

CHALLENGE



THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER OF PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

RULING CLASS, NOT VOTERS, CALL SHOTS IN ELECTION

Like all elections, Obama's, Clinton's and McCain's three-ring circus helps capitalists disguise the class nature of their dictatorship. The illusion is that voters, mainly workers, get to choose the nation's leaders. In reality, a ruling class — led by powerful financiers — hand-picks, bankrolls and directs each of the candidates.

Sometimes, as with Clinton and Dole in 1996, the race reflects major divisions over policy between factions of U.S. capitalists, usually the main wing which advocates long-range imperialist investment abroad vs. the isolationists who oppose costly foreign profit wars, wanting to concentrate on immediate domestic profits. But this year, the front-runners all promote the main, imperialist wing's agenda for a domestic police state and ever-expanding war. Campaign 2008 boils down to which candidate can most effectively mobilize the nation for the imperialists' needs. In Texas recently, Obama and Clinton debated their relative fitness to be commander-in-chief.

The war-making billionaires have high hopes for Obama and Clinton. Both are luring more black and Latino, female and young workers to express patriotic loyalty to the rulers, more so this year to gain support for wider war. Both want health plans that maintain drug and insurance profits, racist plans which will fall most heavily on lower-income black and Latino families who can least afford to pay anything into such schemes. Both advocate "national service" — mandatory drafting of all youth for two years, many of whom (especially black and Latino youth) will serve that time in the military. Both will make workers will pay heavily for the rulers' domestic and global aims. But both promise to impose wartime economic discipline on reluctant capitalists, eliminating tax cuts on the rich in order to rein in the excesses of the corporations and CEOs in the drive to pay for the racist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But, if the imperialists fail to sell the Democrats' plans

for war taxes and regulation, they can fall back on Nazi goose-stepping militarist McCain. All three candidates get their main funding from the sector of U.S. finance capital that has the greatest interest in broadening the U.S. war machine's field of operation. [See page 7.] Taking no chances, imperialist Wall Street giant Goldman Sachs backs all three contenders.

YES, VIRGINIA (AND TEXAS AND OHIO), THERE IS A RULING CLASS

The New York Times (2/10) proclaimed that the 2008 campaign proves that a king-making elite does not exist: "This season's primaries have made the idea of a political establishment, whether Republican or Democratic, hard to take seriously." Even harder to take seriously is the Times' denial, given the candidates' backers and advisers:

- Zbigniew Brzezinski headlines Obama's cast of counselors. Brzezinski has served as director of the elite, banker-backed Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and David Rockefeller's Trilateral Commission. He helped Carter frame his infamous 1979 Doctrine, which vowed permanent occupation of Mid-East oilfields.

- Clinton's handlers, mainly war criminals from husband Bill's days, including Madeleine Albright and William Perry, have formed their own think-tank, the Center for a New American Security. Clinton's CNAS has now joined with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to study U.S. military readiness for challenges from Iran, Pakistan, China and beyond. Hillary's "peacenik" supporters at Carnegie take "generous financial support" from the A-list of U.S. imperialism: BP, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, the Rockefellers, Shell and the Pentagon.

- One-time "maverick" McCain now has Establish-

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Organizing CHALLENGE Clubs in Spain

An Irish youth described a police attack on a PLP meeting as reported in a previous CHALLENGE: "When we were leaving at 6:30 AM and opened the door, cops were there to spray pepper gas in our faces. They tried to force their way in and arrest us but we stopped them. One young woman was in a state of shock; the rest were vomiting due to the gas. When some youths who stayed and then prepared to leave later, they were surprised by the police who yelled at, insulted and ridiculed them for throwing up due to the pepper spray."

Shortly afterwards I met with the collective and began preparing a leaflet describing the police treatment of youth and the working class worldwide. "This has made us stronger," declared this Irish youth, emboldening him to confront capitalism's whole fascist movement.

Now we're working in some neighborhood social workshops enabling residents to take classes near their homes. The workshops include classes in French, English, Italian and martial arts as well as a project to form a musical band, all to benefit the community. These workshops offer the opportunity to spread the Party's ideas to more

people and put them on the long road to destroy capitalism and establish communist workers' power.

Many of our friends read CHALLENGE and some share it on the internet. Others ask for copies to place at art displays for passers-by to read. The "Okupa" movement in this city is big. Many youth organize to occupy abandoned sites and create workshops in art, music and other activities the community needs. While these youth feel impelled to do something for society, they lack a political line that explains why we must fight this system. As a communist PLP'er, this motivates me to participate in these groups and advance our ideas on the destruction of capitalism.

The Party is organizing clubs to study CHALLENGE and recruit these youth to PLP. We're bent on continuing to fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat worldwide.

A PLP'er Immigrant in Spain

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International Women's Day Signals That:

Women Need Communism to End Special Oppression

March 8 is International Women's Day, symbolized by the 1908 New York City march of 15,000 women demanding better pay and shorter hours. In 1910 the Socialist Second International held the first International Women's Conference and established International Women's Day. It has since celebrated many women's struggles — including the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire and the women's march to the municipal Duma (council) in Czarist Russia in early 1917, which helped spark the Bolshevik Revolution.

Internationally, workers will commemorate this month and day to honor the struggle against the special oppression of women and the capitalist system that promotes it, although the bosses and their media will use it to pay lip-service to women's struggles. We must recognize that this special oppression is an integral and necessary part of capitalism, which must be fought every day, not just on International Women's Day or during Women's History month.

Exploitation of women hasn't always existed nor have conditions become better; it has simply changed in form. In primitive communal society men and women's labor was valued equally. In early class society, women were primarily unpaid domestic workers. As capitalism's needs shifted during industrialization, super-exploitation of women in factories began. The ruling class uses the special

oppression of women — like racism and nationalism — as a tool to oppress the entire working class. When women's wages are driven down, it helps lower wages for all workers.

Historically, the bosses cut costs, including wages and on workplace safety, to increase profits. The 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City saw 148 mostly Eastern European and Italian women immigrant workers die, trapped in the building because the doors were bolted shut. In the U.S., this event, as well as many other uprisings, achieved higher wages and better working conditions for some workers, but these reforms can be, and are, reversed, especially during capitalism's economic crises.

