



CHALLENGE

REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

volume 41 no. 01

april 8, 2009

suggested donation \$.50

All Stella D'Oro Workers United to Fight Racist Bosses As:

Strikers Battle Scabs

EDITORIAL>>

Russian Rulers' War Plans Heat Up Imperialist Rivalry with U.S. Bosses

page 2

ANTI-WAR>>

Iraq Vets Stand Against Imperialist War

page 3

HOSPITALS>>

Anti-Racist, Multi-Racial Unity Needed in Nurses' Fight

page 4

EUROPE>>

France: 3,000,000 in Marches, General Strike vs. Bosses' Crisis

page 5

IMMIGRATION>>

Obama, Bosses' Immigration 'Reform': Slave Labor, Cannon Fodder for War

page 8



BRONX, NY, March 11 — A multi-racial and international group of several hundred Stella D'Oro workers and strike supporters chanted "workers united will never be defeated" as plans for more massive and aggressive picketing were carried out today. A loud and determined human blockade met scabs who tried to cross the picket line. Several scabs were stopped. One was turned away before cops arrived to protect the bosses and their scabs.

This was a good day for the Stella D'Oro strikers. Rank-and-file strikers are showing greater leadership. Several workers spoke during a rally ending today's action. Prior to the strike, they probably never would have imagined that they would ever speak at a street-corner rally. Workers have played a part in the strike-support committee, planning today's activities and carrying them out. They have gone out to meetings of other labor organizations to build solidarity and support for their strike.

A large proportion of the strikers are lower-paid women and immigrant workers. They are receiving great support from all the strikers, reflecting a fight against anti-immigrant racism and sexism.

Some strikers believe that positive rulings by the labor board around issues of unfair labor practices will be decisive in winning the strike. PL'ers have pointed out that none of the members of the labor board ever worked in a factory. They know that if they rule against the bosses' interests, they wouldn't be on the labor board for long! We have pointed out that workers' power, unity and understanding of how the capitalist system functions is what is truly decisive. One chant that expresses this idea was often heard as we picketed today. "Who has the Power? We have the power. What kind of power? Workers power!"

On the picket line, workers discussed how the Stella strike mirrors what is happening to the workers all over the U.S. and around the world. Their fighting spirit is a beacon to all workers suffering under the oppression of

bosses everywhere. PLP urges our friends and members to do what they can to increase strike support. You can arrange for strikers to speak to your union, community or church group. Raise money for the strikers from these organizations. If Stella D'Oro products are being sold at a store in your neighborhood, demand that scabs products not be sold. Picket the stores that continue to sell scab products!

PL'ers are trying to make the Stella-D'Oro strike into a school for communism. That means not only bringing CHALLENGE and our communist ideas to the striking workers but also learning from the strikers on how to have ongoing class struggle. ☺

PL'ers Picket Scab-Made Cookies

BROOKLYN, NY, March 16 — Today a group of PL'ers went to a neighborhood Stop & Shop supermarket that was selling scab-made Stella D'Oro cookies. We marched into the store and began a picket line around the cookie shelves while distributing leaflets and CHALLENGES. Everyone in the store stopped and took notice.

The store manager quickly ran to notify the guard to call the cops and kick us out. We were then ushered out while chanting in front of the supermarket. When the cops showed up we chanted, "The cops, the courts, the Ku Klux Klan, all a part of the bosses' plan." Taxi drivers outside the store joined our picket line and chanted with us. As we left we shouted, "We'll be back!"

This was only the start of more protests at local businesses selling scab cookies around the city. Next time we'll up the ante in militant actions against scab-made Stella D'Oro cookies.

Russian Rulers' War Plans Heat Up Imperialist Rivalry with U.S. Bosses

Russia's rulers, capitalizing on their U.S. rivals' troubles, are shifting their own imperialist plans into high gear, taking more seriously preparations for future wars. On March 17, President Dmitri Medvedev announced to top Russian generals "large-scale rearming" in 2011 in response to "continuing threats to the country's security." (NY Times, 3/18/09) The move advances the Kremlin's drive to dominate the states of the former Soviet Union.

Key to the Putin strategy are: establishing pro-Russian governments in Eastern Europe; asserting military control of Russian gas and Caspian oil exports, the "energy weapon;" and supporting U.S. enemies like Iran.

Putin puppet Medvedev, however, couldn't wait for 2011. Two days after announcing rearmament, he "formalized agreements that allow for a permanent Russian military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, territories... the United States considers to be part of Georgia" (NYT, 3/21/09). Russia's 2008 invasion of these regions shut down a U.S.-backed million-barrel-

a-day Caspian oil pipeline (Asia Times Online). And weeks earlier Russia had strong-armed satellite Kyrgyzstan into shutting its air base to U.S. supply planes bound for Afghanistan.

Russia-China Military Bloc Aimed at U.S.

Russia and China are conducting joint military maneuvers. The Moscow-Beijing-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization is meeting in Moscow and inviting Iran and India as "observers." RIANovosti, a Russian news agency, said Venezuela has offered an air base on the island of Orchila to be used by Russian TU 160 strategic air bombers in their long-range patrolling flights. The TU 160 is considered the world's most powerful strategic bomber, superior to the U.S. B-1 Lancer.

That development might provoke another missile crisis similar to the one in Cuba in 1962 that nearly led to a nuclear World War III.

Russian navy ships have also recently visited ports in both Venezuela and Cuba.

Circumstances limit U.S. bosses' immediate response to the Russian build-up. The bulk of U.S. ground troops are mired in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rising joblessness boosts enlistment only marginally. Public opposition to restoring the draft remains adamant. In addition, U.S. rulers must get their economic and political house in order before mobilizing against a power the size of Russia and its allies (to say nothing of China.)

Wall Street's meltdown has put U.S. finance and industry in serious disarray, hindering war planning. Citigroup and GM, once pillars of U.S. imperialism, may not survive. And Congressional Republicans, locked in anti-tax ideology, try to block the massive outlays Obama needs for both the Treasury and the Pentagon.

So U.S. rulers seek to buy time with Russia. Last week Obama dispatched a geriatric diplomatic "dream team" to Moscow. It included Henry Kissinger, Vietnam-era war criminal; George Schultz, advisor to the oil-soaked Saudi monarchy; and James Baker, Exxon and J.P. MorganChase heir and architect of the first Gulf War genocide. The first two focused on reopening talks on nuclear arms, where the U.S. still has the upper hand. Baker begged Russia's oil ministry to keep Caspian routes open.

U.S. Backing Down On Missile 'Defense'?

A Harvard-sponsored report by liberal strategist Gary Hart urging temporary concessions to Russia found its way into a March 19 Senate hearing. It said Washington should "take a new look at missile-defense deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic and accept that neither Ukraine nor Georgia is

ready for NATO membership."

