to the US national security.

On the other side of the dispute stand those that consider WikiLeaks as some kind of 21st century exemplary champion of “democracy”, and call for its defense against the authoritarian State in the name of “freedom of the press”, “free speech”, “government openness” and other bourgeois democratic myths. Among the defenders of WikiLeaks are some self described anti-imperialist “Marxists” that, with quotations from the Marxist “classics” in hand, call on workers to rally behind the defense of Julian Assange and its organization, and for the defense of democracy itself.

But what really is WikiLeaks?

In our opinion the characterizations of WikiLeaks by both detractors and defenders are highly exaggerated. In fact this organization is neither a stateless high-tech terrorist enterprise, nor some sort of new kind of political organization championing the defense of people’s democratic rights (whatever this means). And it is certainly not a CIA creature aimed against the “free press”, although one can’t ignore the fact that WikiLeaks or any other similar organization could well be used as a means to disseminate damaging information about other imperialist rivals. In our opinion the identity of WikiLeaks is more prosaic: this organization is nothing more than a news media enterprise, with a “working model” made possible by the internet era, and in this sense is not distinct from other internet-based companies with more successful (profitable) records.

However what makes WikiLeaks stand out is that it has been built around the clever marketing tool of “opposing” the excesses of capitalist governments by a supposedly independent media (them), not compromised by the subservient role to the capitalist system played by traditional commercial news media outlets (to further its rebellious credentials WikiLeaks has always promoted the idea that it was founded not by some smart business people, but by a mix of “dissidents” from China and computer specialists and intellectuals around the world.) And how does WikiLeaks pretend to accomplish this lofty task? Through a supposed new “model of journalism” which is based on distributing “leaks” (sources) given to it free by altruist “whistleblowers”, as opposed to the dissemination of content (analysis of facts) – a common task of the old news media. It’s worth mentioning that some investigative journalists in Russia have not been impressed by this rather lazy “journalism” and have criticized WikiLeaks for releasing documents “without checking of the facts, without putting them in context, and without analyzing them”².

1.- ‘Gates on Leaks, Wiki and Otherwise’, *NY Times*, November 30, 2010.
<http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/gates-on-leaks-wiki-and-otherwise/>
2.- ‘Wikileaks Case Highlights Crisis in Journalism, Soldatov and Borogan Say’, *Windowoneurasia*,

Sure, to be fair to the founders of WikiLeaks, there might be money to be made in the future by this capitalist venture, but their business idea is hardly “subversive”, even if it has managed to irk a few bourgeois bureaucrats around the world. The so called traditional media outlets (which by the way have contributed immensely to WikiLeaks’ rising fame) have never seen themselves threaten by WikiLeaks’ “new model of journalism”. On the contrary, they have seen it and used it for what it is: a business enterprise that provides the “leaks” from which their news making business depends. There is no reliable information, that we know of, about the amount of money that the official bourgeois commercial media has provided to WikiLeaks (legally WikiLeaks is a non-profit organization that functions through “donations”), but it is a public fact that the *Associated Press*, *Los Angeles Times* and the *National Newspaper Association* among others have provided it with hundreds of thousands of dollars “in legal support”. Furthermore, Julian Assange himself seems eager to capitalize on WikiLeaks rising fame and had been providing scenarios through which the organization can make money: selling on auctions the “leaked” information in its possession is one of the ideas being floated around.

At the time of writing the “WikiLeaks af-

November 30, 2010.

<http://windowoneurasia.blogspot.com/2010/11/window-on-eurasia-wikileaks-case.html>

fair” is again heating up. *The New York Times* (one of the media news outlets that Julian Assange calls “partners”) has restarted the publication of articles based on the “state secrets” exposed in the diplomatic cables provided by WikiLeaks (in the January 3, 2011 edition one is informed that the US government uses all political means at its disposal to further the commercial interests of the aircraft manufacturer Boeing throughout the world – anyone has the right to ask where is the state secret here? But the rub is that, according to the interpretation of *Times* reporters of these classified documents, the government’s motivation for its aggressive sell tactics of Boeing hardware is to keep American workers employed!) Besides, the stage is being prepared through a new media sensationalist campaign for another WikiLeaks stunt, this time centered on exposing the inner dealings of capitalism’s financial world: act two, be tuned in as Mr. Assange fulfills his promise of brining down a US major commercial bank. It is really getting boring!

