

CHALLENGE

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California Fires: Bosses Fiddle While Workers Burn

LOS ANGELES, Oct. 26 — At this writing, over 1,800 homes have been destroyed and 12 people killed in fires that swept through southern California carried by the Santa Ana winds. Several immigrants trying to cross the border died and others were badly burned. The fires were worst in the San Diego area: over 300,000 acres burned, 1,500 buildings destroyed and 500,000 people evacuated.

But U.S. rulers' priority is protecting imperialism, not ensuring enough firefighters, flame retardant materials or water-carrying planes nor preparing levees in New Orleans to withstand fierce hurricanes.

The bosses' media is crowing about their "reverse 911 system" which automatically called people to evacuate, but many immigrant farmworkers were not warned and not allowed to leave the fields. In New Orleans, black workers suffered the most. The conditions at the Super Dome there were hellish; people were left without food, water or sanitation. In San Diego, immigrant workers were murdered trying to find or keep jobs in the local farming industries. Racism is the cutting edge of the attack on all workers.

Unlike New Orleans, most of those evacuated in San Diego had cars and could escape the fires. Volunteers, not the government, provided almost all the food, water, cots, toiletries, etc., and worked at San Diego's stadium and other evacuation centers.

Politicians, including Bush and Schwarzenegger, spent lots of time on TV congratulating themselves for the work performed by these volunteers.

But the firefighters were overstretched and had insufficient resources to fight these fires, including too few planes to drop water and fire retardant material. As is common in southern California, 3,000 prisoners were sent to clear brush and fight the fires.

Every fall winds and drought conditions mean potential fires in southern California. In 2003, understaffed fire departments lacking necessary resources faced big fires in San Diego County. In 2004, a Blue Ribbon Fire Commission recommended many improvements but they never materialized. Fire Chief J. Bowman quit in June 2006, having said the department was "ill-equipped" and "understaffed." (San Diego Union, 4/5/06)

Local real estate bosses, who control local government, refuse to invest to fund

better fire protection. These developers are frequently behind initiatives that say no to raising their taxes for new fire services. San Diego still has no county-wide fire department.

In richer communities developers covered homes with a special retardant that protected them from fire, raising the price of the homes. Only the very wealthy can afford this extra cost. In these areas, the houses did not burn and the residents were able to stay inside as the fire skipped around them.

Three days into the fire, the electric company pleaded with people to cut electricity use, which residents desperately needed for air conditioners to counter the toxic smoke. Pollution in LA and San Diego Counties is as much as ten times above safe levels. The fire shut several power lines connecting San Diego with other counties and states but there was little excess transmission-line capacity or local power-generation capacity. Ten percent of the county's power had to be imported from Mexico. Workers were forced to quickly repair lines in dangerous areas to avoid a complete San Diego black-out.

From New Orleans to Minnesota to San Diego, U.S. infrastructure (including firefighting and electric power) is strained beyond its limits. (See CHALLENGE, 10/31) Luckily, these fires mainly hit suburban and rural areas where more people have cars. If San Diego's urban area had to be evacuated, as proposed by the City Attorney, the resources simply aren't there.

Now in California many white workers as well as Latino, Asian and black workers lost their homes in these fires. While such losses were preventable, no reform of capitalism will significantly change the situation. In fact, funds for any added firefighting equipment will come from workers' pockets and may be linked to a push for "national service" (drafting youth to perform these tasks).

Capitalism exists to make capitalists rich, not to protect workers and their families. It can't meet workers' needs. The murderous U.S. bosses need workers to fight to defend their empire. In a communist society with no profit motive or imperialist wars for world domination, society's driving force will be organizing production, housing, safety and defense to guarantee the well-being of the working class. Building the fight for communism is truly a life-and-death question for our class. ☸

Anti-Racist Students Blast Fascist Horowitz's Hate-Mongering

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, Oct. 22 — "Fight Anti-Muslim Racism! Build Multiracial Unity Across All Borders!" proclaimed posters blanketing campus in response to the David Horowitz-sponsored "Islamofascism Awareness Week" (IFAW). They were posted by student organizations opposing IFAW's racism and war-mongering and its attempt to build support for U.S. imperialism's resource wars in the Middle East and worldwide. The poster was part of a series of actions challenging IFAW on campus, including a teach-in, documentary screening and a number of op-ed pieces in the college newspaper.

Many students, faculty and workers were upset with the blatant racism being promoted by IFAW, but viewed it as a "freedom-of-speech" issue. Other students pointed out that IFAW's racist hate speech has nothing to do with "free speech," but is an attempt to win workers and students to fascist ideas and activities rooted in jingoism, nationalism, patriotism and anti-immigrant xenophobia.

"Free speech" is a myth in class societies, especially under capitalism, where the ruling class controls the overwhelming majority of the means of communication, and the university itself, deciding most of what gets taught in classes and the framework of academic and intellectual discussions. Racist and fascist ideas must be opposed at every opportunity, whether in the university or on the shop floor.

After an anti-war documentary screening before 37 students, a speaker traced the economic roots of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq: the need to dominate Mid-East oil for profit and to secure the U.S. global empire. The IFAW's racism tries to hide this fact, presenting the "War on Terror" as a defense of "Western democracy" and against radical Islamic politics. It argues that U.S. imperialist wars are in the interests of workers and students, trying to convince them to sacrifice blood and sweat for the ruling class's profits.

But while Exxon-Mobil's profits skyrocket and more wealth is accumulated at the top, workers lose their homes and face wage-cuts, vanishing pensions and declining health benefits. Every day workers must suffer more closed hospitals, higher prices for daily necessities and neighborhoods devastated by racist cutbacks, police terror and increasing poverty and unemployment, from South Central Los Angeles to Oakland to the Ninth Ward in New Orleans. This is the reality of capitalism and its imperialist system.

Later that week, a teach-in brought out nearly 60 students and campus workers. A faculty speaker exposed the racist sensationalism behind Horowitz's language, and the fact that fascism historically has been rooted in capitalism and its need to maintain exploitative relations. The ruling class funds and supports his racism and attempts to build U.S. nationalism as tools to prepare workers, students and soldiers for wider resource and profit wars.

While liberals may publicly distance themselves from outright racists like Horowitz or the Minutemen, they fully support their racist and warmongering ideas which they promote in more subtle and dangerous ways. A student speaker also linked today's wars to the long history of U.S. imperialist terror against the world's workers for the benefit of the capitalist class.

Throughout the week internationalism and multi-racial solidarity among workers, students and soldiers were stressed. Students, faculty and workers called for unity to fight Horowitz's racist attack not only on Muslim families, but on the whole working class. CHALLENGE and PLP's communist politics proved crucial to mobilizing students around anti-racist, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist ideas rather than "free speech" issues, helping to organize a multi-racial group of students who understand more why capitalism must be smashed and replaced by a communist world. ☸



Turkish Rulers' Challenge to U.S. Leading to Wider War

The New York Times and its chief foreign correspondent Thomas Friedman are worried that the Democrats are helping the Bushites squeeze Iraq out of the 2008 Presidential election debate. Says Friedman (NYT, 10/24), "All the leading Democratic contenders have signaled that they will not precipitously withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq, but the air has gone out of the Iraq debate." A Times editorial (10/20) complained that, "It was bad enough having a one-party government when the Republicans controlled the White House and both houses of Congress. But the Democrats took over, and still the one-party system continues." These liberal rulers are very concerned about the Bushites' mishandling of this war.

But Iraq isn't going away. Witness the escalating crisis between the Turkish army and the PKK guerrillas (Workers' Party of Kurdistan). A hypocritical U.S. Congressional resolution about Turkish genocide against Armenians during World War I helped worsen the crisis. Turkey's rulers are threatening a military assault on PKK bases inside Iraq (authorized by Turkey's Parliament). The Turkish army has massed 100,000 troops at its border with Iraq to attack PKK bases in Iraq's northern mountains.