Entering World Wars I and II, inter-imperialist rivalry among the major capitalist nations was sharpening. To fight these wars, the bosses of these countries had to mobilize men to go to war and women to replace them in the factories, especially in war production. As the U.S. entered World War II, the ruling class used images like Rosie the Riveter and other mass propaganda to mobilize women to move into war production factories, with the slogan, "We Can Do It!," to "empower" women to contribute to the war effort. When male workers returned after these wars, the bosses ousted women from the factories and sent them home to the unpaid domestic labor of maintaining a family.

Today, women are super-exploited globally, attacked by the U.S. racist destruction of welfare (especially black and Latino women); paid \$2 a day in China's vast manufacturing economy; in Mexico's maquiladoras; subjected to mass rapes in the Congo's wars for diamonds and resources; victims of extreme anti-woman bias of Islamic and Christian

fundamentalists; and murdered, raped and forced into prostitution in the U.S. imperialist war in Iraq.

Women already make up more than half of the super-exploited sub-contracted manufacturing jobs in the U.S., while remaining the principal childcare givers. Women are still paid less than men for similar work, to help lower all workers' wages. A recent Time magazine cover displayed the newer, modern version of Rosie the Riveter, pushing for U.S. national service (a back-door draft). This could potentially mobilize millions of U.S. youth for fascism and world war.

The U.S. presidential election has been touted as an "advance" for women because Hillary Clinton is a candidate. But she is just another millionaire agent of the bosses. All leaders of capitalist governments — men or women, black or white — enforce the bosses' profit system and subjugation of workers.

The special oppression of women divides the working class, and dehumanizes women. Economic exploitation makes women a commodity, leading to degrading them as sexual objects and prostitutes, victims of physical violence, rape and enslavement worldwide. We must ensure more woman — especially as soldiers and workers — take the lead in the effort to destroy the system that created and maintains the special oppression of women, racism and its exploitation of all workers. Only by black, Latin, Asian and white men and women workers uniting can the entire working class end the oppression of capitalism. Communism is the only system that values women as workers and allows all workers to reach their full potential. JOIN US! ☸

(Next issue will deal with more on cultural oppression of women.)

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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The day women burned the veil of oppression . . .

The revolutions in Russia and China brought unprecedented changes in the status of women workers. Following working-class seizure of state power, many sexist traditions and practices were immediately outlawed.

- Thousands of women in the Soviet Union burnt the foul, hot, heavy horsehair veils that symbolized their possession by their husbands
- In China, Vietnam, and Soviet Asia, practices such as foot-binding, child and contractual marriage, polygamy, wife-beating and veiling were immediately made illegal.

- In all socialist countries, abortion was legalized and free, and prostitution was eliminated.
 - In the USSR, daycare centers were established at workplaces so that women could, if they so chose, breastfeed and care for their children during the workday.
- Unfortunately, these societies kept too many of capitalist practices, like the wage system, and therefore failed to secure the liberation of women and of the entire working class. PLP is learning from the strengths and also of the weaknesses of our predecessors; we fight directly for communism and the true liberation of all workers. ☸

Ruling Class Calls Shots in Elections

continued from front page

ment CFR pundit Max Boot in his corner pushing for a U.S. Foreign Legion. Boot joins McCain advisors Henry Kissinger, Brent Scowcroft (Bush, Sr.'s National Security Advisor) and Colin Powell.C

RULING CLASS'S TOP THINK-TANKS DICTATE POLICY

The dominant faction of U.S. imperialists is determined to control the policy of whoever wins in November. The CFR and the Brookings Institution "are undertaking an ambitious initiative to develop a nonpartisan blueprint for the next U.S. president, one which can be used as the foundation for the new administration's Middle-East policy." (CFR website) The CFR team has representation from

all three camps: Sandy Berger (Clinton), Brzezinski (Obama), and Scowcroft (McCain). Not coincidentally, all three candidates have — in the CFR's Foreign Affairs journal — pledged to vastly enlarge the U.S. Army. It is these think-tank policy-makers, bankers and heads of the largest corporations who form the ruling class that runs the country, no matter who sits in the White House.

As popular interest in the elections heightens, it is crucial to expose the candidates' class allegiance. They all defend a racist profit system that systematically and brutally exploits workers, often through war, and is long overdue for extinction. But the working class cannot just vote away its tormentors. Capitalism's destruction can only be achieved through the long-term, painstaking building of a revolutionary communist party — PLP — that will ultimately put an armed working class in power. ☸

PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

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PLP Students Lead Action vs. Racist NYC Budget Cuts

NEW YORK CITY, February 14 — A multi-racial group of over 500 parents, teachers and students rallied on the steps of City Hall today, protesting the recent racist budget cuts. On January 30, a \$180 million cut had been announced and it was carried out the very next day.

The idea for the protest grew out of a teachers union Delegate Assembly on February 6 when PLP members called for the immediate organization of a protest rally for February 14 at Department of Education (DOE) headquarters. They called for teacher unity with parents and students and for the union to use the press, radio and leafleting subway stations to bring out as many people as possible.

The union leadership attacked the call, saying the 14th was "too soon" to bring anyone out. (This from a union with over 100,000 members!) They said, "We can't 'hide' behind our students." Clearly the union leaders feared thousands of angry workers and students on the streets. Instead they called for a "coalition rally" for March 19, six weeks after the cuts were made.

But PLP students and teachers showed what

could be done NOW. At several schools, PLP'ers immediately called for meetings to plan a student-parent-teacher fight-back. They proposed a rally on Valentine's Day at DOE offices.

The students wrote a flyer advertising the rally and e-mailed it to other student governments city-wide; posted copies around schools; made announcements over school loudspeakers; explained the impact of the cuts in the classrooms. The news of the rally quickly spread to other schools and they took up the organizing as well, encouraging students to join the fight-back.

No Love on Valentine's Day

At the rally some student speeches emphasized the need to build a movement to smash capitalism, that we must not rely on lying politicians. Some of the latter said they would "help" the students, asserting that the students and parents need Democratic politicians "to save them."