But any U.S.-Russia "détente" only masks future conflict. Anticipating the Kremlin's March 17 battle cry, Team Obama leaked its long-range war plans days earlier: "The protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are forcing the Obama administration to rethink what for more than two decades has been a central premise of American strategy: that the nation need only prepare to fight two major wars at a time." (NYT, 3/15/09) Obama's not-so-subtle implication is that the Iraqi and Afghan conflicts may not be resolved before it's time to take on Russia, China, Iran or any combination thereof.

Putin's imperialist Russia, though less than half the population of the U.S., enjoys certain advantages. For one, it has military conscription. While some reports say draft-dodging and desertion mean that only 11% of eligible conscripts actually serve, U.S. recruiters would be thrilled to snag one in nine 18-27 year-olds.

Then there's Russia's more advanced fascist streamlining of the state. Carrying out a 2004 Putin edict, on March 21 Medvedev simply fired and replaced a dissident regional governor. Compare that to the partisanship that often stymies Congressional action on legislation aimed at more central control of the economy. The Rockefeller wing of the U.S. ruling class aims to save its collapsing system. It must discipline the bankers and CEOs whose short-range profit goals hamper their long-range needs.

Workers Suffer From Russia-U.S. Imperialist Rivalry

These U.S. rulers would want to impose the economic discipline that Putin did when Yukos, a pro-U.S. Russian oil company, challenged the state's Lukoil company. He jailed Yukos's chief and legally bankrupted the firm. Public protest has been minimal.

Of course, workers have been suffering from Putin's capitalism, increasing fascism and war preparations — unpaid wages and pensions, disastrous health "care," unemployment and racist neo-Nazi attacks on non-Russians and Putin opponents — all of which are fundamental to profit systems everywhere.

U.S. rulers will drive to catch up to their Russian rivals in winning the masses here to war and fascism, which means lowering workers' living standards (Obama labels it "shared sacrifice") and increased racist — especially anti-immigrant — attacks.

Today, U.S. media giants openly question whether the popular wrath they have stirred up against Bernie Madoff and AIG's bosses could be better directed, say, at a foreign foe. But the proper target for workers' anger these days is the profit system itself that generates endless wars and economic disasters. Only communism can eliminate these horrors. ☛

OUR FIGHT

★ **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 — sexism — and traditional gender roles created by class society.**

★ **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!**

PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

P.O. Box 808 Brooklyn NY 11202

• www.plp.org

• email: desafio.challenge@gmail.com

• blog: challengenewspaper.wordpress.com



Iraq Vets Stand Against Imperialist War

BERKELEY, CA., March 23 — To mark the 6th year of the invasion — and now permanent occupation — of Iraq, and Obama's shift towards Afghanistan, the Bay Area chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) recently held a Winter Soldier forum to a packed auditorium here. Each vet had a unique experience in the military, related in powerful testimonies. (This article is part of a long-term dialogue with rank-and-file IVAW members regarding communist politics and military organizing.)

Army's Not For Millionaires' Children

Soldiers join the military for many reasons, some out of necessity. Prior to joining, a number of young vets from the panel had tough situations, making attending college difficult and job prospects rare. The military's offers of money for college and job opportunities disproportionately attract working-class youth. As most soldiers are plucked from the working class, they have a high potential to ally with the workers against the common enemies of the entire working class: the ruling class and its capitalist system.

Other vets on the panel joined out of a genuine and noble desire to help. They wanted to go on humanitarian missions and distribute aid packages. However, once in the military, it became evident that imperialism cannot afford to be gentle, either to the vets or to the Iraqi and Afghan working class. Distributing aid was secondary to combat missions. To the U.S. military — running

on what one vet in intelligence gathering called "educated" guesses — "helping" meant sweeping invasions of Iraqi homes. It meant fighting a few insurgents among large local populations, causing staggering civilian casualties and unnecessary damage to both U.S. and Iraqi working-class life.

In The Belly of Imperialism

The vets' honest testimonials included graphic accounts of war, violence, invasion and atonement. One vet was infinitely glad to have disobeyed the orders to shoot an Iraqi child on sight. Another vet intensely remembered friends that died protecting oil fields for U.S. corporations. Another vet recounted the surreal cultivation of extreme violence among his Marine troop. Intense anti-Muslim racism and an attempted frame-up drove one vet out of the service. Sexual assaults against female soldiers are also increasing.

Being placed at a point of physical, psychological and political contradiction, our vet friends' experiences culminated in a breakthrough of consciousness and firm opposition to the war. It was not an easy journey, and it is to their great credit that these vets speak out against injustice. Upon returning to the U.S. and requesting counseling aid, many in the vet community are neglected, being forced to wait months to see an army doctor who will be dismissive of their situation. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is prevalent. Among vets, suicides climb as does unemployment.

Homelessness encroaches. To the soldier as much as to the civilian casualty, as well as to the entire working class, imperialism is the enemy.

Fighting the War Machine

That these vets are survivors and can be won to fighting for pro-worker politics is evident from paraphrased statements such as, "I'm not anti-war. I'm anti-war for profit. I'm anti-war for oil. I'm anti-wars of occupation and aggression."

One vet joined the military as an anti-war activist. Through this, information was gathered, enriching the vet's understanding of how the military operates within imperialism. This was particularly inspirational, and joining up while already being anti-war and anti-imperialist is something CHALLENGE readers, comrades and anti-war activists should seriously consider.

Issues of class struggle, armed struggle, revolution and the construction of a just and egalitarian society become tangible if, and only if, masses of soldiers and vets, along with workers and students, develop revolutionary class consciousness and take part in the organizing to smash imperialist war with communist revolution. This gives life to a new society. Soldiers can end the war, but soldiers can also speed up the beginning of the end for capitalism. As has been said before in CHALLENGE, there can be no communist revolution without revolutionary communist soldiers.

Bay Area Vet

PLP Anti-War Marchers Challenge Liberals, Phony 'Leftists'

NEW YORK CITY, April 22 — A multi-racial group of PLP members, including a young new member and a Party friend, traveled yesterday with a local anti-war group to the anti-war march on the Pentagon in Washington D.C. The marchers were predominantly white.

A PLP'er spoke, explaining that the war's root problem was capitalism and that we must fight back as workers against the racist ruling class that Obama represents. We distributed CHALLENGE to the small but spirited crowd of a few thousand. The marchers' anger was strong as we chanted, "They got bailed out, we got sold out!" and "Fight Back!"

For PLP'ers, veterans of previous national demonstrations, it was obvious that the mass anti-war movement was essentially an anti-Bush movement led by Democrats. Previous national demonstrations organized by, or with, United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) — a national anti-war coalition tied to the Democratic Party's liberal wing — drew hundreds of thousands.

Obama, the supposed "anti-war" candidate, is just as imperialist as Bush — he's keeping combat troops in Iraq, expanding the war in Afghanistan and bombing Pakistan. But after Democratic victories in Congress and the White House, UFPJ has effectively declared, "Mission accomplished."