The Bush administration is trying to forestall a Turkish invasion. After all, northern Iraq is controlled by Kurdish forces which have sided with U.S. imperialism in the Iraq war. Relatively it's the most stable area in Iraq. It also contains some of the largest oil deposits near the city of Kirkuk, which the Kurdish nationalists have given Bush's pal Hunt Oil rights to develop (see CHALLENGE, 10/31, on Hunt's competition with the Eastern Establishment's big oil outfits like Exxon-Mobil). Turkish rulers want

to control that oil, opposing its control by Kurdish nationalists.

The Iraq war has sharpened all the contradictions in Eurasia. Since World War II, Turkish bosses have been loyal allies of U.S. imperialism, particularly during the Cold War against the old Soviet Union. But times have changed. Turkish rulers now want a bigger piece of the pie. An article by George Friedman, head of Stratfor Intelligence Report, entitled "Turkey as a Regional Power" (10/23) says:

"Cautious in World War II and strictly aligned with the United States during the Cold War, Turkey played a passive role: It either sat things out or allowed its strategic territory to be used....The situation has changed dramatically.

"In 2006, Turkey had the 18th largest economy in the world — larger than that of any other Muslim country, including Saudi Arabia — and the economy has been growing...between 5 percent and 7 percent a year for five years....It has a substantial and competent military.... It also is surrounded by chaos.

"Apart from Iraq to the south, there is profound instability in the Caucasus to the north and the Balkans to the northwest....Turkey has a vested interest in stabilizing the region. It no longer regards the United States as a stabilizing force.... It views the Russians as a long-term threat to its interests and sees Russia's potential return to Turkey's frontier as a long-term challenge." Several of the old Soviet republics now sit as a buffer between Russia and Turkey but the Turks see the Russians flexing their oil-powered muscles to possibly threaten Turkey over the long run. Historically Russian and Turkish rulers have always fought over control of the oil in

the Caucuses and Caspian Sea region.

Meanwhile, the U.S., while saying it opposes terrorism, actually supports a Kurdish guerrilla group in Iran which is aligned with the PKK and shares its same mountain bases in northern Iraq. So the U.S. is playing a dangerous game, simultaneously trying to placate the Turkish ruling class and the U.S.'s Kurdish allies ruling northern Iraq. Some in the Bush administration haven't forgiven Turkish bosses for barring a U.S. invasion of Iraq from Turkey in 2003. But huge amounts of supplies used by the U.S. invaders in Iraq now come through Turkey, including a U.S. air base in southern Turkey. And Turkish troops are helping NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Kurdish nationalists are preparing for another sellout of their aspirations for a separate state composed of Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. In the past, the Kurdish nationalists have become pawns of Iran's Shah, Saddam Hussein and other regional despots. The PKK, which claims to be "Marxist," is no different. It's basically a nationalist group aligning itself with U.S. imperialism and the pro-U.S. Kurdish rulers of northern Iraq. Its sister guerrilla group in Iran is becoming a U.S.-Israeli bosses' weapon for a war against the mullahs there.

However, many Kurdish workers and youth have often supported what they view as Marxist groups looking for a revolutionary answer to the national oppression Kurds have suffered at the hands of the Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian and imperialist bosses. These workers and youth must unite with their brothers and sisters region-wide to build a red-led movement fighting for the only solution to this imperialist hell: communism.

WHAT WE FIGHT FOR:

☆ **Progressive Labor Party (PLP) fights to smash capitalism — wage slavery. While the bosses and their mouthpieces claim "communism is dead," capitalism is the real failure for billions all over the world. Capitalism returned to the Soviet Union and China because socialism failed to wipe out many aspects of the profit system, like wages and division of labor.**

☆ **Capitalism inevitably leads to wars. PLP organizes workers, students and soldiers to turn these wars into a revolution for communism — the dictatorship of the proletariat. This fight requires a mass Red Army led by the communist PLP.**

☆ **Communism means working collectively to build a society where sharing is based on need. We will abolish work for wages, money and profits. Everyone will share in society's benefits and burdens.**

☆ **Communism means abolishing racism and the concept of race.**

☆ **Communism means abolishing the special oppression of women workers.**

☆ **Communism means abolishing nations and nationalism. One International working class, one world, one Party.**

☆ **Communism means the Party leads every aspect of society. For this to work, millions of workers — eventually everyone — must become communist organizers. Join Us!**

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Teachers, Parents, Students:

Unite vs. Bosses' Divisive 'Merit' Scheme

NEW YORK CITY, October 17 — Today, instead of allowing discussion of anti-racist resolutions in support of the Jena 6, United Federation of Teachers (UFT) President Randi Weingarten changed the agenda of the Delegate Assembly (DA) to push the racist and divisive merit pay and pension plans of billionaire Mayor Bloomberg and former prosecutor Chancellor Klein. Amid increasing racist attacks, noose hangings, beatings, cop murders and the legal lynching of the Jena 6, Weingarten appealed to rampant individualism to push aside the fight against racism to win teachers to collaborate (her word) with our bosses.

The centerpiece of this new deal is the merit-pay scheme under which schools showing improvement in test scores and attendance will get money, perhaps as much as \$3,000 per teacher. Each school that votes for it will have a committee — the principal, another administrator and two UFT members — to decide who gets the money. This scheme will tear teachers apart.

Workers will be divided over who "deserves" the extra money. The principal will try to reward his favorites. Teachers vying for the money will try to avoid teaching students who have problems. Teachers whose students do not "progress enough" will be blamed if the school does not get the money. Schools will be focused even more on racist testing as a means to determine educational "success." This will push the ideology of individualism and material incentive: the only reason people work harder is to get more pay.

The fact is, those whose main concern is a higher paycheck run from students and become administrators or union hacks or simply kiss up to the principal. Most teachers are already working hard, not to beat someone to a bonus, but because we want our working-class students to learn. Offering extra money to "teach better" is an insult. It implies that we are not concerned about our students and will be "good teachers" only if the bosses reward us. The fact is, the ruling class really does not want us to be good teachers. They don't want us to teach youth the truth about capitalism and the necessity and ability to

get rid of it and build communism — a system run by the working class. Under communism the needs of the working class will come first and we will work based on our political commitment to our class, not based on some "bonus" or other material incentive.

The bait to get teachers to buy into merit pay is the "improved" pension plan. The two are being sold as a single package. But even the bait is poisonous to the working class. Presently UFT members must work 30 years or until age 62 to retire with penalty-free pensions. Educators who started working before 1974 could retire earlier with better pensions. Under the new deal, UFT'ers can retire at age 55 after working 25 years if they agree to pay more into the system each year beginning now. But new hires will have to pay more all through their careers and must work 27 years before retiring — an "eat-your-young plan."

Only in the last ten minutes of the Assembly did Weingarten allow the discussion of the Jena 6 resolution. A delegate who had earlier challenged the agenda change rose to speak about the increasing racism, including the attack on a black UFT member by the police in June. She demanded that the union stop congratulating itself on passing resolutions, start organizing within the schools and make fighting racism a focus of UFT chapters. Weingarten proposed yet another "committee." We must make this an organizing committee that builds the anti-racist fight in our schools. When the meeting ended the delegate was thanked by several others for speaking about this growing racism.

UFT "leaders" and the ruling class depend on racism and individualism to keep union members divided from each other and from our students and their families. We must expose Weingarten's collaboration. We must not fall for opportunism and material-incentive ideology. We must build unity of educational workers and our students and their families, and recruit them to PLP. This can lay the basis for creating a society in which the "reward" for hard work will be a decent life for our entire class.✊

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fight back



Students Protest Fascist Horowitz's Anti-Muslim Racism

UC Berkeley

BERKELEY, CA, Oct 28 – David Horowitz's "Islamofascism Awareness Week (IFAW)," a deranged celebration of lies, ignorance, war and racism, crash-landed on college campuses Oct. 22nd. Many schools saw through this farce and were successful in preventing the events (Only 32 of the expected 200 schools actually went through with IFAW), but Berkeley was not so fortunate.