We don’t have a crystal ball and can’t predict the future of WikiLeaks. It might well have seen its fifteen minutes of fame and collapsed, while its founders move on to new capitalist ventures. Already it is said that some its founders have jumped ship and are creating other similar enterprises. As for Julian Assange, his star status will likely guarantee him a comfort-

able living and new amorous adventures (he should be more careful with the condoms though!) and won’t see much in terms of criminal charges by the US government. The real loser so far in this scandal is the naïve US soldier, Private Bradley Manning, who “leaked” the US government files to WikiLeaks: he is being made an example to others that might be tempted to play heroes by disseminating information that the democratic State has decided to keep out of reach of its subjects.

Let’s be clear, from a working class perspective, the WikiLeaks affair is only important because the bourgeoisie is cynically using it to reinforce its ideological domination over society, pedaling the myth of bourgeois democracy and its self capacity for criticism making capitalism the best and only possible world. All this at a time when the working class all over the world is being subject to unprecedented draconian attacks to its working and living conditions by a capitalism system going through the worst economic crisis in history. The world proletariat does not need more “democracy”, “accountable governments”, “independent media”, “transparent business practices”, etc. Our task is not the impossible reform of capitalism, but the overcoming of its outdated relations of production that are sinking the whole of humanity in a growing spiral of barbarism.

Eduardo Smith, 01/06/2011.

Miners Challenged Union Manipulation

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when a van of relief collected in New York by a teachers’ union, the American Labor Party and the Progressive Party came into the Barrackville local union. Those who brought the good and clothing came with movie cameras and lights to photograph the delivery, and they in-turn were photographed and their visit reported in the local press (...) many blacks accepted the relief. The implication was that they were somehow un-American for accepting the ‘Red’ food (...) The press attacks became so vicious that many local union presidents publicly denounced the acceptance of any ‘Red’ food, some even declaring that ‘Red’ food sent to their locals should be dumped into the river.” (p.28). “It was in Detroit that autoworkers organized a city-wide relief program to help the miners with the giant Ford local 600 spearheading the effort. Food and clothing to fill five huge trailers were donated by the workers and others, including students, who contributed generously to the appeal.” (p.30). Another characteristic of how class solidarity works was shown “When the miners cheered the 12 tons of food that the auto workers had sent, and a check for \$1,000 from United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 600, and another \$333 from Local 155, Joe Hogan (UAW) rose to say that the auto workers didn’t come ‘to get thanks from the miners, but to give thanks to the miners for their splendid fight,’ which was not only on behalf of themselves but helped the whole labor movement.” (p.30). William Massey of the relief committee concluded: “Our victory shows what can be done when we fight together.” (p.30). “The relief committee, in operation for only two weeks, got over \$6,000 in cash contributions from workers in other industries, plus the relief truck caravan. The relief pipeline was open. The operators and the government were not going to starve us into submission.” (p.31). Not only did the miners win this strike but

the experience they went through widened even further the gulf between the rank-and-file and the top of the unions, in the person of John L. Lewis. The next year, in 1951, a wildcat strike erupted in Northern West Virginia, where the miners demanded seniority rights; they knew that the ‘Continuous Miner’ would cause an enormous amount of layoffs and they wanted the seniority system to have protection from automation. “The wildcat strike centered on Consol’s 13 mines in Northern West Virginia, but quickly threatened to spread as miners from other areas began to plead for us to come and pull them out because they faced the same situation. So intense were the feelings of those of us on strike that we forced Lewis and Consol to negotiate a seniority protection clause without first going to work. This was the first time a provision was won while workers were on strike.” (p.31). Under the renewed pressure of these very militant wildcat strikes, the bosses from the mines and the unions had to give in. Recognizing the threat of these militant workers, the bosses chose to give-in in order to prevent these experiences of self-organization spreading through the wider working class.