PLP efforts were modest. We need to struggle even more within our mass organizations to oppose Democrats' leadership of the anti-war movement. In our local group we realized that as we took leadership in organizing for this march, more people chanted anti-capitalist slogans and discussed more class-conscious politics than at past actions of our group. The more people we bring, the greater our influence.

It was the first national anti-war march for the new young PLP'er. She saw lots of division among the various phony "left" groups but thought we could have been more effective if we all united around a revolutionary working-class line. But most fake left groups, like the march organizers, shouted "Iraq for Iraqis," instead of calling for workers of the world to unite against both local and foreign bosses. The "radical" socialists who controlled the protest avoided working-class neighborhoods and marched to the Pentagon past mostly empty corporate buildings instead.

Veteran PL'ers explained to our new comrade that only PLP organizes to smash capitalism with communist revolution. We vigorously participate in reform movements — against certain wars or to win economic gains from the government or bosses — but our goal is to build a PLP of millions.

We know that the bosses can strip away any reform victories with their control of state power but a mass party of millions can smash their state and build workers' power. So-called socialists may appear "left" but they mis-lead workers to support lesser-evil capitalists and build dead-end reform movements. PLP uses CHALLENGE to sharpen class struggle and win workers to our communist politics.

To build a mass party we must do much more to challenge liberals and fake leftists. Based on our revolutionary outlook, our group returned home more motivated to intensify class struggle in our anti-war group, schools, jobs and families. ☺

HS Debate-Club Coaches Back Anti-Racist Fight

I am a NYC high school teacher who has been active in coaching debate for some time. Over the years PLP members have helped to play a leading role in spreading CHALLENGE, organizing mass debates in the schools and in raising anti-racist, anti-imperialist and pro-working class ideas in our league.

Last weekend, at our coaches' meeting, we were able to put two very important items on our agenda. The first was the racist arrest and incarceration of two Baltimore youths, Cedric Forte and Gregg Hill, a well-known debater in our region (see next CHALLENGE), and the second was an upcoming budget cuts speak-out in Brooklyn.

I was overwhelmed by the sentiment of the coaches and judges who responded to our call for action. They wanted to raise money, find lawyers, contact the Baltimore Debate League and start a mass letter-writing campaign in their classes. They wanted to post specific ways to help on the debate website. It was truly inspiring! They clearly understood the nature of racism and the prison system, and also that we must always be fighting back and taking action, even as we are involved in debates and discussions.

We had a brief speak-out on the budget cuts later in the afternoon, and some coaches really encouraged their students to take leadership. Many students were angry about how the schools will be hit by the bosses' economic crisis and made plans to get their schools involved in a citywide conference, April 2nd.

Comrades who have been involved over the years, both students and teachers, have provided a strong foundation for our ideas. We must continue organizing in our league with students, parents and teachers.

Brooklyn High School Teacher

Anti-Racist, Multi-Racial Unity Needed in Nurses' Fight

BROOKLYN, NY, March 17 — As the capitalist economic crisis deepens, producing hospital closings and millions laid off, nurses at Methodist hospital here conducted informational picketing yesterday demanding increasing staffing to enable them to deliver safe, quality care to their patients.

The nurses are currently negotiating a new contract so they took to the streets to win support from the community and from patients. Thousands of leaflets were distributed detailing a recent scientific study that reported:

- The likelihood of patient deaths increases 31% if a nurse cares for eight patients instead of four;
- Inadequate nursing staff is related to 24% of unanticipated patient deaths and permanent loss of functions;
- Higher registered nursing staff significantly lowers pressure sores, pneumonia and post-operative and urinary tract infections.

On the picket line, a CHALLENGE reporter another health care worker interviewed one of the nurses and found there is one nurse to ten patients here. "We're overworked," she said. "We have to go to the lab and pharmacy to deliver blood samples and pick up medications. Sometimes we have to go to the basement to pick up linen, since the hospital bosses have subcontracted the laundry services and that's where the clean linen is delivered."

Questioned about nurse technicians in the hospital, she replied, "The nurse techs also have a heavy workload. There is one tech for fifteen patients or more. At the end of every

shift we feel overwhelmed."

Noting that there weren't many nurse techs on the picket line, the nurse said the nurses union hadn't reached out to the 1199-SEIU members to join the line. "That was a mistake," she declared, "because every worker at this hospital is involved in patient care, from environmental service, food service and other departments. This would have had a greater impact on the hospital bosses."

Asked about Obama's health care plan, she said, "I know he wants everyone to have health care insurance, but the plan does not call for building more hospitals and hiring more nurses."

When it was time to return to work, a PLP member gave the nurse a CHALLENGE, reminding her that all workers need a united plan of action against the hospital bosses and for quality care. This is especially necessary given increasing layoffs such as that of 250 workers at Brookdale hospital and the recent closing of two Queens' hospitals.

The 1199-SEIU workers are mostly black and Latino and the nurses' union is multi-racial, but when a leaflet was submitted to the 1199-SEIU headquarters calling for unity between the two groups, the union leadership rejected it. Rank-and-filers will have to by-pass these sellouts and organize this unity in the fight against racism and the bosses' attacks.

Capitalism depends on racism and these divisions to reap super-profits. Workers don't need these bosses, their union lieutenants and the system that sends workers to the scrapheap. ☸

Haiti: Pro-Boss 'Unions', Obama No Messiahs

[The writer is corresponding with a PLP member in the U.S. — Editor]

Thanks for your letter. I hope this correspondence will begin the long journey we must make together in the struggle for a just and equal world.

There is a void in the union movement in Haiti: the swindlers who've taken the movement hostage, gangster-like pro-capitalist "unionists," have nothing to do with unionism. They're only there to steal money from the government and international organizations. The only "union" they represent is their own briefcase or computer.

Some of us are trying to restart real unions. But when we denounced the structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the new unions were hit with state repression, including firing nearly all our leaders. We also have problems of organization and training, so we're organizing forums and training workshops, but not forgetting actions like sit-ins, strikes and street protests.

I'm very pleased to get the PLP newspaper and am open to it, especially on the question of the expansion of war. In Haiti, people tend to consider your president (the new one) a messiah who will set about resolving all the problems of humanity, when in fact he enters a system in crisis, a system by-passed by time which can supply not a single serious, lasting solution, but on the contrary could make the crisis worse.

So mustn't we become a unified force to supply an alternative?

How can we work to make the voice of our peoples heard, instead of the multi-nationals? We need to deepen our discussions of ideas on the left, because Haiti does not have a serious left party.

The already-rich want to corner everything in Haiti by privatizing all enterprises. To do that, they're hounding us, trying to shut us up. So your solidarity is very important.