Prior to IFAW, a student group coalition formed which quickly affirmed a pacifist stance. The leadership decided to address the events indirectly, so as not to obstruct the "free speech" of IFAW. Events emphasizing inter-religious unity and cultural diversity were planned, avoiding the political implications of IFAW in wartime context. Comrades and some other students proposed actively fighting and confronting racism but the liberal line won out. Laying to rest their claims of not being racist, and that IFAW was about "promoting scholarly debate," the mostly all-male College Republicans harassed a group of Muslim women and their Caucasian friend, calling them "terrorists" and "race traitor," respectively. Comrades invited students from a political film class to confront this racist movement.

IFAW consisted of a forum, a film screening and a rally. At the Monday kickoff forum, PLP members joined students and the community to protest Nonie Darwish, author of the anecdotal "Now They Call Me Infidel: Why I Renounced Jihad for America, Israel, and the War on Terror." In her book and during interviews, she holds that "after 9/11, there is nothing America has or has not done that causes terrorism," because "terrorism is the duty of every Muslim." Darwish was greeted with jeers and was consistently disrupted.

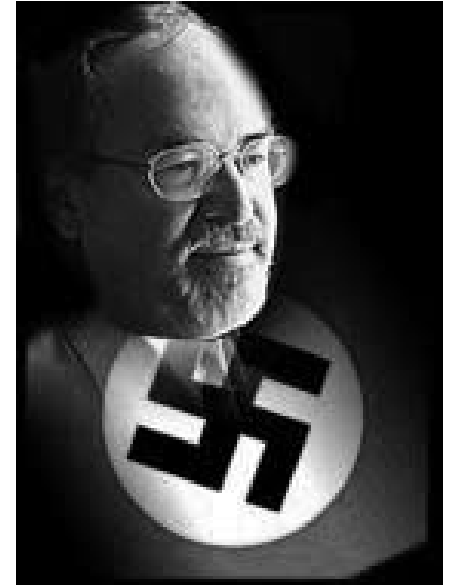
Aiming to further deceive the audience, Darwish asked for the support of the American "left" in addressing the mistreatment of women in Islam. Outbursts continued, and Darwish later said this was the largest amount of protest she had ever ex-

perienced. Wednesday's screening of "Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West" was made possible only through heightened police protection. On Thursday, the College Republicans held a pathetic 20-minute rally. They appeared shaken and were barely audible, even before students shouted them out! Actively confronting and fighting racism works!

IFAW is classic imperialist rhetoric. Concern is feigned in order to create public acceptance of "The War on Terror," in which control of the mostly Muslim Middle East and its oil is vital to U.S. imperialism's survival. This is a deliberate propaganda effort aimed at the fighters and engineers of tomorrow's wars: students, whom Horowitz feels need extra encouragement.

There are over 1,000,000 Iraqis and nearly 4,000 U.S. soldiers now dead. The huge bipartisan-approved war budget and Dept. of Homeland Security safety precautions have resulted in rising tuition, cuts to healthcare and education, racist profiling, detentions, deportations, spying, and legalized torture. This is an attack on the entire working class. This is "Imperio-fascism." The stakes are too high, and we cannot afford to see IFAW out of context. Darwish was ignorant or evil enough to state on Monday that "the discussion had nothing to do with Iraq." The College Republicans, supporting this isolationist argument, stated that protesters "confused the issues at hand." Horowitz and his roster of opportunists (Coulter, Santorum, Pipes, Darwish, etc.) would have us believe that terrorism stems solely from Islamic fundamentalism, not American foreign policy, not extreme poverty, not growing inequality, not imperialism, not capitalism.

To rid ourselves of cockroaches, we turn on the lights. If not exposed, confronted, and combated, they grow. Similarly, allowing racism to go unopposed makes racists feel it is okay. Let's not forget that there are consequences to speech and ideas. In the case of IFAW, they are war, racism and the death of millions of workers. This is not free speech, it is free murder. Oppositional 'free speech' is tol-



erated as long as it is accompanied by inaction, as only actions in the interest of the ruling class are allowed.

The events of IFAW show the potential of multi-racial unity and anti-racist action. PLP members and their student allies will build from this action. While this racist movement is important to confront, we must expose the more dangerous liberal-led movements. While openly racist republicans stab us in the front, wolves-in-sheep's-clothing democrats stab us in the back! 99.999% of democrats have supported the war, and the presidential candidates will not take Iran off their sights. Come the elections, don't vote, revolt! Join PLP in the fight for a society where the needs of the working class are primary and there are no imperialist wars for profit. Read, subscribe to, write to and struggle with CHALLENGE, the revolutionary communist newspaper of PLP and weapon of the working class. ☪

Enraged Hospital Workers Storm Bosses' Office

BROOKLYN, NY, October 20 — Yesterday at a hospital here, a group of workers representing the day and evening shifts stormed into the Human Resources department expressing rage and anger over working conditions, short-staffing and gross disrespect towards healthcare workers.

This action was planned for a month. The workers were very vocal. One remarked, "The system stinks. I became a health worker in order to take care of sick people, but I cannot, given the workload that demands me to take care of fifteen to twenty patients."

Another said, "I'm an environmental service healthcare worker. We're short-staffed. Many departments are not being cleaned properly. Over the weekends the floors are not swept and most of the time trash remains until the beginning of the week."

Still another said, "The bosses' supervisors and a few doctors are very disrespectful towards the workers. They speak to us in an inappropriate manner."

One worker replied, "Under the profit system the bosses will always treat the workers with contempt. However, the workers must always wage a struggle against this type of behavior, by confronting the supervisors in their offices with other workers."

The director of Human Resources was very apologetic. He said they'll "look into the problem." Afterwards, the workers called a meeting with the 1199/SEIU union representative who was present. A few workers advocated informational picketing around the hospital. The union leadership said the members should have given management "a chance to respond." A majority of workers agreed.

However, the union leaders do not advocate class struggle. They operate within the rules laid down by the bosses' system. They might win a few grievances and arbitration cases, but these are only reforms that the bosses will reverse later. Class collaboration cannot beat back these attacks.

Here there is understaffing in all areas. Patients lack care. On any particular day, by shift's end many workers are completely worn out. The bosses have been renovating the hospital with huge profits made off the workers' and patients' backs.

They've spent millions on new technology to compete with other capitalist-run hospitals in the drive for more profits for themselves, their stockholders and the banks that finance them. Meanwhile, the emergency room is packed with patients waiting for hours. Increasingly, patients are returning within days of being discharged due to incomplete treatment.

The majority of workers and a large number of the patients at this hospital are black and Latino. The system's racism exacts an even greater toll on these groups, which eventually affects ALL workers, as evidenced by the continuing decline of the ability to obtain decent healthcare in the U.S. The rulers are driven to spend workers' taxes on waging their imperialist wars in the Middle East for control of oil resources while ignoring the healthcare needs of workers here.

Capitalism surely ruins our lives. But the class struggle continues until workers build a mass revolutionary communist Party — PLP — that can overthrow this rotten system. ☪

Hit Columbia University's Racism

NEW YORK CITY, October 26 — Over 50 Columbia University students, alumni and others protested the appearance of racist Columbia alumnus, David Horowitz. His presence followed a week of anti-Muslim rhetoric and speakers, hosted by the College Republicans — "Islamofascism Awareness Week" (IFAW).

It also followed weeks of hate crimes, including a noose hanging, swastika graffiti and a message threatening Muslims left in one building stating "AMERICA is for WHITE EUROPEANS." Numerous organizations planned several events throughout the week, including the main protest before Horowitz's speech, joined by a number of Muslim students and a PLP member. The Muslim Student Association didn't participate, believing the protest would "legitimize" Horowitz's message.