One young woman speaker said if politicians really cared, billionaire Mayor Bloomberg would pay the school "deficit" out of his \$11 billion fortune because he CAN. Instead we have Democratic can-



didate Obama wanting 92,000 more troops in the military while NYS Senator Hillary Clinton allows \$504 million to be cut from the school budget. Some "help"! The speaker concluded that we need a revolution to end this racist system. Condemning the budget cuts as racist, students also linked them to the widening war and to a growing police state.

Liberals in the crowd told the cops that the students "weren't a part of the demonstration" and wanted them to leave. The cops, eager to end the event, tried to negotiate but we told the crowd what was going on and they all began chanting, "Let them speak!"

The final speaker described the growing repression against workers fighting the attacks of the system. While Bloomberg rolled out the red carpet a week before for the NY Giants, he will never do that for angry parents and students on the steps of City Hall. Fight for communism! ☸

Industrial Workers Find Their Party: PLP

"When I was a child growing up in Mexico a question occurred to me: Why do some people have more than they need while others have nothing. I always felt this was very unjust; and since my parents had no answer I spent most of my youth with this question in my mind. So when I first read CHALLENGE and met the Party I understood that I was not the only crazy person that wondered about these things." This is how an industrial worker described his first impression of CHALLENGE at a recent dinner for industrial workers. He was then asked if he considered himself a member of the Progressive Labor Party and immediately replied "Yes, yes!"

In all, two industrial workers joined the Party at the dinner, showing us, as one comrade put it, that workers know that the racism, imperialist war and capitalism are hell for us, but what is missing is the solution: communist ideas and our Party.

Communist ideas were front and center: a comrade opened the dinner with a talk about the importance of CHALLENGE in building for revolution and in the need to have confidence in workers' openness to communism. He called on everyone to renew their commitment to getting CHALLENGE to as many workers as possible through our networks of family, friends, and co-workers. These networks will form the basis for battles in the streets, factories, barracks, and eventually the taking of state power by the working class.

After dinner a comrade suggested we play a game called three questions. Each person answered three questions and then chose the next person to answer, and so on until everyone had a turn. The questions were: how were they introduced to the Party/CHALLENGE, what their first impressions were, and how their impressions have changed. Workers gave suggestions on how to improve CHALLENGE, how we might utilize and distribute the paper under fascist conditions, and asked for advice on how to distribute it to more workers. We struggled with each other to commit to translating and writing more. Through this discussion, which ran late into the night, we all got to know each other a little better and realized what another comrade summed up at the end: "it seems we all came to be here tonight through our friendships with other workers. That is how the Party has grown and will continue to grow. Our task then is to build more friendships and turn all our friendships and relationships into vehicles for building our CHALLENGE networks and the Party."

It was a great evening overall. We consolidated our growing industrial base, raised close to \$200, and sold all our tickets for the upcoming May Day Dinner. Best of all the Progressive Labor Party now has two more industrial workers fighting for communism. ☸

Puerto Rico:

Striking Teachers Defy Gov't Ban

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO, Feb. 25 — Teachers are waging a very important struggle for teachers, workers and students, here and in the U.S. They are fighting the governor and education authorities, the cops who have attacked their picket lines and AFT and SEIU hacks who have tried to raid their union. The 42,000-strong FMPR (Federation of Teachers of Puerto Rico) — the island's biggest union — went on strike on Feb. 21 against the union-busting Law 45 (a combination of the federal Taft-Hartley and New York State Taylor Law) which bans public workers from striking. The teachers are also fighting for better working and teaching conditions and against the plans to privatize about 1,000 schools, turning them into charter schools. The average annual wage of teachers here (most of them women) is \$19,500, lower than any in the U.S.

The school bosses and cops have tried to push scabs to break the strikes. On the first day of the strike, riot cops viciously attacked striking teachers. On Mon., Feb. 25, cops escorting scabs attacked striking teachers at the Republic of Colombia school in Río Piedras. But in spite of the barrage of attacks facing the striking teachers, their struggle has mass support. Most of the 500,000 students are staying away from schools even though the government is urging them to attend classes. On Sun. Feb. 17, a few days before the strike, chanting "La huelga en educación será la mejor lección (The strike in education will be the best of all lessons) and "lucha sí, entrega no" (Fight back, no sellout), some 25,000 teachers and other workers and youth marched in San Juan in support of the teachers. There were huge contingents of workers from the UTIER (electrical utility union) and UIA (water workers union), who are also negotiating new contracts.



But while these workers are fighting mad, the sellouts of the AFT (AFL-CIO) and the SEIU's Change to Win Federation are behaving like colonial masters, trying to stab the teachers in the back. Both are conniving with the local government to decertify the FMPR. There are rumors that Dennis Rivera, former head of NYC's 1199 and now a top honcho in the international SEIU and the NYS Democratic Party, has offered governor Vila a huge contribution to his re-election campaign (the governor is facing charges of campaign irregularities in his previous election) in exchange for decertification.

Workers shouldn't have any faith in these hacks and in any electoral parties, including the pro-independence liberal PIP, which is offering its legal aid to the strikers. All these politicians serve capitalism.

PLP teachers are internationalist and always support our militant brothers and sisters fighting back anywhere against the same enemies we all face (education authorities, cops and union hacks). The striking teachers in Puerto Rico are an example we should all follow, fighting back in a period where teachers and workers all over face major attacks from the bosses trying to make us pay for the their economic crisis and imperialist war. Our slogan should be: teachers, students and workers of the world, unite! ☸

Anti-Racists Unite, Teach Racist Educators A Lesson

NEWARK, NJ, February 2 — “You can see Jim Crow alive and well in debate,” said one coach in the New York Urban Debate League (NYUDL) after a tournament here.

The head of the Jersey Urban Debate League (JUDL) ejected a Bronx high school from the tournament, accusing three black students of “trying to steal a pack of paper.” This incident has sparked outrage and action amongst the debaters and communities involved. PLP members can explain to fellow workers and youth that the only way to destroy racism is fighting for communist revolution worldwide.

THE REAL STORY

A school safety officer and another woman — a teacher or administrator — accused three black student debaters in the girls’ bathroom of trying to steal a pack of paper (which was in a nearby janitor’s closet). The debaters denied this.