A Union Militant in Haiti

150th Anniversary of John Brown/Harriet Tubman Raid on Harper's Ferry

October 17, 2009 marks the 150th anniversary of the John Brown/Harriet Tubman raid on Harpers Ferry (Tubman is usually left out, but she was a key planner of the raid, and missed the raid because of severe illness). We are calling everyone to join us in Harper's Ferry that day. We have obtained permits from the National Park Service and the town of Harper's Ferry, so a big demonstration will happen.

Thirty years ago in 1979 we held a similar bold march in both Harper's Ferry and Lawrence, Kansas to celebrate the fight against slavery. Since then, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore PL'ers have held at least 10 rallies at the site to link the anti-slavery struggle to today's battle against racism.

Back in 1979, the National Park Service had no exhibits either on John Brown or on Storer College, a historically black college that opened in 1865. The only recognition of Brown was a private, horrible Wax Museum that demonized Brown (and terrified children with a scene of his hanging). Six years later, when we returned to Harper's Ferry, the Park Service had set up exhibits and a movie about John Brown and the raiders. Perhaps it was the 500-strong antiracist workers and students marching through Harper's Ferry that made the Park Service realize that the reason for Harper's Ferry National Park was the raid, and that it should be honored!

We hope that mass organizations including unions, church group, school clubs, and community groups will join in this event and learn about the role of multiracial unity and militancy to fight all forms of racism. The march will celebrate the raid as a critical step in abolishing slavery, along with slave rebellions and the Underground Railroad, and will encourage everyone to "finish the job" undertaken by Brown, Tubman, and the raiders.

We are encouraging all antiracist readers of CHALLENGE to organize in their areas and bring busloads to Harper's Ferry, West Virginia on October 17!

D.C. Red

Defend Framed-Up Airport Skycap

QUEENS, NY — Last November, a black immigrant skycap worker at LaGuardia Airport was assaulted and arrested on the job. A week later, when he returned to retrieve his paycheck, he was fired.

The skycap was performing his normal functions, helping passengers with their bags to and from their vehicles. After waiting for about ten minutes with a family of passengers in the taxi line the skycap was asked to call a private car service. When the private car arrived the skycap went to identify it, but before he could return to the family he was thrown against an airport bus. "You're going to jail!" screamed a man.

Bystanders said it appeared the skycap was being jumped, because the cops were wearing plain clothes. The police claimed the skycap had violated airport policy by hailing a private (black) cab off the street. When he showed them his phone, which proved he had called the car service, the cops confiscated it and took him away. After initially mixing up the charges, the skycap was charged with soliciting, and resisting arrest.

In the months that followed, the fired worker went to preliminary hearings regarding his case along with a few PLP members and friends. He agreed that it was important to fight this case and that it reflected a larger attack on all workers. Despite numerous attempts to force the skycap to settle,

he refused to do so. "Why should I settle, when I didn't do anything wrong?" he argued.

While he is fighting this racist arrest, the state and skycap bosses have launched another attack on him. After filing for unemployment and receiving two checks, the worker was cut off and told he would have to pay back the \$800 he had received. His employer had contested the claim, saying that he was ineligible since he had violated company policy and was terminated, not laid off. This sort of attack is happening to industrial workers everywhere who are fired for minor offenses so that bosses can avoid contributing to the growing unemployment rolls.

Meanwhile, the fight against the bogus criminal charges continues. The judge refused to dismiss the absurd case of being arrested for calling a cab, even though there is no evidence against the worker besides the lies of the cops. This should come as no surprise since under capitalism the courts work hand-in-hand with the police to defend the bosses' interests. Now the case will go to trial, and if convicted the worker could face as much as a year in jail. PLP is planning to pack the court with supporters for the trial in April and support our friend who is under attack. ☸

France: 3,000,000 in Marches, General Strike vs. Bosses' Crisis

PARIS, March 20 — Yesterday's general strike and demonstrations of three million people — 500,000 more than the January 29 action — saw 350,000 marching in Paris and 300,000 in Marseilles. Workers are reacting violently to rising unemployment and to French president Sarkozy's attacks on social reforms won over the years. They are angry at the joblessness in a crisis triggered by financial speculators, while French bosses are reaping record profits and top executives are getting fat bonuses and golden parachutes.

Following the union-organized demonstrations, fierce confrontations with the police erupted in Paris (300 arrests), Marseilles, Toulouse, Nantes, Saint-Nazaire and other cities. Before the general strike, workers took several militant actions:

- On March 12-13, Sony-France workers held its chairman, Serge Foucher, overnight until he agreed to pay at least 45,000 Euros each (\$60,000) to the 311 workers losing their jobs from the closing of Sony's Pontonx-sur-l'Adour factory.

- In Evreux, workers occupied the GlaxoSmithKline drug factory on March 11, demanding a 10,000-euro bonus (over \$13,000) for "mental suffering" for its 2,000 workers following announcement of 798 layoffs. The workers settled for a permanent 5,000-euro yearly bonus, starting this year. (The company calls it a "performance bonus.")

- After the Clairoux Continental Tire factory boss announced its closing in 2010, the 1,150 workers immediately struck. On March 12, 500 workers ambushed him inside a tire warehouse and bombarded him with eggs.

Finally, yesterday, the working class again demonstrated its ability to halt production — and profits. Half the trains were not running, one-third of Orly airport's flights were canceled, no national newspapers were printed and the radio stations were forced to play only music all day long.

Overall, the strike included railroad, telephone, electricity, state radio and TV, weather service, postal, pharmaceutical, chemical, banking, telecommunications, Airbus, glass and building material workers, along with primary and secondary school teachers. For the past seven weeks, teachers and students have partly or completely shut down half the universities, forcing Education Minister Xavier Darcos to "give up" some planned changes in recruitment of primary and secondary school teachers (Liberation newspaper; see below).

'Danger Of Uncontrollable Social Unrest...'

For the bosses, their government, and their lieutenants among the labor leaders, both the Jan-

uary 29 and today's general strikes were carefully-scripted theater. Rémi Barroux spilled the beans in France's newspaper of record, *Le Monde* (2/18): "In times of crisis and social torment ... [French President] Sarkozy needs the trade unions more than ever. Without them, and in particular the five so-called 'representative' union confederations, there is a real danger of uncontrollable social unrest."

According to *Le Monde* journalist Barroux, the government mainly wants the unions to "help...transform...the French social model," meaning dismantling the welfare state. Union membership has declined 50% over the past 25 years, down to 8% — unable, Barroux says, to obtain an increase in the minimum wage, much less follow the example of the militant workers of Guadeloupe (see CHALLENGE, 2/11, 25, and 3/11,25). But "for all that, the unions cannot abandon their protest activities, as they risk losing out to more anti-authority unions, like Solidaires."