Students gathered in the center of the campus to listen to various speakers denounce Horowitz. A PLP member who spoke linked this anti-racist struggle to the fight against Columbia's expansion, racist research and war funding. He said Horowitz represents one wing of the ruling class that wants to use racist terror to whip up support for the war, but was also dangerous because he

continued on page 5



MASS STRIKES, UNION BETRAYAL MARK FRANCE CLASS STRUGGLE



PARIS, October 26 — The October 18 nationwide strike of thousands of transport and utility workers revealed both the strength and the weakness of the working class in France. Strength in the strike's potential: 73.5% of the railroad workers went out, as did 58% of the Paris commuter train workers and 45% of the gas and electricity workers. These percentages greatly exceeded past strikes to defend workers' pensions. Accompanying protest marches in dozens of cities totaled 300,000 demonstrators. But weakness was seen in the complete sellout by union misleaders and their deal with right-wing president Nicolas Sarkozy. The workers showed tremendous fighting spirit, but all in vain.

Workers here are taking a beating. Sarkozy is successfully playing the union hacks against one another, taking away 60 years of gains.

On September 9, French Prime Minister François Fillon announced that the government had — without negotiations — already arbitrarily written the law eliminating the special retirement plans that were established to compensate for hardships endured by railroad, commuter-train, gas and electrical workers and sailors, among others. They allow retirement at 50 or 55.

In 1995, Prime Minister Alain Juppé attempted a similar attack, but two months of strikes, especially among railroad workers, forced him to back down.

Ending these special benefits is a necessary first step in the bosses' breaking the working class's

unity and fighting spirit, since next year the government intends to raise the years of dues-paying required for full retirement from the present 40 to 41 (effective in 2012).

Most union hacks reacted mildly, one favoring "progressively changing" the retirement plans instead of abolishing them, while another tried to play Sarkozy against Fillon.

But Christian Mathieu, a leader of the SUD-Rail trade union, denounced Fillon's announcement as a "declaration of war" and called for a strike, forcing the others to participate to save their credibility.

They immediately sabotaged the strike. The CFDT and the CGT unions (which, combined, comprise over half of France's 1.8 million union members) limited the strike to those directly benefiting from the special retirement plans, and then for just one day.

Clearly, then, the railroad workers would spearhead the strike, especially the train crews; 87% of the train crews support three unions: the CGT, SUD-Rail and the FGAAC (a narrow craft union of train crew workers). If the FGAAC workers scabbed, it would break the strike.

On October 17, Sarkozy secretly offered FGAAC general secretary Bruno Duchemin's train crews retirement at 55 (instead of 50) while the other rail workers would retire at 60 (not 55). After allowing the FGAAC to strike on October 18, Duchemin called it off, hailing the sellout of his own union's members and of all workers as a great victory.

This betrayal broke the back of the strike movement, enabling the CGT and CFDT to stick to their losing one-day walkout strategy. Following strike balloting by several workers' general assemblies, SUD-Rail, UNSA and FO, representing 35% of the rail workers, nonetheless called for the strike to continue. For the next five days, rail traffic remained disrupted in the Paris area and two outlying regions.

On October 22, the union hacks said they would give the government nine days to revise its attack

on the special retirement plans or risk another one-day walkout. They've abandoned keeping these pensions intact. Instead, they will mimic the FGAAC, hailing the government's takeaways as a "triumph," arguing that "it could have been worse." These spineless bureaucrats are wasting the energy and self-sacrifice of the working class in France.

Unfortunately, CHALLENGE was exactly right in its prediction (5/23) following the French presidential elections: "The working class here faces a period of sharpening struggle.... Years of reformist politics and business unionism have taken their toll. The union hacks won't fight against the massive capitalist attacks on workers or against racism and imperialist preparations for endless wars. Only dedicated revolutionary work to strengthen class consciousness can rebuild the unity and combativeness the working class needs."

One bright spot was the October 20 demonstrations defending immigrant workers. Some 3,000 marched in Paris while demonstrations occurred in 30 other cities. Two days later, one charge against schoolteacher and immigrant rights activist Florimond Guimard (see CHALLENGE, 10/31) of "willful violence with a weapon, to wit a vehicle" was dropped, but he still stands accused of "resisting the police."

Seven federations of civil servants have called for a one-day public-sector strike on November 20, demanding higher wages, jobs and defense of social services. Five of the teachers' craft unions joined the movement, notably to condemn the government's plan to axe 11,200 education jobs next year. This strike can help workers regain their self-confidence and militancy.

However, only much bigger, longer and tougher strikes have a chance of breaking the government attacks. For that to happen, traitorous union hacks must be dumped. Lasting victory can only come from smashing the government and the capitalist system it represents. For that, workers, soldiers and students must organize for communist revolution. ☛

Imperialist Rivalry Over Oil Behind Myanmar Turmoil

An eerie calm has settled over Myanmar (Burma), the recent scene of massive demonstrations against its military junta, led by saffron-robed Buddhists who were squashed brutally by the army and armed goons. It is the calm before more storms ahead because Myanmar is a bone of contention in the intensifying inter-imperialist rivalry.

Two things have put it in the imperialists' crosshairs: its rich natural resources — abundant timber, minerals, hydropower, oil and gas — and its strategic location. Energy security and total control of the sea lanes across which this energy is transported is an imperative for the major imperialist powers bent on world domination.

As this struggle heats up, the capitalist/imperialists are mercilessly attacking the international working class. Myanmar is a vivid example: 90% of its 50 million members of working-class families earn under \$300 a year, spending 70-80% of that on food alone. A 500% increase in oil prices triggered the latest unrest, hiking inflation 35%. Nothing short of communist revolution can eliminate this crushing poverty and capitalism's oppressive rule.

U.S. rulers' main strategy is control of Myanmar, to militarize the Strait of Malacca, thereby controlling the sea lanes from the Persian Gulf to the South China Sea, over which 15 million barrels of oil travel daily. Through this narrow passage, between Malaysia and Indonesia, must pass 80% of China's imported oil. With possible war with China looming on the horizon, U.S. rulers must militarize the strait in order to control China's energy supplies.

Therefore, since 1989 their main political agenda in Myanmar has been "non-violent" regime change. Working through its humanitarian-sounding fronts, the U.S. State Department has been recruiting and training Myanmar's opposition lead-

ers. Its latest attempt, the "Saffron Revolution," has failed thus far. According to Asian Times on-line ("The geopolitical stakes of 'Saffron Revolution'," 10/24/07), this effort was being directed from the U.S. Consulate General in bordering Thailand.

Russian and Chinese imperialists are fighting the U.S. over Myanmar, working together to maintain the current rulers, although for different reasons. Russia wants to control the gas and oil resources to further its goal of becoming the European Union's (EU) main provider and distributor of energy, expanding its political and economic interest into the East. U.S. rulers are trying desperately to break Russia's energy chokehold on the EU, to get the Europeans on board for present and future wars.

ARMS FOR OIL

In 2001, Russia sold Myanmar — reeling under U.S. sanctions — 15 Mig-29 Fulcrum aircraft. It has recently agreed to build Myanmar a nuclear research center and install an advanced air defense system. In exchange, Russia gets to bid on future oil and gas exploration and production concessions. Presently, Russian and Chinese oil companies are producing Myanmar's off-shore oil deposits. Nevertheless, Russian military bases here will be aimed at countering both U.S. influence and eventually China's growing power.

Aware of U.S. strategy, China is actively seeking to build oil and gas pipelines in Myanmar, one to transport gas from Myanmar and the other to carry Middle Eastern and African oil across Myanmar into China, by-passing the Straits of Malacca. China is also building other ports and bases in Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan to project its naval power far into the strategic Indian Ocean.

China is using its clout as the junta's biggest commercial partner and main arms provider to access Myanmar's resources. Myanmar has signed on to supply China 6.5 trillion cubic feet of gas over

Auto Workers Spread PLP Ideas

DETROIT, MI, October 25 — After two weeks of fighting plant-to-plant and local-to-local, the UAW leadership finally overcame rank-and-file resistance, giving Chrysler the new contract it wanted. PLP was a small part of that resistance as Chrysler workers helped distribute PLP literature in their plants and local unions. Barely half the workers approved the deal, which slashes starting pay to \$14/hour, creates "non-core" tier jobs that can further lower wages and be farmed out, slashes new workers' retiree benefits and relieves Chrysler of its health care responsibilities.