The accusing woman dismissed their claims and got the JUDL head to interrogate them. Frustrated and angry, the students refused to speak to him so he removed them from the tournament.

The entire team of nine made a quick collective decision to leave together to protest this racist attack. The debate coach dispatched an e-mail detailing these events, and many coaches, including PLP members, responded with encouragement, sup-

port and most importantly suggestions for action, including writing the JUDL head and the woman and possibly addressing it to the entire JUDL. Other coaches detailed how their students also experienced racism at other mostly-white tournaments, ranging from whispers to dirty looks to openly racist comments and accusations.

Urban Debate was founded as “anti-racist” leagues that would include black and Latino youth in an “advanced,” nearly all-white, academic activity. But just as U.S. bosses use black history month and Barack Obama’s presidential candidacy to mislead workers into believing conditions are improving for black workers, this incident — like the Jena 6 case — shows how capitalist schools give students repeated lessons in tolerating racism as youth in order to accept racism as adults.

The black CEO of NYUDL, tried to ward off protest letters, saying “removal was not an unreasonable decision,” arguing that the debaters’ silence implies their guilt — not anger at actual racism — and stating that the incident wasn’t racist! Coaches responded to him with more suggestions for action, although a coaches’ letter has not yet been drafted.

PLP members — rather than preparing youth to accept racism — are organizing the working class to build a classless communist world that will abolish the false concept of “race” through struggles

against the bosses’ racism.

Inside the Bronx school, staff, students and parents were furious. Parents are drafting a petition asking the JUDL head and the other woman to travel to the Bronx and personally apologize to the students and their families. A student petition will be circulated amongst their classmates, and the school staff is working on a separate petition, all asking for a formal apology and condemning the acts as racist.

Amidst increasing attacks on students through racist budget cuts, this struggle has mobilized dozens of students, parents and teachers to take action and can involve hundreds more. PLP is helping spread the struggle within the schools, explaining that the problem isn’t just one “bad administrator”; it’s capitalism’s racist education system.

Schools spread the lie that “anyone can succeed.” Meanwhile, they help ensure that working-class students — especially black, Latino, and immigrant students — accept “their place” as future docile cheap labor, prisoners or cannon fodder in imperialist wars. PLP aims to teach working-class youth that their future lies in joining the international multi-racial fight for a communist world without bosses and their racist agents.☸

Oaxaca’s Mass Struggle Leads To PLP Growth



OAXACA, MEXICO, Feb. 15 — Today, 70 thousand teachers of Section 22 of the SNTE carried out a one day strike and mass marches to protest against the state government and Governor Ulises Ruiz. Teachers demanded that the jailed political prisoners be freed (teachers, students and workers arrested during the teachers strike of 2006), better working conditions, and that the schools taken over by the state and given to Section 59 (supporters of the fascist governor) be returned.

The fight between Oaxaca’s working class and the government began when the teacher’s union demanding a better contract had confrontations with the police in which several of its members were beaten and another killed. This event unleashed years of Oaxaca’s workers’ pent up anger at the government that has done nothing to improve the massive poverty, racism against indigenous people, and unemployment in the area, and has instead used the police to savagely oppress students and workers who demand better conditions. A coalition of different community based and student organizations, as well as, the teachers’ union and political parties formed APPO (Asemblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca) to lead a struggle which took over major roads, schools, government buildings, and radio stations in Oaxaca. The struggle climaxed in the fall of last year when students and workers bravely fought several battles against the Mexican government’s federal police over control of Oaxaca. Eventually, the Mexican government prevailed over

the APPO led forces taking Oaxaca back and imprisoning leaders of the struggle.

Now, a little over a year later workers and students who participated in this struggle continue to fight. Teachers are fighting to change Sec. 22’s leadership whom they blame for having sold out during last year’s struggle. Many workers and students also blame APPO leaders for too closely allying themselves with mainstream political parties like Lopez Obrador’s PRD. More importantly, teachers, workers and students are talking about the movement’s strengths and weaknesses. What went wrong? Why did it fail?

Overall, the struggle in Oaxaca has elevated the political consciousness of workers and students. Members of PLP have participated in these struggles and in these discussions inside the teachers’ union and on university campuses.

Recently, at a neighborhood committee led by teachers, a group of PLP’ers gave a political economy presentation explaining how the capitalist system is responsible for the exploitation and oppression of workers. They also pointed out that the movement was limited primarily by the reformist politics put forth by its leadership. One teacher agreed and stated that fundamental and permanent change would only come as a result of a revolution; but to take on the Mexican government we need communist ideas and, to defeat it, armed struggle for workers’ power. The PLP’ers introduced CHALLENGE/DESAFIO and argued that the most difficult part of the struggle is the one over ideas and developing a political understanding that enables workers to build a movement with a long term and revolutionary communist outlook. The discussion concluded with the committee agreeing to organize a study group based on CHALLENGE/DESAFIO and other PLP literature.

As a result of PLP’ers participation in this movement, the Party has grown and strengthened. Many students and workers in Oaxaca know about PLP and respect its principled stance on the need for revolutionary communism. Now, as workers and students reflect on the lessons learned from the struggle, they are more open and willing to learn about PLP and its politics. ☸

China’s Capitalist Road Won’t Help Workers in Cuba

Fidel’s resignation as Cuba’s chief of state was no surprise. Since he fell ill in the summer of 2006, his brother Raúl has been in control. Bush, McCain, Obama, Hillary and the usual suspects have issued the usual hypocritical statements about the need for “democracy” and “human rights” in Cuba, playing to Florida’s powerful Cuban right-wing exile leadership. But none of this can hide the fact that the U.S. base in Guantánamo, Cuba, has become a synonym for torture and violations of human rights. (Of course, capitalism’s “democracy” means various sections of the ruling class control all political parties and give the working class the “choice” of which bosses’ agents will exploit them, lead them to war, abolish social services, push racism and cut wages and jobs.)