Government Pretends To Grant Concessions

Thus, with widely-spaced one-day general strikes, the major unions pretend to be militant and the government pretends to give in. On February 18, the government reacted to the January 29 action, announcing 2.6 billion Euros (over \$3.4 billion) in social measures: a one-time 150-euro bonus to the poorest families; a 500-euro payment for 12 months to unemployed workers who don't qualify for jobless benefits, and "encouraging" companies to pay workers on short-time 75% of their normal salary, with the government paying two-thirds of the cost.

"Answering" yesterday's actions, Sarkozy merely announced speeding realization of the above measures and promising to add more measures "if needed."

On education, minister Darcos gave up changing the content of recruitment exams while maintaining the core of his reform, giving students teacher training without recruiting them. (Presently, most teachers are recruited by competitive exams first, and afterwards get a salary while receiving teacher training.) This would enable the recruitment of large numbers of lower-paid temporary teachers. These "concessions" are a government maneuver to get university teachers to accept the principle of its reform and then ram through its entire program.



Bosses' Leader Plays 'Bad Cop'

While the government pretends to give workers crumbs, Laurence Parisot, head of the bosses' organization, does a "bad cop" routine. She denounced the general strike's cost to the economy, saying it was "an easy way out,... [not] an answer." She attacked the CGT union as guilty of "demagoguery and creating illusions," holding it responsible for companies going bankrupt, hoping to split the eight confederations. And by talking tough she lets the Sarkozy government appear "uninvolved" in the conflict, hoping workers will view Sarkozy as the "lesser evil," or even the neutral arbitrator between labor and management.

The union confederations met but couldn't agree on a future plan of action, other than looking into making future mobilizations more effective, agreeing to plan for May Day and to meet again on March 30. The obvious course would be to take inspiration from the 44-day general strike of the workers in Guadeloupe.

Need For Communist Leadership

The one factor that could upset this shadow-boxing by the union leaders, bosses and government is the workers' class anger and ability to stop production and defend themselves violently. One vital element is the fight against racism, mostly missing during the strike, as was solidarity with the now-ended militant strikes of black workers in Guadeloupe and Martinique. This is where communist leadership is crucial, forging the multi-racial unity and developing the communist class consciousness necessary to win the real prize — not merely reforms that the bosses take away but seizing state power, abolishing capitalism and running society in our interest. ☛

El Salvador: FMLN Gov't. Will Serve Bosses, Not Workers

EL SALVADOR, March 23 — "I identify more with the Brazilian model than the Venezuelan one," said President-elect Mauricio Funes of the FMLN party. He added, "For me President Lula and his government are part of the 'Democratic Army' of a government that can send signals of confidence to the foreign and national investors."

Lula has promised Funes technical and economic cooperation, financing social projects and infrastructure through the National Bank of Brazil. This is one more leap in Brazilian capitalists growing political influence in Latin America.

Even though thousands of workers celebrated the FMLN victory, having the illusion of a change to a better life, the reality is revealed in the above statements and plans of Funes and FMLN leadership: guarantee the profits of foreign and national capitalists and therefore the exploitation of workers. This is not a victory for the working class; instead it continues the monster of capitalism with the face of a "red" government,

The open fascist capitalists of ARENA (the governing party for the last 20 years) and the

murderers in the armed forces quickly accepted the victory of Funes because they know they'll continue being the ruling class that will keep exploiting the workers.

Funes has not hidden his great admiration for big capitalists like Mexico's Carlos Slim, one of the world's richest capitalists. He also felt greatly honored that Obama and Hillary Clinton, representatives of history's most vicious imperialists, congratulated him on becoming one more capitalist leader.

We workers shouldn't have the illusion that Funes will make conditions better, that he'll combat the effects of the worldwide economic crisis or halt the imperialists' preparations for world war. In Funes' first post-election speech, he said, "Tonight we should have the same feeling of hope and reconciliation that made possible the signing of the peace accords in our country," he said in his first speech after winning the Presidency. But he didn't say the "peace" accords have only brought more poverty, unemployment, repression and death to workers and their families.

A real communist revolution is still the only answer to capitalism and the bosses' crisis, to "21st Century Socialism" or phony leftists like Lula, who keep oppressing workers. Our struggle continues to be organizing the workers using the Party's ideas and practices through class struggle, the distribution of CHALLENGE and the growth of the revolutionary communist PLP — fighting for a communist world without exploitation, money or capitalists. ☛



LETTERS



Raul Castro Following China's Capitalist Model

I would like to add to the letter (CHALLENGE, 3/25) on the Perestroika of Fidel and Raúl Castro. Big changes are indeed taking place in Cuba, besides their national baseball team not reaching the finals of an international baseball championship for the first time in decades. It wasn't just the former foreign Minister Pérez Roque and the Prime Minister Carlos Lage who were forced to resign but also the entire top hierarchy of the Foreign Trade, Fishing, Steel and Labor ministries.

They were replaced mostly by military men linked to Raúl. Many see this as a triumph of the "Chinese Road" which Raúl and his group are taking to develop capitalism in Cuba. Those who were forced to quit were labeled as "Talibans," or roadblocks to a Chinese-style modernization of the economy, despite their backing the more open capitalist reforms since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its subsidies to Cuba. They are even identified as too "Chavistas," since Raúl and his faction want to break with dependence on Venezuelan oil so as not to fall into the same hole following the end of Soviet subsidies.

Raúl wants to diversify while building the "Chinese model" of joint ventures between the state and foreign companies. And, like in China where the army plays an important role in many of the key economic sectors, Cuba's military is already the biggest manager of enterprises there, involved in over 800 companies of all types, many linked to foreign investors.

While Raúl and his group don't necessarily want to break with Venezuela's Chávez, they're emphasizing their relationship with Brazil, whose huge Petrobras oil company has many investments in Cuba. Brazil can also help Cuba with biofuels, like ethanol from sugar.

Brazil's President Lula is also on very good terms with Obama. He recently visited Obama in Washington and advocated ending the U.S. embargo on Cuba. (The Obama administration just eased travelling restrictions to Cuba.) The Raúl group also wants to make more deals with Russia and China.

Raúl and his group realize the Cuban economy is being heavily affected by the world's economic meltdown. Relying on Venezuela is shaky since its oil-based economy is being hit hard by the drop in the price of crude.

The price of nickel, Cuba's main export, has declined 30%. Tourism, another big source of foreign currency, is also down. Worst of all was the huge losses Cuba suffered from the hurricanes sweeping the entire island in 2008.

Raúl and his group have opted for the only road they know, more capitalism. That's what's behind Cuba's Perestroika.

Red Che

Camping Trip Brings H.S. Student Step Closer to PL

The PLP camping trip in February was wonderful. I met some old friends and made some new ones. The conversations were interesting and the recreation was excellent. It was truly a communist affair.

I don't know how life in a communist society is, but this trip felt like it was a small taste of communism. There was a strong sense of community among the people. I like that tasks were given to different individuals or groups. Each task, in the end, benefited everyone. No one had any problem sharing their belongings.