Ford's deal is next. GM hired 3,000 workers at \$14/hour before the ink was dry on its new deal.

No doubt the UAW leadership will be better prepared to ram this sellout down Ford workers' throats. But Ford workers may have "a better idea." Their response to our modest efforts has increased CHALLENGE circulation; hundreds at one assembly plant took PLP fliers and CHALLENGE at shift change. Many paid for them by dropping money in the can entering their union meeting. By establishing CHALLENGE networks and helping distribute contract fliers on the inside, Ford workers are paving the road to joining PLP.

International competition among the auto billionaires and the growing challenges to U.S. bosses have set the "pattern" for these auto talks. We cannot yet alter that balance of forces. But by fighting for future generations and uniting with auto workers worldwide, we can build new leadership on the shop floor. By spreading CHALLENGE and PLP's ideas to more workers, we can understand how the world works, and how to change it! ☛

continued on page 6



VIRUS CAUSES AIDS, CAPITALISM CAUSES EPIDEMIC

WASHINGTON, DC — Activists led by the Metropolitan Washington Public Health Association's Health Disparities Committee and DC Fights Back are organizing against District of Columbia's HIV/AIDS epidemic rate that's similar to the 5% in Cameroon and the Ivory Coast. On November 3, we marched in Southeast Washington, DC to the corner of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Avenues to organize more working-class struggle against this disease and its social and economic causes.

Two Progressive Labor Party members help lead this work. We have won many public health students and friends to begin to rely on the working class as the main force for change by bringing them to the streets of working-class neighborhoods. We and another activist distribute CHALLENGE during these activities. Workers need CHALLENGE'S communist analysis since, although AIDS may be caused by a virus, the AIDS epidemic is caused by capitalism and imperialism. Such oppression requires revolutionary change.

Communists offer a society in which everyone can work creatively to contribute to each other's well-being. No elite profit-hungry enslaving bosses for us! To achieve communism will take a lot of work and eventually violent working-class struggle. Fighting against the racism of HIV and poverty will help workers unite and gain the strength necessary to seize power.

For two years, health professionals, students, community advocates, people living with HIV, people fighting addictions, gay and straight, black and white have conducted monthly street outreach and community discussions in the communities most affected by HIV, drugs and unemployment. We sit at tables on the corners, walk the streets, staff health

fairs and sponsor community meetings where we listen and learn from each other.

Working-class residents have thanked us for caring and have taken thousands of condoms; hundreds have given us their names and numbers. They have told us that what they really need is affordable housing, jobs, activities for youth and drug treatment — and some have told us that a complete overthrow of the system is needed! We are building a mass movement to expand the struggle against disease by demanding better housing and job opportunities. Public health activists call these the "social determinants of health."

HIV may be the strongest example of unequal conditions in society. It affects the poorest people in the world the most heavily. In the United States, black and Latino workers have the highest burden of HIV. Over 75 percent of new AIDS sufferers are black. HIV is the leading cause of death for young black women! Social and economic factors drive the HIV epidemic. Poverty and unemployment fuel the drug trade, leading to huge percentages of black workers in prison or unable to work. Housing instability is one of the main predictors of HIV and AIDS. Living on the street or moving from couch to couch is risky. No job means no steady income and no opportunity to contribute to society. Depression and substance abuse make people more likely to suffer from infections as well as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. We are in a fight for survival against the ruling class and their politicians who spend over \$700 million dollars a day in Iraq, build baseball stadiums and call \$400,000 condo-



miniums "affordable housing".

Strategies for Change

Many of the strong activists in our work believe that working with or changing the politicians in power will help us. Our fight against this illusion is gaining some traction, especially as we turn to the working-class as the alternative power to change things! Building stronger relationships in this working-class community can lead to sharp struggle against the rulers and their apologists. The War on Poverty in the 1960s or the newer emphasis on NGOs and community- and faith-based organizations have not and will not turn the tide. The same rich industrialists and financiers control our wages, employment, schools, ideological indoctrination, health systems and foreign policies. It is more unrealistic to think that capitalism can change its racist exploitative character than it is to know that workers' revolution can win! ☺

March Against Racist Oakland Cop Murder of Black Youth

OAKLAND, CA., October 27 — Several friends and members of PLP attended a rally protesting the police assassination of 20-year-old Gary King, Jr. Cop Gonzales called Gary over for "questioning" with the excuse, "He looked like a murder suspect." After an argument and a struggle, Gary was tazered, broke loose and ran away in broad daylight in the afternoon. Gonzales drew his gun and shot him twice in the back.

The family and some youth marched from the neighborhood where Gary was murdered to City Hall demanding the Mayor charge cop Gonzales with murder and bring him to justice. Gary's young friends were upset, angry and frustrated; a memorial at the site of Gary's murder said, "The Police did this."

The City Hall marches and campaign continue. Gary's Dad told us, "I don't know how to handle this...but these marches help me with the grieving." A nursing student and Gary's high school classmate made a sign reading, "Oakland Police, Stop Killing Our Friends!" She remarked on our Jena 6 T-shirt and we compared the similarities between the white-supremacist KKK justice in Jena and the black-run justice system here. A friend at the rally spoke about the fear she wakes with every day that her teenage sons will end up dead from a cop murder or the general violence among youngsters on the streets.

But weighing most heavily was what to do about this killer cop. Gonzales has been involved in two previous shootings of young people; one died and one is paralyzed. He's on paid leave after this incident but may well return to Oakland's streets to kill again.

Thirty years ago PLP members helped organize a similar march to protest the murder of Tyrone Guiton, a 14-year-old victim of the racist Oakland cops. There have been many police murders since. Now, Ron Dellums, ex-1960's radical, ex-Congressman and Black Congressional Caucus leader, is Mayor. His office responded by locking up City Hall in the face of the angry crowd of 40 or so protesters. So much for Dellums' claim to "leadership" in the fight against the marginalization of Oakland's black and Latino youth.

Thirty years of elections of a largely black political leadership here has not stopped jailing black

youth, unemployment, and skyrocketing real estate prices pushing the poor out or crumbling schools. Capitalism marches on — a murderous system killing youth from New Orleans to Baghdad!

At this rally, at Gary's funeral and on the job in transit our organizing uncovered tremendous ambivalence about the causes behind Oakland's soaring murder rate, whether youth killing youth in gang/drug activity or police harassment/murder of black youth. Co-workers at AC Transit and MUNI, and even our passengers, often comment on "the sad state of our youth," or "what happened to respect." But in the next breath they make comments like: "But...there really is nothing out there for them; "Things were different when we were young. ...We had some hope, some jobs...a future!"

Many drivers do recognize that the bar has been raised to exclude young people from working. Previously, a class 2 license was sufficient for a job at AC or MUNI, a job many young people wanted. Now transit agencies turn younger workers down, even with the proper license in hand, if they have one violation in the last five years, like "running a stop sign." A younger black driver said, "It was different even seven years ago when I got this job. I have to argue with people all the time — it's not the kids...it's the system."

Such comments from transit workers can be a springboard to a generalized conclusion that capitalism depends on racism. We put communism on the agenda in this struggle. In the context of police murders and destruction of our community, we present the communist alternative of production for need, not for profit, to remove the economic basis for racism.

Some of our co-workers see how maintaining a system that puts profits first leads to police assassinations and gang/drug killings. They want to take this on since community, family and job are intertwined. Our Local is in the middle of a contract fight for lunch breaks and rest periods which would improve the drivers' schedules and create jobs. At the union meeting we asked who would get these jobs? A union committee could provide "mentoring" for the younger, unemployed "potential" bus drivers. This is an area in which we can unite with co-workers and youth to take on the racist institutions of capitalism. ☺

Hit Columbia University's Racism

continued from page 3

obscured the danger posed by the rulers' liberal wing that wants to build nationalist and patriotic loyalty to the bosses.