Despite all the anti-communist rhetoric by the U.S. bosses and their media, the reality is that the top Cuban leadership is already making changes that are more openly capitalist. Cuban rulers are following the Chinese or Vietnamese “road,” where the old party bureaucracy remains in political control but encourages more and more capitalist investments. Even when Fidel was in full control, there were many more imperialist investments in Cuba’s tourist and energy industries from Europe, Canada and Asia.

There even are many U.S. politicians and capitalists who want to end the embargo on Cuba — which has been a total failure — and allow U.S. companies to invest there, particularly in newly-discovered oil deposits off Cuba’s coast. Even with all that, it’s doubtful that the right-wing Cuban exiles and U.S. imperialism will again control Cuba as occurred before the 1959 revolution.

Already, the Cuban government is allowing open discussions of problems facing their economy and political life. Recently a CNN video showed young students demanding of Raúl Alarcón, a top leader, more access to foreign traveling and the internet. Even though Cuba doesn’t suffer the extreme poverty prevalent in the rest of Latin America, there’s still a lot of inequality between those who have access to foreign currencies and those who don’t.

For Cuban workers and youth, these changes from the top might offer a few consumer crumbs, but they won’t bring freedom from capitalist exploitation. Capitalism worldwide is a system in crisis, which only offers imperialist wars, mass unemployment and fascist/racist terror. A new communist movement is needed, learning from the errors and achievements of the revolution here and worldwide. That is the only road to real freedom for workers and youth. ☸

Energy Resources The Prize in U.S.-Russia Clash Over Kosovo

Kosovo's "independence" from Serbia was imposed by the U.S., European Union and NATO, with a puppet government led by the head of one of Europe's biggest criminal gangs, the UCK (Kosovo Liberation Army). This is sharpening the struggle for world supremacy, especially between the U.S. and Russia, over the control of Eurasia's vast energy reserves. An "independent" Kosovo will make U.S. military bases permanent in the area to protect future Washington-backed pipelines and maintain its military encirclement of Russia, setting the stage for future wars. Its precedent can also be used by both the U.S. and Russian imperialists, the former to create destabilizing secessionist movements in Russia and China, the latter in the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

Kosovo's independence is the continuation of Clinton's 1999 merciless bombing and the subsequent total dissolution of Yugoslavia, intended to separate Russia from the Balkans, encircle it with U.S. and NATO military bases and safeguard the Macedonian pipeline routes delivering Eurasian oil and gas to the EU to break their energy dependence on Russia.

The military goals were largely achieved, but eliminating Russia's influence in the region has proven more difficult. For example, at the first Balkan region energy summit (held 6/2007 by the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania), the guest of honor was Putin.

Breaking Russia's stranglehold on European energy has been even harder. Last year, U.S. imperialists suffered serious set backs when Putin signed energy deals with the former Soviet Central Asian republics. A U.S. expert wrote, "Western energy policies in Eurasia collapsed in May 2007... Cumulatively, the May agreements signify a strategic defeat of the decade-old US policy to open direct access to Central Asia's oil and gas reserves. By the same token they have nipped in the bud the European Union's belated attempts since 2006 to insti-

tute such a policy." (latimes.com)

Putin followed this by striking deals with some of the former Soviet Eastern European countries to build new pipelines and massive underground gas deposits and hubs to increase delivery to the EU, bypassing the Ukraine and Belarus, both politically problematic transit spots. These deals and others with Turkey, Greece, Austria, Italy, Germany and Serbia have tremendously increased the EU dependence on Russia. In fact, the EU division over Kosovo's declaration does not reflect a strategic one. Instead, Italy, Greece, Austria, Germany and others are more willing to compromise with Russia.

Given this, the U.S. bosses must fight to control the energy resources of Eurasia. This struggle is also more pressing because of the crumbling of their post-WW II strategy for world domination: controlling the strategic oil reserves of Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States and Venezuela. They lost Iran, Venezuela is slipping out of their grip, Saudi Arabia is becoming more independent (it refused Bush's request for increased oil production to avert a U.S. recession) and the whole Middle East is increasingly volatile.

But, the possibility of passing a long-awaited Iraqi law, handing over Iraq's oil to the U.S. and allies, has renewed U.S. bosses' hopes. They think Iraq will soon be pacified enough to pump 6 million barrels a day in four years and many more shortly thereafter. A pacified Iraq would be the perfect bridge to transport the trillions of dollars of Eurasian energy to the EU and other parts of the world. Thus, they hope that Russia's backbone would be broken, China and the industrial world would again be energy dependent on the U.S., and Iran and Venezuela would have to capitulate. However, this might eventually make a China-Russia-Iran alliance against the U.S. a reality.



Serbian Nationalist's protest Kosovo "Independence"

Camp Bondsteel, the huge U.S. Kosovo military base is strategically located 15 miles from the path of the U.S.-planned Macedonia pipeline. The projected Russian pipeline will pass through Serbia. Whether or not the U.S. rulers' dream of a pacified Iraq comes true, the struggle over control of Eurasia's energy and the EU's markets will only intensify. The Russians will never give up their centuries-old dominions without a tremendous fight, and the U.S. won't relinquish world hegemony peacefully. Wider wars and eventually WW III will decide this dogfight.

Workers in Kosovo, Serbia and elsewhere are expendable pawns in the imperialists' chess game for world domination. The burning of the U.S. embassy in Belgrade by right-wing Serbs is but another example of our class' anger being used to further the imperialists' goals. Independence, like democracy, is a boss-created myth serving their class, not ours. We must forge our working-class international unity under the leadership of one worldwide mass PLP to smash all the capitalist-imperialists, their borders, patriotism and racist divisions with communist revolution. ☺

Pakistani Bosses' Election Won't Solve Workers' Problems

Those Pakistanis who did vote in the country's recent national assembly elections registered their disgust with current president and military dictator, Pervez Musharraf, soundly rejecting his ruling party, (the Pakistani Muslim League, PML-Q). An even greater disbelief in the ability of elections to solve the problems faced by Pakistan's working class was mirrored in the great majority who didn't vote. In a country where workers struggle with double-digit inflation and face daily shortages of basic necessities like wheat flour and sugar, barely 20 million — of a possible 100 million+ eligible voters — went to the polls.