There were a few faults with this trip. We did not get to talk about dialectics. The main focus of the workshops were the budget cuts, foreign policy, and Obama. Another fault was that the groups did not stay on topic. Some conversations were so good that it took a while before anybody brought them back to the original question.

This trip has brought me a step closer to the Party. The more I read CHALLENGE, talk to other comrades about what is going on, and hear about workers' struggles against the bosses, the clearer it becomes that this capitalist society is no good

and needs to be eradicated. This trip showed me that the struggles in the world give revolution a chance. The chance of a revolution may be small right now, but it is definitely not zero.

High School Comrade

Rulers Use Fear; Answer: Fight Back!

In discussing the article in the last CHALLENGE, The Seven Deadly Scenarios, one in our group commented that the army has been forced to recruit on an individualist basis (An Army of One), which makes it harder to marshal the patriotism they need. However, once soldiers get sent to Iraq, they can either be disgusted by what they observe and open to communist ideas, or can justify the horrors of war by allowing themselves to believe the patriotic lies they're told.

As CHALLENGE frequently points out, there is a connection between war and fascism. In the U.S., the government has fostered street gangs to the point where, in many cities, more young people are killed at home than in Iraq. The bosses use the fear engendered by their gangs to justify metal detectors in schools, cameras everywhere and heavy police presence in working-class black and Latino neighborhoods. The average teenager believes that metal detectors and police in the school are "for our protection," not to intimidate us. As the article pointed out, the rulers will use fear of epidemics as an excuse to control the movement of people out of their neighborhoods. This is reminiscent of the Nazis who used the lie that "all the Jews have typhoid" as an excuse for locking them up in the ghettos. The U.S. government has been getting many victims of fascist policies to accept or promote those policies.

Because of the weaknesses and small size of the communist movement, it is easier for the bosses to use fear to promote passivity. For example, some teachers would not fight school closings because they thought they'd be more likely to get another job if they kept quiet. On the other hand, there are many examples of the working class fighting back, which we read in the pages of CHALLENGE.

However, we are not working hard enough to strengthen the side of the contradiction that promotes fighting back and fighting for working-class control — communism. Sometimes we put too much stock in what the ruling class is doing and don't think clearly enough about the ways we can make a difference by winning enough people to the communist side, so that we can smash the lying, murderous capitalist class.

CHALLENGE Reader

Spain: PL'er Aims to Grow Communist Activity

Some time ago when comrades here drifted apart — vacations, changes in work for some, and others returning to their countries of origin — I felt disillusioned with the political work we were doing in Spain. I was too mechanical in just counting the number of people that we had around us, rather than trying to understand that we've been doing positive work to build PLP internationally.

CHALLENGE and much of the communist political line of PLP has been distributed and discussed with many workers from Italy, France, Ireland, Turkey, Portugal, India and other parts of Europe. Some of these workers have emigrated back to these areas of the world.

Currently I count on two other people who are close to us but are still studying PLP's documents and practice. I'm trying to expand our communist activity and we are all working to increase our commitment to the communist ideas of PLP.

PLP's work is not simple, though it should not be necessary to say this. The working class is bombarded by capitalist ideas that try to divert



MADRID, March 23 — Students in Spain have been protesting the Bolonia plan to privatize public universities. Last week, the Barcelona cops viciously attacked students supporting the occupation of fellow students at the university there. The local "socialist" authorities fully supported the cops' attack.

Yesterday immigrant workers marched in Madrid and other cities against the subprime fraud. Spain, like Britain, the U.S. and Ireland, were among the hardest-hit by the subprime collapse since their economies relied increasingly on speculation by bankers and real estate swindlers. The marchers complained about the lack of help they're getting over what they call "real estate fraud and garbage mortgages."

The marches were organized by the National Platform of Those Affected by Mortgages and by the National Coordination of Educadoreans in Spain. The said they were sold over-valued homes and apartments and were charged four times as much as other customers. Again, racism is part and parcel of capitalism worldwide.

The marchers demanded a moratorium on their mortgage payments and other changes. But these workers shouldn't expect much from capitalism in such deep crisis. Indeed the best lesson they can learn from this disaster is that a system which can't satisfy the housing needs of millions worldwide must be destroyed.

workers' minds away from the reality of oppression in the world. But people now are thinking about the economic and social crisis which gives us the opportunity to take the initiative to explain that what's really happening is the owners of all the wealth want even more as they prepare for a third world war.

I'm proud to be a member of PLP and I want to dedicate myself to serve the working class, though it's hard not having a comrade with the same ideas to work with. I struggle to continue the work of fighting for a better society, a communist society. I get up every day thinking of ways to talk to people and tell them about the Party's ideas, but a visit from a PLP comrade to Spain wouldn't hurt!

I hope where it's possible that there are at least two who are thinking, planning, and building the Party. The working class needs the ideas of PLP and we have to continue figuring out how to win more workers to join the ranks of the PLP. Long Live Communism.

Red Comrade in Spain

Ex-CIA Agent

continued from page 8

Thus, Baer says, the only realistic option is negotiations. He suggests guaranteeing Iranian internal security and ending the embargo in exchange for Iran ending its support of Hamas and Hezbollah. He would also acknowledge Iran's role in Iraq and Afghanistan and establish an international body to monitor oil supplies and nuclear arms, including Israel's.

This book is very informative, but even if the U.S. ruling class were to follow Baer's prescriptions for U.S. imperialism's survival, all its contradictions would still remain. Obama is expanding the war in Afghanistan, is maintaining a large presence in Iraq and supporting Israeli apartheid.

Whatever the exact pathway, massive war looms over the region for the control of resources. The U.S. will almost certainly fare badly in this conflict, while killing untold numbers of soldiers and civilians. Our job is to turn the guns around on these imperialist murderers and begin to build an international society based on anti-racism, anti-nationalism and egalitarianism — communism. ☺

March on May Day!

May Day (May 1st) is the working-class's international holiday celebrated by tens of millions of workers worldwide. It was born out of — and honors — the Chicago workers' historic struggle for the 8-hour day on May 1, 1886, a general strike that spread to workers nation-wide. It's a day when workers around the globe march for their common demands, signifying international working-class solidarity.

It's the day when the world's working class "holds a review of its forces, mobilized for the first time as One army, [under] One flag...[to] make the capitalists and landowners of all lands realize that today the proletarians of all lands are, in very truth, united."

Ever since, with communist leadership, it has symbolized workers' demands and class interests, united in the fight against capitalism. But by the 1950's, most "communist" parties had abandoned these principles. Union leaders became lieutenants of the bosses, and either renounced May Day or stripped it of its revolutionary character.

In 1971, the Progressive Labor Party picked up the red banners of May Day in the U.S. It has organized May Day marches and activities in many countries for 38 years, to unite workers around their universal demands, regardless of capitalist-created borders. These include opposing imperialist war, racism, the special oppression of women, wage slavery and fascist police terror while championing unity of immigrant and citizen workers and the only solution to all these attacks facing the international working class — communist revolution. ☸

Assemble:

N.Y.- May 2, 11 am at Linden Blvd. & Flatbush Ave.