Another PL'er received a big round of applause when stating he was there from City College along with other students outside Columbia who stood in solidarity with them. He also urged the crowd to check out the latest issue of CHALLENGE containing an article about the noose-hanging at Teacher's College.

Many important political points arose during the organizing weeks, including the necessity to place IFAW within the broader racist attacks occurring recently at Columbia. It was also stated that IFAW was an attack on ALL students, not just Muslims; therefore it required a united, multi-racial response.

There was a debate on how best to confront racist, ruling-class mouthpieces like Horowitz. PLP and many Muslim students favored direct action to shut down all the IFAW's events. Others felt this would give Horowitz "what he wanted" and create "bad publicity." Agreement was reached to protest outside the event, not inside.

When Horowitz was scheduled to speak the crowd moved to the student center. The cops barred many trying to enter "because they were not Columbia students." The handful of Columbia students who did gain entry were forced out because they "did not have invitations"!

The crowd outside continued rallying and chanting, despite the rain and cold weather. PLP'ers leafleted, sold CHALLENGE and made some contacts and new friends. In the end Horowitz's racist pro-American garbage was not heard by many people because the College Republicans' poorly-advertised RSVP system for the event effectively shut out not only protesters but a much broader audience.

Now we will follow up our contacts as well as other students involved in organizing the event so that we can build a more sustained movement to fight not only racism at Columbia, but the racism of Columbia. ☺

< LETTERS >

Racist Attack in Spain Hallmark of Capitalism

The recent kick in the face and groping of a young Ecuadorean immigrant by a racist thug on a commuter train here revealed the extent of racism in Spain. This racist attack became worldwide news because it was filmed by a train's videocamera. The young girl (a minor) was so traumatized and fearful that she refused to leave her house and denounce the attack until it became public. But the young punk is out on bail and now claims he was "drunk" and "doesn't remember a thing."

Such attacks are not isolated. They occur daily throughout Spain. Local authorities and politicians in some areas openly support these racist gangs. But the biggest racist attack immigrant workers suffer is the super-exploitation of their labor, with miserable wages and in many cases semi-slave-like working conditions.

The union hacks and the official "left" refuse to fight racism but openly collaborate with the bosses' attacks on the entire working class — selling out strikes and militant actions by rank-and-file workers. This has prevented some young workers from seeing that unity with all workers — not joining racist neo-Nazi gangs — is the only way out of the alienation and misery of capitalism.

Leaders of immigrant workers' organizations are also partly to blame. They prefer to separate themselves from all workers in Spain in order to get some public crumbs (grants, etc.) from the authorities.

The fragmentation of the working class here is a big problem — strengthened by the division of workers into different regional areas (Basques, Catalonians, Galicians, etc.). The racist and national oppression under capitalism can only be fought with the multi-racial and multi-national unity of Spain's entire working class. This unity is now more crucial than ever since the subprime and other crises hitting world capitalism (real estate speculation was huge here, as in the U.S., the UK, Ireland, etc.) are causing Spain's economy to reel.

Racism is a universal aspect of capitalism, from Jena, Louisiana, to Barcelona. We must fight it with an internationalist ideology and anti-racist unity of the working class. That has been the politics PLP and CHALLENGE have fought for since its beginning. Join us!

International anti-racist

The Bosses Don't Care About Workers' Lives or Deaths

"You went early two days in a row," the boss accused me. I tried to answer, "Yes, but..." He interrupted me. "I don't want explanations. I don't care about your problems, and if you miss one more day, don't come back to work!" Then he asked if I liked my job. I answered, "I need to work to pay my bills." He looked at me, annoyed, and asked me again. I made the same answer. He got madder, "You don't understand. My question is if you're happy with your job." My answer continued the same and I got up, asking, "is that all, or do you have another question?" This was two days after I received a call explaining that my best friend's mother had died. After this call I immediately told my supervisor that I had to leave work early to be with my friend and co-worker. The next day I only worked 7 hours and returned to my friend's house to be at her side. That's why my boss had called me to his office for this conversation.

When I got back to my work area, my friends asked what happened with the boss. I explained and they gave me their support, telling me not to pay any attention to him and not to come to work the next day, the day of the funeral. But since I'm a worker in this system of wage slavery, I couldn't risk being fired from my job and decided not to go to the funeral. I couldn't support my friend at this difficult moment, which was a very bitter experience for me.

The next day, while I was cleaning my machine to end the day, my supervisor asked me to stay and work overtime. The boss came and told me I had

to stay because they had an urgent order. I interrupted him, "I don't want explanations. I don't care about your problems." He laughed, but with anger on his face, while he tried to make it into a joke, but he knew what I meant. I went home without working more that day.

I'm an industrial worker with a short time in the Party, but these experiences have made me think more about the need to build the Party among the workers to fight against abuse and exploitation. I've learned that while we need our jobs, the bosses need us more, and we shouldn't allow oppression or discrimination against women workers, or any workers. To achieve this, we need to win workers' power. That's why I'm willing to help build the PLP, the Party of the workers.

A woman industrial worker

Pacifism Takes Beating at Anti-War Action

"Honk if you oppose imperialist oil wars and want the troops home today!" Many drivers honked in approval.

PL members in Stockton, CA, are active in the Peace and Justice Network. Every Thursday evening from 5:00 to 6:30 we demonstrate with anti-war signs on a busy street in front of San Joaquin Delta College.

We have distributed CHALLENGE to members of the Peace and Justice Network, sparking sharp political discussions on pacifism, racism, nationalism, imperialism and war.

One Peace and Justice member defended the position of non-violence. When we raised the question of self-defense, he screamed, red-faced, "NO VIOLENCE, NO VIOLENCE," saying, "I won't be associated with anyone who stands for violence."

A retired longshoreman asked about the 1934 General Strike "when workers were confronted with mass police violence". Then we asked, "What would you do if confronted by the violence of the KKK or the Nazis?" The question wasn't answered, but it opened the door to further discussion.

One Peace and Justice member used to bring a large U.S. flag to the anti-war demonstrations. When challenged about this he replied, "This is my flag." We said, "It's not our flag; we support the international working class." The next demonstration he brought the U.N. flag and then stopped bringing any flags. Next we need to bring the red flag. Several times this member has discussed the dignity of all workers.

We've linked these activities to our involvement with students in the MECHA (a Latino students organization) club at the college. We won them to show a series of anti-war films, including the anti-racist, anti-imperialist "Sir, No Sir."

One MECHA member was a Marine in Kuwait during the first Gulf War. He comes from a military family, several of whom served in the Marine Corps. They were committed to serving the interests of U.S. nationalism. But overseas the massive death and destruction he saw for the profits of U.S. oil companies changed his thinking. Upon returning here he became very active in the anti-war movement.

Another MECHA member designed a very powerful anti-war graphic we've used on leaflets at our public demonstrations.

We plan to increase CHALLENGE sales and form a study group to help create a more revolutionary communist consciousness.

Stockton PL Club



'Flush the system down the drain'

NEW YORK CITY, October 27 — "We don't care about the rain! Flush this system down the drain!" chanted dozens of workers and youth led by Progressive Labor Party's young members at the anti-war march here. It's good thousands marched despite the rain, but while the rulers are preparing for wider wars (including attacking Iran), the anti-war marches are getting smaller and are still mainly older and white.

Although many speakers distanced themselves from the pro-war Democrats, the leadership of the anti-war movement won't break with the Dems. As election time nears they will support whoever runs against the GOP (Hillary, Obama, Edwards or even Gore if he decides to jump into the circus). Our chant, "Bush/Democrats no solution! Fight for communist revolution!" and the CHALLENGE (10/31) front-page article exposing Democrat Gore's war crimes pointed out the futility of these dreams. A thousand marchers took our papers.

The U.S. bosses' oil war has already killed over a million in Iraq. Ending this genocidal system will save the lives of millions of workers worldwide who die every year from hunger, curable disease and imperialist war. Waiting for the Democrats or "marches for peace" won't do that. We need to build an anti-imperialist, anti-racist communist-led movement to smash the war-makers. This is the message we must bring back to our workplaces and schools. This is the lesson we must learn from the Bolshevik revolution that turned World War I into a massive revolution 90 years ago. ☸

Myanmar Continued From page 4

the next 30 years. Big hydropower projects are also planned.