The entire electoral system is thoroughly corrupt, a condition endemic to capitalism. Although winners included the Pakistani People's Party (PPP), led by Asif Ali Zardari, husband of the recently-assassinated Benazir Bhutto, and ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-N, the low vote could easily reflect a protest against the big spending of the candidates. They criss-crossed the country in private jets, helicopters, bullet-proof 4-wheelers, protected by heavily-armed private security guards and poured money into extravagant TV and print ads. This campaign blitz cost 200 billion rupees, according to the Times of India. (1,000 rupees roughly equals \$16.)

For many months Pakistani army officers have been moving away from Musharraf as their frontman. His overly-obvious bowing to U.S. orders, plus personal power-grabbing, made it more difficult for the army to control the Pakistani masses. The appearance of a "fair" election was necessary to downgrade the increasingly unpopular general. But "choosing" between the same small group of elites who, using elections, coups or assassinations, have bounced in and out of power for the past 40 years, reflects the "choices" under capitalism where all parties represent the ruling class.

It was also the most expensive election in the



country's history, completely controlled by those who financed the campaigns, with money mostly coming from wealthy industrialists, stock brokers and real estate businessmen whose "investments" will require pay-offs. This means the same old corrupt government, run on contracts, kickbacks and patronage.

No party won an outright majority. Power-sharing deals involve U.S.-backed dictator Musharraf, who retains the presidency illegally; PPP leader, Asif Ali Zardari, unable to assume office because of his criminal past, having served eight years in prison on embezzlement charges; and Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistani Muslim League-N, also barred from office because of past convictions for hijacking, terrorism and attempted murder.

These two parties engineered a coalition government that excludes Musharraf, who remains president, for now. Meanwhile, the lawyers, journalists, NGO's, human rights activists and students of the "Democracy Movement" are pressuring the coalition for a place in the new government.

One young activist lawyer was skeptical of the

movement's call for "democracy" — as if the state was neutral, above class interests, instead of being an instrument for the ruling class to exploit the working class. Doubtful of producing any lasting changes through a capitalist government, he said, "Nevertheless we're in this movement, fighting the anti-working class labor laws. As capitalists fight with each other, and show their many weaknesses, we have an opportunity to build a mass party for revolutionary change."

But the U.S. is the main player pulling the strings in Pakistani politics. Shortly after the elections, the U.S. ambassador in Islamabad summoned the PPP's Asif Ali Zardari to the U.S. embassy. The PPP now says the new government won't seek Musharraf's immediate impeachment. The U.S. indicates it will continue working with Musharraf.

Pakistan, a center of competition among world powers, occupies a position of great geo-strategic importance, bordered by Iran, Afghanistan, China, India and the Arabian Sea. It is crucial to strengthening the U.S. hold on the Middle East. Already the U.S. has four army bases in Pakistan, and launches Predator missile attacks on insurgents from a secret base in Pakistan.

Richard Holbrooke, former U.S. ambassador to the UN, says, "We will look back 10 years from now and say that Af/Pak was even more important to our national security than Iraq." Both Obama and Clinton favor expanding the "war on terror" in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The search for Al Qaeda and Bin Laden will be used to justify keeping the U.S. in the area for a long time. U.S. Pakistani and Afghan workers and youth will be dragged into fighting more wars. Therefore, the most important task is to build a revolutionary party to lead the working class out of the endless horrors of capitalism. This is PLP's aim in Pakistan and worldwide. Fight for Communism. ☺



LETTERS



Building PLP on a School Trip

Recently, five PLP members participated in a school class trip though the states of Mexico, Tlaxcala, Oaxaca, Chiapas and Tabasco. But even if its appearance was just a trip as part of our studies, in essence we unmasked the lies pushed by the bosses about poverty, people left behind, racism and the application of so-called alternative energy. We also exposed how land rich in natural recourses is being expropriated in Chiapas with its high level of biodiversity.

We also saw the level of militarization in Oaxaca and Chiapas, with the military inspection at each highway toll booth. This militarization is occurring across Mexico. Soon soldiers from the Mexican army will join U.S. Army GIs as U.S. rulers spread their military worldwide battling its rivals under the guise of the “war against terror,” which will lead to World War III. All this helps us pose questions to our fellow students after hearing official speeches of the research institutions behind the trip.

One night we brought two students to a local comrade’s house, where we described the origins of PLP and its fight against the capitalist ideas that destroyed the old world communist movement.

The local comrade helped our friends see the clarity of the Party’s political line as well as reasserting it for us. We all asked our new friends to join PLP.

Their responses surprised us. One asked us why we didn’t tell him clearly about our ideas from the beginning, since he agreed with what we said and to continue working with us. The other student said he’d like to know more about PLP before deciding.

The need to build a mass party of millions of workers and students impels us to take advantage of every opportunity to wage this kind of ideological struggle. We returned from the trip more conscious and dedicated to the revolutionary line of the Party. Join the PLP to build for communism revolution!

Red Students, Mexico

Social Esteem Comes With Class Content

The book review in CHALLENGE (2/27) about the Paul Gomberg book makes good points about how the Party can develop self-esteem by enabling workers to contribute to building communist society after a communist revolution which should be, and is being used by the Party now to inject class content into our organizing. Gomberg says, “Why would someone work harder for no extra money or material gain,” and answers that social esteem from commitment to society replaces money. But that argument needs to explain how capitalists manipulate self-esteem to recruit workers and needs to propose some pre-revolutionary Party strategy to counter the bosses’ bourgeois ideology.

The bosses convince some workers they are superior to the masses of exploited labor by giving them titles like foreman or superintendent at low pay. And if these workers can drive their subordinates to accept increased workloads that result in less jobs and benefits, they are promoted to more esteemed titles like department manager, assistant director, etc. with little or no increase in compensation.

The bosses’ military uses recruiting slogans like “a few good men” to promote self-esteem and patriotism among disadvantaged youth with little hope of a job, education or medical care. The racist, sexist training they receive conditions them to commit inhuman crimes against “evil” people and still feel important because they believe they are helping fight terrorism and protecting “democracy.”

The sports industry bosses and media make billions by injecting animosity into games that become like patriotic wars where winners are gods and losers deserve the thumbs-down of the Roman Coliseum. Millions of fanatic sports fans, dehumanized by meaningless jobs get vicarious esteem through the games which condition them to support their government’s imperialist “team” at sporting events through chants of “USA!, USA!”