Lessons For Today

The pamphlet from News & Letters from 1984 concludes as follows:

“Lewis and the operators had clearly understood the revolutionary implications in the 1949-1950 rank-and-file movement. That became the last great strike Lewis ever led, and never again directly involved the rank-and-file in any contract negotiations. All subsequent contract talks were held in secrecy, and we first learned of new agreements when they were reported in the press (...) Within 10 years, from 1950 to 1960, the nation’s miners were slashed from 500,000 to less than 175,000. The whole of Appalachia became a permanently depressed region for two decades.” (p.32). “The historic significance of the 1949-50

strike, however, was not only that the miners had revealed the course of the strike that they were far ahead of their leaders (...) they had also demonstrated that to achieve their ends they had to create their own organization- the mass meeting. They made their own decisions, carried them out in opposition to the power of the government, coal operators, a hostile press and their own union leadership, and at the same time had directly involved broad segments of the working class in the nation. To some, many of the things the miners did seemingly spontaneous, as though the actions came from nowhere. Just the opposite was true. The spontaneity of the miners flowed from their own repeated collective thought and action that preceded their ‘spontaneous’ activity.”

We can only add that this experience, as many others confirm, of the working class since the onset of capitalist decadence can only achieve temporary victories and a rise in its class consciousness through self-organized struggles. It is the only way of developing its collective capacities of solidarity and the perspectives of a class that has the capacity to overthrow capitalist social relations. It has to rise up and affirm its historic role of freeing humanity from class based societies and capitalism (whose only solutions to its crisis of overproduction are austerity measures and war). The working class has a communist perspective for humanity, because in its radical struggle lays the germs of a strong solidarity and class consciousness that are totally opposed to the logic of capitalist society. Now that the working class in the United States is reacting to the crisis and austerity measures, it is very useful for the working class to remember its own capacities for self-organization and solidarity, largely unknown to the present generation. *JZ / 12.12.2010*

(1) The Coal Miners’ General Strike Of 1949-1950 And The Birth Of Marxist Humanism In The US by Raya Dunayevskaya.

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60 Years Ago: Miners Challenged Union Manipulation of Strike Actions

One of the characteristics of the miners' strikes in the United States was their deep rooted confidence in their unions as defenders of the working class. While this was true during the 19th century during the ascendant period of capitalism, by the beginning of the 20th century with the onset of capitalist decadence the unions were gradually integrated into the state machinery through regulation of working conditions and guaranteeing labor discipline, only 'demanding' the most modest and limited benefits. During the early 20th century, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was a proletarian response to the change in function and operation of the established labor unions and worker's parties when capitalism entered the period of decadence. Though once the counter-revolution gained the upper hand after the decline of the first revolutionary wave (1917-1927) in the latter half of the 1920's, the unions regained their grip on the working class and were able, with few difficulties, to aid in the militarization of labor for the war effort of World War II.

After the Second World War, the US lived through an important upsurge in class struggle that often moved outside of the union stranglehold and asserted itself as a class with its own interests separate from those of the state. One such experience was the miners' strike movement of 1949-1950.

How Did It Start?

Following the imperialist world war the United States emerged as a world superpower and the leader of the Western imperialist bloc, a position which required it to assert strict discipline at home and imposed on its workers the Taft-Hartley Act (passed despite a veto from President Truman) in 1947; mainly to curb organized labor's power and introduce a major provision that established an 80-day 'cooling off' period for strikes that could supposedly create a 'national emergency'. A long established tradition of 'No Contract, No Work' had become part of American labor, and there had been mass rank-and-file opposition throughout 1947 and 1948 to the Act- which caused swift action to be taken by the Truman ad-

ministration (since Truman had won the 1948 Presidential election under the promise to repeal Taft-Hartley). All through 1949 there was a back and forth fight between the administration and the President of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), John L. Lewis. Although he is considered an important strategist, his actions against the US Direction of Mines always used the miners as a maneuverable mass in order to obtain some amelioration at the expense of any self-organization practiced by the workforce.

Two events that shook the miners were the wildcat strike of 62,000 Ford Rouge auto workers against speed-ups at the huge Detroit plant and the introduction of the 'Continuous Miner'; a Caterpillar mining machine (called 'man-killer' by the miners) that would worsen labor conditions considerably (more dust, heat and danger of fires) and reduce the need for the current workforce to only one-third of its size compared to traditional mining practices.