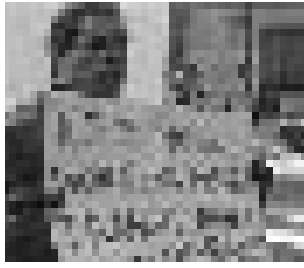
With other capitalists/imperialists — Australia, France, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, U. S. and Thailand — having their hands on Myanmar's energy resources, the situation is bound to explode. Regional wars will give way to global war.

This scourge can only be eradicated by eliminating the profit system with communist revolution. Myanmar workers once opted for communism. The Communist Party of Burma, until it self-destructed in 1989, had tens of thousands under arms and millions of followers. Several times it nearly captured power. Its internal weaknesses, the same ones afflicting the old communist movement, caused its demise. But the working class of Myanmar and the world will opt for communist revolution again, this time for good. ☸

Chicago Transit Workers Fight Doomsday Cuts

CHICAGO, IL, October 29

— “Why are you talking about the Olympics? We need transit now!” That’s what one handicapped mass transit rider yelled at the Congressional sub-committee holding hearings about the mass transit needs of Chicago hosting the 2016 Olympic games. Meanwhile, about 60 riders and bus operators rallied against the “doomsday” cuts due this week. The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is scheduled to slash 39 bus routes and raise fares by \$1 on November 4, with even bigger service cuts and fare hikes next January, unless the state supplies \$110 million in new funding. Metro commuter rail and Pace regional bus service face similar cuts.



But even the new funding demanded by the CTA, Mayor Daley, and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) leadership will come at the expense of the workers, especially newly-hired transit workers. In a very slick move, the CTA and ATU Locals 241 (bus) and 308 (rail) sent their contract negotiations to arbitration. The arbitrator’s decision slashes pay and benefits, extends the number of years required for retirement and ends pensions and retiree healthcare for workers hired under this new contract. As many as 1,500 current part-timers can be laid off and rehired as permanent workers subject to the new give-back contract. Once the state agrees to fund the system, the new arbitrated contract automatically goes into effect, bypassing an angry workforce, with service cuts and fare hikes in force.

These racist cuts, attacking an overwhelmingly black workforce and a mainly black and Latino workforce, and similar to the Cook County healthcare cuts, reflect the strain on the bosses’ economy caused by the \$12 billion-a-month war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Like the crises rocking the Chicago Police Department (see next CHALLENGE), it also reflects some serious in-fighting among the bosses. While we can’t turn the tide against the bosses yet, we can fight these cuts and in doing so, expand CHALLENGE circulation. That in the long run, will build the revolutionary movement that can derail the racist war-makers and strike-breakers. (More next issue.)

BBQ Builds Workers’ Solidarity and PLP

Recently our PL industrial club organized a BBQ to close our industrial Summer Project. Going early to help prepare food and set up I asked, “How many chairs did we rent?” “40,” came the reply. Wow, I was quite surprised. “Why so many?” I asked. “We’re not really expecting that many people, are we?” “Better to have too many,” he said, “than not enough.”

People started arriving — family first, then friends, then the family of our friends. Our co-workers brought their wives, brothers, sisters, children, mothers and friends. Everyone from the PL club brought people with them. It was a great working-class crowd! Some came early and others later — a good thing, because it gave us more time to talk with them and their families than if they all came at once. Besides, to my surprise we wouldn’t have had enough chairs!

After the majority of people had arrived, while everyone was enjoying the food, a comrade spoke about workers’ solidarity, the striking GM workers, the Jena 6, the need for working-class solidarity and how racism affects all workers. Everyone obviously liked this, judging from the clapping that followed.

My own friends had a really good time. After a while, they got carried away in conversation with some other comrades. The conversation continued for hours, about culture, history and revolution in political films, Latin America, as well as the need for winning industrial workers and soldiers to

fight for communism. They talked through dinner and dessert. These discussions enabled me to get to know the partner of one of my friends better. Eventually contact information was exchanged between some friends and other comrades while new friends from other factories were made.

My friends stayed until after dark, despite having to get up early for work the next morning. They helped us clean up and contributed money to help pay for the BBQ. One worker gave \$20 for the Jena 6.

The friend who organized the event not only hosted it but made sure it was successful, that workers met other workers and their families and friends.

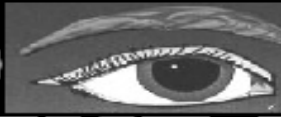
In addition to getting new CHALLENGE readers, two study groups that were “in the works” were solidified throughout the day.

The friends who came were happily surprised overall by the collective feeling at the BBQ. Friends greeted some comrades the next day at work with warm, firm handshakes, and sincere “Thank yous.”

This event is just one more sign that we’re on the right track: building ties every day while putting forward our politics primary in a bold way, a successful combination for our industrial club. Our confidence and our CHALLENGE network have grown. This has helped lay the basis for the work that remains to be done.

An industrial comrade

RED EYE ON THE NEWS



Below are excerpts from mainstream newspapers that may be of use for our readers. Abbreviations: NYT=New York Times, GW=Guardian Weekly, LAT=Los Angeles Times

Capitalist-era wars center on oil

Of course, the war is about oil. Virtually all wars of the modern, industrial era are about oil at some level. They’re about other things too...but oil is always in the equation someplace.

Remember 1991 when we invaded Iraq for the first time? Ostensibly we were doing it to protect the freedom of Kuwait, whose oil fields had been taken over by Saddam. But....When the predictable public outcry arose over trading “blood for oil,” [the Secretary of State said . . .] It was really about truth and justice and democracy blah, blah, blah.... Our wars are always about freedom and justice....

We forget that before Japan’s “sneak attack” on Pearl Harbor we had cut the nation off from high-grade scrap iron, aircraft fuel and, finally, oil. Those acts, however justified, threatened Japan’s economic existence and made war inevitable.

And the genesis of our hostile relations in Iran dates from 1953 when a CIA-backed coup overthrew its elected leader, the deeply strange anti-American Mohammad Mossadeg, and installed our puppet, the Shah of Iran, who ruled for us with an iron hand. Mossadeg’s greatest crime? He expropriated British oil interests.

Countries fight wars over oil and always will.... look at it from the policy-makers’ point of view. It’s other people’s blood. (MinutemanMedia.org, 10/4)

We can’t ‘fight nice’ vs. fascism

Eric D. Weitz’s “Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy”....praises the republic’s achievements in the 1920s and condemns its murderers: the right-wing businessmen, army officers and civil servants who handed the country over to the Nazis....

The republic’s mistake, Weitz argues, was its

failure to [annihilate] its conservative enemies at the beginning. This is a disquieting view because it can lead to the conclusion that the moderation of the German socialists was a mistake, whereas the [dictatorship] of the Russian Bolsheviks demonstrated what successful leftists had to do to prevail over their opponents. (NYT, 10/21)

Re-enlistment is a phony statistic

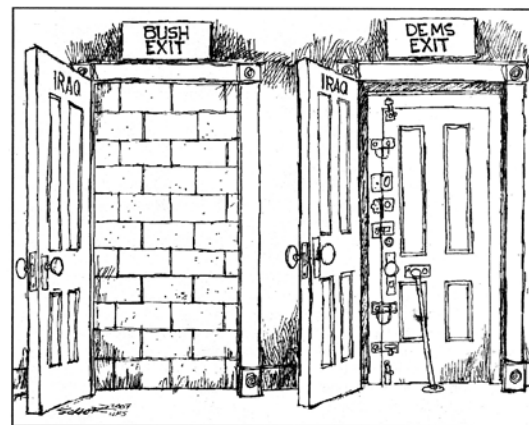
Supposedly impressive re-enlistment rates are cited as evidence that soldiers enthusiastically support the war effort. In reality, these retention numbers are more the result of the “stop-loss” policy, where soldiers are required to remain in the Army after their contracts have expired if their units are deployed or ordered to deploy soon. My platoon’s infantrymen expected to be “stop-lossed” and some felt they might as well cash in on the re-enlistment bonuses if they were going to be forced to stay in the Army anyway. (NYT, 10/20)

Immigrant policy works, for bosses

To the Editor:

Your editorial argues that the current immigration policy, of catching a few undocumented workers and harrasing and frightening the rest, cannot work. On the contrary, it works perfectly.