Gomberg states correctly that, “Esteem takes the place of money” and requires communist revolution. But until we reach that goal, we must learn how to seriously evaluate and challenge the bosses’ interpretation of self-esteem.

Red Spartacus

Small School Movement A Hoax

After reading the article on creeping fascism through smaller schools [CHALLENGE, 2/27] I’m unconvinced. As a veteran NYC high school teacher (22 years) and a member and supporter of PLP for some 35 years, here are my thoughts.

The small-school model and movement is primarily a hoax. The real issue is the class oppression and rotten living conditions that working-class students (especially black and Latino) must endure. The size of the school does nothing to alleviate those problems.

Secondarily, the number of students in the classroom in most of the small schools is not being reduced. In my school, with maybe 1,000 students, our classroom size is 31 to 34. If these small schools were also reducing class size, there might be some “improvement.” However, class-size reduction is not exclusive or unique to small schools. Large schools could also have reduced class size. But then the bosses would have to spend billions on adding new classrooms. They prefer not to!

The attack on teachers that has been a big part of “No Child Left Behind” is real. The bosses blame the teachers for the failure to educate our youth. However, this same attack applies to big, comprehensive schools. Whether the bosses build big schools or tiny schools, they mis-educate and prepare our youth for imperialist war. And when teachers follow the bosses’ ideas — work longer, tow the line, etc. — it’s not because of small schools but rather a lack of class-consciousness, racism and everything else the bosses use to keep teachers from uniting with students and parents. The size of the school is irrelevant.

Old Red Teacher

Are Communists Against Workers with Religious Ideas?

I had conversations about religion, communism and the working class with two airport workers, both CHALLENGE readers. One friend is an Ethiopian immigrant and is very religious. I asked her, “Why are you preparing for life after death when you should be preparing for life before death?” I explained that as workers, “We must fight for a better world now.”

I told her that one of the first things the slave-masters told the slaves upon their arrival here in chains was to “pray and get their reward in heaven.” I explained that this was to influence them not to revolt.

My other friend, a black flight attendant, asked me, “You really are a communist?” I said, “Yes, of course.” She said that she had read something about religion in the PL pamphlet “Jailbreak!” “Are communists against religion?” she asked.

I told her that communists are not against workers who are religious. We oppose how the oppressors, the bosses, use religion to convince workers to suffer all types of rotten racist, anti-worker conditions, that the bosses use religion to teach workers not to fight back.

I described historical examples of how religion

Turkey Invades Kurdish Iraq, Seeking Control of Oil

The Turkish invasion of Iraq’s Kurdish region involves much more than chasing PKK Kurdish guerrillas with bases in Kurdish-run northern Iraq. The PKK guerrillas are actually very weak and divided ever since its top leader, Ocalan, was jailed in Turkey in 1999. The real Turkish aim is to prevent the pro-U.S. rulers of northern Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) from controlling the oil-rich area around Kirkut.

Turkey doesn’t want an independent Kurdistan near its border. The invasion occurred shortly after Kosovo became a direct U.S.-European “independent colony” and after the KRG announced an agreement with South Korea’s National Oil Corporation to develop oil fields. They also signed a \$10.5 billion contract with Korean Ssangyong Engineering and Construction for the rapid modernization of the region’s infrastructure. Thousands of South Korean troops are still based around the Kurdish capital of Irbil.

Although the U.S. government considers Turkey an ally, the invasion is a blow to the loyal U.S. lackeys in the KRG. Control of northern Iraq’s oil wealth is part of Turkey’s own plan to become a regional power. Turkish rulers are not only wary of U.S. support for the KRG but are also fed up with the constant delays blocking its entrance into the European Union.

So, despite U.S. opposition, Turkey has signed an important energy deal with Russia for a new gas pipeline into Europe and has made deals with Iranian rulers to buy gas and exploit oil in the Caspian Sea.

Again, imperialism inevitably leads to endless wars, sacrificing workers on the altar of capitalist profits.

had been used against the international working class. During the U.S. abolitionist movement, the pacifist wing wanted to use education alone to persuade the Southern slave-owners that slavery was evil, while the militant wing — led by John Brown and Harriet Tubman — felt the slave bosses could only be defeated by mass violence, since slavery itself was a violent institution.

Then, during World War II, the Nazis used some Jewish sellouts (the Judenrat) to betray the masses in the concentration camps, making religious appeals to convince them not to fight back. Eventually the Stalin-led Soviet Red Army defeated the Nazis.

I said communists don’t persecute workers who are religious. In Czarist Russia, the Black Hundreds (the KKK of Russia’s day) persecuted Jews and Muslims. The Bolshevik Revolution stopped this racism.

After a PLP-led communist revolution, workers who are religious won’t be persecuted as the bosses did in Northern Ireland with Irish Catholic workers or in the former Yugoslavia with Muslims. The Party won’t tolerate such racist behavior. The PLP is open to workers even if they are religious because capitalism hurts all workers. The only solution is communist revolution.

Airport Red

CHALLENGE COMMENT: We agree that a communist society would not persecute people with religious ideas, as the major religions have done, killing people in the name of their religion — the Crusades, the Inquisition — as well as Islamic and Christian fundamentalists who attack anyone who doesn’t believe in their religion. We think religion should be dealt with in the context of class struggle and ideological struggle. We work with many people with religious beliefs and some are PLP members. However, we also advance a materialist world outlook which, as Lenin said, “necessarily includes an explanation of the true historical and economic roots of the religious fog.” So we will struggle for a materialist view of the world. Karl Marx argued that religious faith was primarily an effect, not a cause, of a much more general oppression of capitalism. Focusing on religion can obscure the wider picture, diverting energy away from real social struggle. We envision a society without religion because capitalism and all class societies — the cause of the problems which workers look to religion to alleviate — will have been wiped out.

‘Small Schools’: Rulers’ Education for Fascism, War

(The previous article — 2/27 — maintained that the move to small schools enables the rulers to increase fascistic control in a sort of “creeping” fascism.)