L.A.- May 1, 11 am at Olympic & Broadway

FIGHT FOR COMMUNISM! MARCH ON MAY DAY

Workers of the world, unite to...

FIGHT BACK against landlords, evictions, budget cuts & unemployment — Make the bosses take the losses!

TURN THE GUNS AROUND on the war-makers — From Iraq & Afghanistan to Palestine & Pakistan, turn imperialist wars and occupation into class war for communist revolution!

SMASH racism, sexism, deportations & killer KKKops!

A Capitalist system that cannot meet the needs of **ALL** workers, soldiers and students **must be destroyed!**

PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

RED EYE ON THE NEWS

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

No free lawyers for immigrants

NYT, 3/3 – In the heart of Manhattan, amid one of the greatest concentrations of legal muscle in the world, hundreds of New York's immigrant poor are locked up with no access to a lawyer as they fight deportation.... In the immigration court system no defendant has the right to a court-appointed lawyer, and some of the most vulnerable end up in the hands of fly-by-night operators who bungle cases wholesale.... "Justice should not depend on the income level of immigrants,"....many should not have been placed in deportation proceedings by the government in the first place...

While money for judges, clerks and free legal services is short, the Department of Homeland Security has been very well-financed... "They have tons of new lawyers who are raring to go, and now they're just arresting lots of people and shoveling them into immigration court." Meanwhile, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg said immigrant communities must learn to stop hiring bad lawyers.

Sexist military hides rapes

NYT, 3/2 – She was raped when she was in the Navy. "He was very rough," she said.... "My military career ended. My assailant's didn't." The truly chilling fact is that, as the Pentagon readily admits, the overwhelming majority of rapes that occur in the military go unreported, perhaps as many as 80

percent. And most of the men accused of attacking women receive little or no punishment. The military's record of prosecuting rapists is not just lousy, it's atrocious.

There is no real desire in the military to modify this aspect of its culture. It is an environment in which the overwhelming tendency has been to see all women — civilian and military, young and old, American and foreign — solely as sexual objects.

No safety net for illegal work

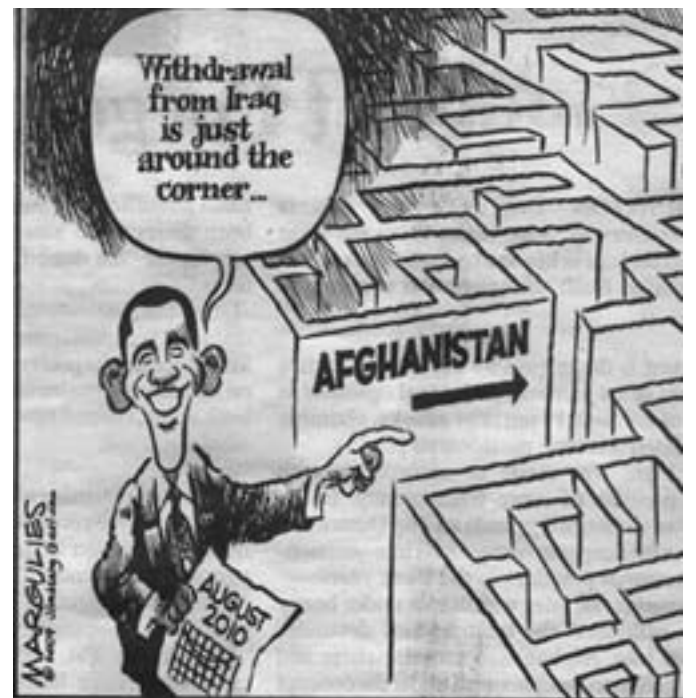
NYT, 3/22 – Many Americans who lost jobs are turning for help to the government's unemployment safety net, with job assistance and unemployment insurance. But immigrants without legal status, by law, do not have access to it. They are clinging to low-wage jobs, often working more hours for less money, and taking whatever work they can find, no matter the conditions.

Despite the mounting pressures, many of the "illegal" immigrants are resisting leaving the country. After years of working here, they say, they have homes and education for their children. "I've got my family, my wife, my kids. Everything is here."

Spraying hits poor, not coca

MinutemanMedia.org, 3/5 – In July 2007, Teresa Ortega stood solemnly in a field of wilting corn and pineapple crops as tears streamed down her cheeks. She had taken it upon herself to start a farm with 100 widows — women who had lost their husbands and children to Colombia's war and were fighting against poverty. Now — after a plane sprayed chemicals over their farm — all was lost.

Between 2000 and 2007, the U.S. government spent over half a billion dollars spraying a chemical defoliant on approximately 2.6 million acres of



land in Colombia. Half a billion dollars bought U.S. taxpayers not the promised 50 percent drop in coca production, but rather a 36 percent increase. And now there is "credible and trustworthy evidence" that fumigations are harmful to human health.

Franco 'disappeared' leftist kids

NYT, 3/1 – For 65 years, Ms. Girón, a Spanish mother of seven, ached to know what had become of her son Jesús. The story is part of a dark and long-overlooked chapter of the repressive decades under Franco: the "disappearance" of children taken from left-wing families as part of an effort to purge Franco's Spain of Marxist influence.

Hundreds, there could be thousands, of children were taken from families suspected of ties to left-wing groups....Children led a life of fascist doctrine, harsh discipline and Catholic ritual.

Obama, Bosses' Immigration 'Reform': Slave Labor, Cannon Fodder for War

In preparations for wider, global war to maintain their world domination, Obama and U.S. rulers need liberal fascism: to sharply attack workers while trying to win us to their side. Domestically, they need slave labor for their war industries and tens of million of soldiers for their imperialist battlefields. Spurred by the deepening economic crisis and stiffer competition from other imperialists and regional bosses, they want to pass a Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill to achieve these aims, using millions of undocumented workers.

They've been pursuing two roads simultaneously: terroristic immigration raids and a lengthy road to legalization. Fascistic raids can terrorize immigrants into accepting super-exploitation, driving immigrants into the arms of the rulers' politicians, patriotism and elections as a "solution."

A NY Times editorial (2/1) attacked "Nativists" or open anti-immigrant racists: "Americans want immigration solved, and they realize that mass deportations will not do that." Meanwhile, they praise the "rule of law" (bosses' law), a call which liberal immigrants' rights leaders adopted, accepting fascist immigration reform rules making legalization a long, expensive process, as the lesser evil to open racism. But they're really two sides of the same coin.

The top imperialists' "we-love-immigrants" line means low wages and cannon fodder for war, along with U.S. citizen workers. Another NY Times editorial attacked the Minutemen and called for "accepting" immigrants. A series on immigrants notes the growing numbers of immigrants and the importance

of schools in teaching them "American" values.