The purpose of federal immigration policy, or lack of such, is not to protect the moral rights of immigrants — it is to maintain long hours, low wages, non-existent benefits and a complete lack of job security as the national labor standard. (NYT, 10/24)



Next prez won’t be anti-imperialist

On Iraq, each of those candidates...identified as electable, now says that the U.S. must stay in Iraq or the surrounding region with large military forces, not just after the 2008 election, but that of 2016 — beyond two more presidential terms — so as to “prevent chaos”....

The apparent debate that takes place in America on Sunday mornings on television, or in the national press, and in the Congress, is really a knockabout vaudeville performance without serious content: both sides in essential respects are on the same side. (William Pfaff, Tribune Media, 10/4)

Burma ‘rebel’ would keep army rule

...The Burmese Army’s....energies go into a bigger task: running Myanmar.... The military, known as the Tatmadaw, now permeates Myanmar, controlling virtually every institution and most business enterprises....

Even if the ruling junta is removed, it is most likely to be replaced by another military government....

The junta’s chief opponent, the pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, has acknowledged that, saying any future government must involve the military. (NYT, 10/7)

Bolshevik Revolution

Workers Took Power; Can Do It Again

Ninety years ago, November 7, 1917, marked the beginning of the single most important event of the 20th century, the Bolshevik revolution, which directly inspired the Chinese revolution and anti-imperialist struggles around the world from Vietnam to Africa to Latin America.

Russia's working class, headed by the revolutionary communists of the Bolshevik Party and its leader, Vladimir Lenin, freed one-sixth of the world's surface from capitalism. They proved once and for all that it was possible to strive for a world without exploitation, where those who produce all value, the working class, can enjoy the fruits of their labor and not have it stolen by a few parasitical bosses and their lackeys.

The Russian revolution was the first serious attempt by workers and peasants to seize, hold and consolidate state power. Even though capitalism has returned to the former Soviet Union, workers will not forget that the Soviet working class defeated capitalism in 1917; smashed the imperialist armies of 17 countries (including Japan, the U.S., Britain, France, among others) which invaded Russia in 1918 to try to crush the revolution; freed the masses, especially women, from the yoke of capitalist, feudal and religious oppression; and then in 1945 defeated the mightiest and most barbaric army the capitalists had ever organized: the Nazi Wehrmacht.

The revolution frightened the world's bosses, who immediately sent armies from 17 countries to try — in Churchill's words — to "strangle it in the cradle." From 1918 to 1923, millions of workers led by the Red Army defeated the imperialists' counter-revolution. Nearly five million died in that battle,



V.I. Lenin

many of whom were the most committed workers the revolution had produced. Lenin himself died because of injuries inflicted by a hired killer.

The masses showed great courage and determination to defend and build their revolution, under the leadership of their revolutionary party. They proved that the revolutionary violence on the part of the working class and peasantry were vital to the seizure of state power.

Achievements of the Revolution

The Bolshevik Revolution brought Russia to heights of productive development that capitalism, given a similar time period and circumstances, could never have dreamed of. Bringing the working class to power, the Revolution coordinated their social-economic efforts for the production and exchange of the necessities, the comforts and even some luxuries of life, making them available to all. The Soviet system of production was for use, not for profit. This can only be accomplished by abolishing capitalist profits and the private ownership of property, with its exploitation, poverty, unemployment, racism, fascism and imperialist wars.

In the 1930s, when the entire capitalist world sank into depression, and tens of millions worldwide were left jobless and starving (much like today), the Soviet Union was forging ahead building a new society without unemployment and hunger. They created some measure of a decent life for workers in an incredibly short time, transforming a 90% illiteracy rate into one in which nearly everyone was literate.

Around 1938, without any official declaration, the USSR had achieved the era of free bread. One could enter a cafeteria, order little or nothing, and receive all the bread one wanted. You needed, you received — at least to that extent. Even during a drive for heavy industry, living standards rose strikingly when the rest of the world was mired in the Great Depression.

The Soviet Union not only freed workers but also fought against racism and sexism. The battle against racism was particularly significant. As pro-communist Paul Robeson said about his trips to the Soviet Union, he "felt like a human being for the first time since I grew up. Here I am not a Negro but a human being. Before I came I could hardly believe that such a thing could be.... Here, for the first time in my life, I walk in full human dignity."

Heroic Fight Against the Nazis

In 1941, the bosses again tried to destroy the revolution. Hitler, using all of Europe's resources and the largest military machine ever assembled, invaded the Soviet Union with four million troops. They discovered the Soviets were no pushover as occurred in Western Europe. Hitler's prediction — endorsed by western military "experts" — of capturing Moscow in six weeks went up in smoke.

Nazi troops found total destruction and desolation in every captured city or town — the "scorched earth" policy. Soviet defenders burned everything to the ground that they could not take with them and then organized armed resistance behind enemy lines: the Partisans.

Over 6,000 factories were dismantled and moved east of the Ural Mountains, re-assembled to produce weapons again, a feat requiring total unity and support of Soviet workers, unmatched by any country, before or since. Soviet soldiers and workers fought for Stalingrad block-by-block, house-by-house and room-by-room to halt the "unbeatable" Nazi invaders. Workers in arms factories produced weapons 24 hours a day for the Red Army, working 12-hour shifts. When Nazi troops captured factories, heroic Soviet workers and soldiers would re-take them.

The entire German Sixth Army and 24 of Hitler's generals were surrounded and killed or captured in the battle of Stalingrad. Never again would the Nazis mount a successful offensive against the Red Army. Stalingrad was truly the turning point of the Second World War. Not until the Nazis were on the run following their defeats at Stalingrad and in the Battle of the Kursk — the biggest armored battle in world history, involving millions of soldiers and 6,000 tanks — did the U.S.-U.K. forces invade Western Europe. It was the communist-led Soviet Union that smashed the Nazis, the largest and most powerful army ever mounted by a capitalist power.

All this was accomplished under the leadership of Josef Stalin. No wonder he is reviled to this day by world capitalism.

Lessons to Be Learned

Unfortunately, the Bolsheviks suffered from many political weaknesses which led to the return of capitalism to the USSR. From the beginning they believed that to achieve communism, first socialism



Artist rendition of the storming of the Winter Palace

had to be established, a belief Karl Marx had advanced. We have learned from that experience that socialism retained capitalism's wage system and therefore failed to wipe out many aspects of the profit system. Socialism put forward material incentives to the working class rather than political ones as the way to win workers to communism. We must win masses of workers to abolish capitalism's wage system and its division of labor and fight directly for communism.

Today no country is led by revolutionary communists, but this is a temporary historical setback. While this era of widening imperialist wars, fascist attacks on the working class, mass unemployment, diseases like AIDS killing millions in Africa and other areas, is upon us, every dark night has its end.

PLP is a product of both the old International Communist Movement and the struggle against its revisionism. Pseudo-leftist groups have not learned history's lessons and continue to fight for nationalist "sharing of power" with capitalists, a la Venezuela's Chavez, not for the working-class seizure of power and the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Our movement is daily fighting to learn from the Soviet Union's great battles and achievements as well as its deadly errors that led to its collapse, mainly that reformism, racism, nationalism and all forms of concessions to capitalism only lead workers to defeat. Give the ruling class an inch and they'll grab a mile.

We honor the bold fight by the workers of the Bolshevik Revolution against capitalism and for a working-class communist world. Today, we must organize workers, students and soldiers to build a mass worldwide working class Party that will turn this era of imperialist wars into a new, international communist revolution.☪

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