Mid-September a strike had started as a result of an announcement by Lewis of the suspension of all payments by the UMWA Health & Welfare Fund because the coal operators were refusing to make their royalty payments and the Fund's resources had been cut. It started in the largest captive mine in Barrackville and the state's largest commercial mine, Grant Town, both in Northern West Virginia, where local union meetings were called. Almost immediately, union miners all over Northern West Virginia and Southwestern Pennsylvania had followed suit. Roving pickets mushroomed throughout the area to halt all production and transportation of coal, including non-union operations. Many of the miners were armed. The strike spread throughout the whole of Appalachia- West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Ohio- with Western miners also walking out to make the strike total. Lewis ordered the 78,000 Pennsylvania hard coal miners as well as the 22,000 soft coal miners west of the Mississippi back to work, whereas on the next day United Steelworkers (USW) President Murray called a steel strike fol-

lowing the collapse of mediation talks with the government. This was the first time that coal and steel were on strike at the same time, with over 900,000 workers walking out. During those same summer and fall months auto workers at Ford, Chrysler and GM also went on strike. But the rejection of a joint strike fund by American Federation of Labor (AFL) President Green and the separate agreement at the end of October with Bethlehem Steel thwarted the possibility of a General Strike.

Workers Overrun Union Strategies

With the Eastern miners ordered back to work to their three day work week by Lewis, the rest of the miners felt isolated and so the Consolidation Coal Company brought a court action against UMWA to fight the three day work week. But when Lewis called the six Consol mines in Morgantown-Fairmont out, most of the other area miners spontaneously walked-out as well. When they were called back to work by Lewis, they voted against it. There was mass spontaneous picketing and every picket line was honored. "Monday, the day Lewis had ordered us to go back to work, came and went. Not only did we stay out, we began to spread the strike." (p.20). Union bosses, like Urbaniak and Cappellini, who tried to regain control of the strike movement were booed and in the meetings the miners re-affirmed their determination to spread the strike throughout the country and to stay out 'until hell froze over'. "This turning point, begun at the Sunday Grant Town meeting, reached irrevocable completion at the Thursday Monogah meeting. The rank-and-file were now in control of the strike." (p.21). As soon as Truman invoked the Taft-Hartley Act the union could be fined for contempt of court and so too could every miner that would try to influence any other miner to stay out on strike. But activists found out that it is against the Constitution of the United States for a law to be passed against an individual. So the miners found the answer when the cable came with Lewis' back-to-work telegram. They said, "We have all heard the telegram. I can't tell you what to do, but

they can't pass a law against an individual. You can do what you want, but I can't tell you I'm not going back to work until we have a contract! Meeting adjourned." (p.22). So the miners reconvened with the legal decision and continued the strike, but now they had to organize themselves if they were to be successful.

Workers Assert Their Own Class Perspectives

The ruling class was stunned by this loophole in the law and tried by all means to quell the strike and to starve out the miners and their families. This was the reason why so many miners' wives participated in an important role during the mass picketing and the organizing of relief to the neediest families. Because the strike was declared illegal, "all established avenues of aid dried up or cut off, the top priority became massive relief to help the miners and keep the operators from starving us in defeat." District officials tried to sabotage the setting up of a miners' relief committee that would seek help from workers of other industries who were sympathetic to the miners and were anxious to help. Once the relief committee was approved in Grant Town, WV, "committee members were appointed to go out and get aid from other workers throughout the country (...). The following week, two miners headed East to Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York, and two others went North into Ohio and Michigan. All were totally committed to winning the strike, and no more effective speakers could have been sent out to do the job." (p.25-28). One should not forget that, "the local press and company stooges tried to whip up anti-Red hysteria, accusing the strike leaders of being Communists or dupes of Communists and charging that Reds and outside agitators were infiltrating and taking over the leadership of the strike." But the rank-and-file stood firm and defended their strike and relief committees. "The red-baiting and accusations took a particularly vicious turn

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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*.