So, despite the economic crisis, these bosses in their media champion this Bill, while portraying the 12 million undocumented workers and immigrants in general in a favorable light. They also use their past and present high-ranking fascistic officials and politicians to echo this call.

Obama and Biden toe the bosses' line on immigration "reform." They "Support a system that allows undocumented immigrants who are in good standing to pay a fine, learn English, and go to the back of the line for the opportunity to become citizens." (Whitehouse.gov, 1/21, 2009)

Janet Napolitano, Obama's Department of Homeland Security Secretary and new chief of ICE (immigration police), said (2007 Washington Post op-ed): "Don't label me soft on illegal immigration.... [I] supervised the prosecution of more than 6,000 immigration felonies [as Arizona Attorney General] and I govern a state where, in 2005, there were 550,000 apprehensions of 'illegal' immigrants." In 2006, she sent the National Guard to the border to attack undocumented workers.

Meanwhile, Napolitano has criticized construction of the fence along the U.S.-Mexico border and urged Congress to pass the June 2007 Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill. In January 2008, Napolitano called for enhanced border security and said the U.S. should crack down on employers who hire "illegal" immigrants. She also advocated a path to citizenship for "illegal" immigrants now here.

Michael Chertoff, Former Homeland Security

Secretary — who, as head of ICE, terrorized the immigrant community, deporting 350,000 undocumented workers nationwide in 2008 alone — also lobbied Congress in 2007 for the immigration reform bill that failed to pass. In a recent interview on the impact of the economic crisis on immigration reform, he said it's needed to be ready when the economy becomes vibrant again because the U.S. will need "some more workers coming from other parts of the world..." (CFR.org, Council on Foreign Affairs website, 3/16/2009).

With Chertoff's remarks about a "vibrant economy" and the media's platitude about "hard-working undocumented workers," these liberal bosses try to hide their "covenant with death" in preparation for global war and fascism.

The slave-labor conditions imposed on immigrant workers are becoming widespread in industry as the bosses also force citizen workers to accept layoffs, lower wages and more fascistic working conditions. PLP fights for unity of citizen and immigrant workers against racist unemployment, immigration raids and laws that mean indentured servitude and a military draft. We also fight harassment, speed-up and slave-labor working conditions.

Racism against immigrant, black and Latino workers is the cutting edge of the bosses' attacks on all workers. We fight to unite the working class against racism, to abolish the bosses' borders with communist revolution. In a communist society, all workers will be welcomed and needed to work and fight for the interests of the international working class. ☸

Ex-CIA Agent's Book: Was Iran Real Winner in Iraq War?

There's much to learn from ex-CIA agent Robert Baer's latest book, "The Devil We Know, Dealing With the New Iranian Superpower." Baer (the guy who George Clooney played in "Syriana") lays out Iran's interests and policies in the Middle East, aiming to reform U.S. policy in the region. However, his analysis of the area's dynamics, from Iraq and Afghanistan to Lebanon and Israel/Palestine, is very insightful and by-and-large correct.

He says Iran is a very complex society, poorly understood in the West. Although a police state, its population is becoming more liberal and modernized. However, Baer ignores the fact that 30 years ago Iranian workers and youth, going beyond liberalism, could have overthrown both the pro-U.S. Shah as well as capitalism. Unfortunately, misled by the fake left, the revolution was co-opted by the reactionary Islamic mullahs who rule today.

The U.S. sees the bombastic President Ahmadinejad as the center of power, but control really lies with the religious and security leadership. Likewise, Iran's influence in Iraq, western Afghanistan, Lebanon and Gaza, through indirect proxies and policies, is much greater than is understood by Westerners. Much of this power has been inadvertently handed to Iran through the disastrous policies of the U.S. and its allies.

After a costly eight-year war with Iraq (1980-1988), Iran was unable to topple Saddam Hussein, but U.S. rulers did it for them in 2003. The U.S. fiasco in Iraq allowed Iran to increase its control. Iraq's Shia majority, long oppressed by Saddam's Sunni Baath Party, welcomed the help of Shiite Iran. Washington's first choice to run Iraq was Chalabi, a double agent working for Iran. In 1980, the Da'wa party, which now holds the major share of power, fled to Iran for protection from Saddam Hussein and remains heavily indebted to it. The Supreme Council for the Islamic Resistance in Iraq (now the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council), was founded in '82 sponsored by Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

Iran also co-opted the most militant Shiite nationalist, Muqtada al-Sadr, who fled there when the U.S. defeated his forces in 2003. After the invasion, the British supposedly controlled Basra, the large

city in southern Iraq, which contains most of its oil. But the Iranians have controlled it politically, their adherents winning the elections and administering charities and leading mosques. The petroleum-export facilities are supplying 600,000 barrels a day to Iran despite supposed British management. Thus, Iran controls or heavily influences many of Iraq's main players without sending its own forces into the country.

Western Afghanistan has also long been an area Iran seeks to control. The destruction of the Taliban was another gift from the U.S., leaving a vacuum Iran rushed to fill. Herat, a 40% Shiite city, had a governor friendly to Iran. NATO removed him but made him energy minister! Central Asian gas must pass through either Iran or Afghanistan via Herat to get to Pakistan, and Iran intends to control either route, thus wielding influence over that country. Iran also has the power to close the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow exit from the Persian Gulf through which 20% of the world's daily oil supply passes, to a degree holding the whole world hostage.

Iranian influence in the Mid-East is also growing. In 1982, when Israel invaded Lebanon, the PLO fled in disarray. Then Iran organized the many angry young Lebanese men into Hezbollah. With

patience and secrecy, they built Hezbollah into an effective military and political force, able to defeat Israel and dominate Lebanese politics.

Long anxious to gain a foothold with Hamas but unable to access Gaza, Iranians were waiting when, in 1982, Israel stupidly expelled the Hamas leadership to Lebanon. Since then they've influenced Hamas to de-emphasize terrorism and become a serious military organization.

The Iranians have also been gaining a foothold in the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan. Militant Sunni leaders are now willing to unite with Shiite Iran because no Sunni leaders have fought Israel and many, like the princes of Saudi Arabia, are known for corruption and self-indulgence. Extremists like Al Qaeda promote useless isolated terrorist attacks. Iran has been incorruptible, reliable and successful in building a political and military network of all Muslims in the region.

Baer warns U.S. rulers that Iran cannot be contained by force. That would require hundreds of thousands of troops that are indefinitely in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, a U.S. attack on Iran would probably fail even if invaded by a huge army. And Iran would almost certainly close Hormuz and/or destroy the Gulf's oil facilities.

continued on p. 6

SUBSCRIBE or RENEW!

All the communist politics, news, and struggle from around the world!

•••\$15 individual 1 year

•••\$35 for institution 1 year

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____



Make check or money order to: Challenge Periodicals, PO Box 808, Brooklyn, NY 11202