NEW YORK CITY — Although the separate identity and sharing of resources in these small schools may not seem fascistic, the subtle effect is that the working class is falling victim to these changes without connecting them to the ruling class’s need to increasingly control our lives. Indoctrinating students in schools seems like a natural way for the ruling class to prepare them for its future imperialist wars.

The rulers’ need to control by force all aspects of society is, for them, a necessary part of capitalism in crisis. The small schools help control not only the teachers and administrators but also to “creep” fascism into students at a very young age and win youth over to the bosses’ ideology.

The fact that over 70% of this city’s school population is black and Latino gives a racist character to this manipulation of the education system, and drags conditions down for ALL students. The rulers figure the large black and Latino student body is grist for their low-wage economy to grind out super-profits for the bosses, and drives jobless youth — the “fruit” of this inferior education — to enlist in the bosses’ military to fight and die in imperialist wars.

The small schools deepen the divisions the ruling class pushes on the working class. Not only does the working-class student suffer racism, nationalism and sexism, but the small school intensifies capitalist individualism under the guise of “school identity.” In one high school divided into smaller schools, the new schools insisted on “branding” — identifying each school in the building so visitors would know each school’s location. But this branding also separates the students and punishes those who were not present in the area of “their” school. Many students often faced disciplinary action because they traveled to their next class down the “wrong” staircase or hallway.

In one school that was “phasing out” of the building, students had classes in two separate areas, divided by one or more of the small schools. This caused them to arrive late to class because they had to walk around the small schools to avoid “trespassing” down their hallways. Often siblings would attend different small schools in the same building, causing problems when one sister tried to visit another attending a separate school in the building.

The administrators claimed the separation of the

student bodies helped students focus on their studies. But in reality the rulers’ need for more control over the students in particular is the real reason behind this identity branding. The tightening of student movement is a form of preparing youth for future fascistic control.

The administrators in these small schools further push capitalist individualism by either having a dress code or a uniform students must wear while in school. Some schools have T-shirts and sweatshirts with the school logos on them to further link a student to a particular school. While there have always been school uniforms and dress codes, this new “branding” facilitates administrator’s control of the student body.

Many of these small schools are housed three or four to a building. Within the one building students must fight for resources that once served one school but now must accommodate three or four. Contrary to popular belief, small schools do not mean smaller class size. Most of the small schools face the same over-crowding as their larger counterparts. In addition, four separate schools have to share one gymnasium, making it difficult to schedule classes from four different schools in one gym.

Not only are students being short-changed in gym class, but they must share cafeterias, auditoriums and other areas of the building. At one small Brooklyn school, students were given gym classes without a certified gym teacher. Swimming classes were led by a teacher without lifeguard training, which is supposedly mandated by State Department of Education regulations. Worse, it’s life threatening for students as well.

Students are also being trapped into “theme” schools, although many “themes” are not real. Theater schools have no theater programs; law schools have no legal programs, etc. This indoctrinates youth into a lock-step way of thinking. And 12- and 13-year-olds are choosing — or being placed in — these schools without being allowed transfers (except for hardship or safety reasons). That’s fascistic.

Overall, this small-school movement is just another way the ruling class uses the education system — as they’ve done in the large schools — to herd students in the direction of supporting the bosses’ aims: a low-wage police state at home and as cannon fodder for imperialist war abroad.

(Next: The union’s role in this movement.)

Top Five Big Business Contributors to the Leading Candidates

BARACK OBAMA:

- * Goldman Sachs (Wall Street’s top power broker, whose “alumni” include U.S. Treasury-Secy. Henry Paulson, Citigroup chairman Robert Rubin, British Petroleum CEO Peter Sutherland, and Jon Corzine, New Jersey’s Governor)
- * UBS (world’s largest wealth manager, largely owned by Saudi royal family)
- * J.P. Morgan Chase (“Rockefeller’s bank,” closely tied to Exxon Mobil)
- * Exelon (nuclear power company; ultra-imperialist Cabot family has big stake)
- * Kirkland & Ellis (BP’s U.S. law firm)

HILLARY CLINTON:

- * Goldman Sachs
- * Citigroup (U.S.’s and world’s biggest bank; Saudi prince main shareholder)
- * Morgan Stanley (Wall Street bank, deeply invested in Middle East)
- * DLA Piper (world’s biggest law firm, with offices throughout Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the U.S.)
- * J.P. Morgan Chase

JOHN MCCAIN:

- * Citigroup
- * Bank Rome (lobbyists for Shell Oil and Chiquita Banana)
- *Greenberg Traurig (law firm representing Alcoa worldwide)
- * Merrill Lynch (U.S. richest investment firm whose biggest holdings are war beneficiaries GE and Exxon Mobil)
- * Goldman Sachs

(Source: Center for Responsive Politics)



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

Trailer poison still hits N. Orleans

...Many trailers contain unsafe levels of formaldehyde, an industrial chemical classified as a probable carcinogen.

About 38,000 families are still living in the trailers and mobile homes, federal officials said Thursday at a news briefing, including more than 7,000 in trailer parks that FEMA had already vowed to close by May, before hurricane season begins again...

The agency has no...program to help families that have incurred medical bills because of formaldehyde exposure... (NYT, 2/15)

Mideast: Oil wealth, food riots

In Yemen, prices for bread and other foods

have nearly doubled in the past four months, setting off a string of demonstrations and riots in which at least a dozen people were killed. In Morocco, 34 people were sentenced to prison on Wednesday for participating in riots over food prices, the Moroccan state news service reported. Even tightly controlled Jordan has had nonviolent demonstrations and strikes.

The fact that the inflation is coinciding with new oil wealth has fed perceptions of corruption and economic injustice.

...The inflation of the past few months has taken a toll on all but the rich.(NYT, 2/25)

Prez candidates accommodate rich

...Both candidates appear to be looking for ways to avoid taking positions that would...expose them to a business backlash.

Before leaving Ohio, Mr. Obama met with workers at a titanium plant near Youngstown...

“Revolutions in communications and technology have made it easier for companies to send jobs wherever labor is cheapest, and that’s something that cannot be reversed,” Mr. Obama said. “So I’m not going to stand here and say that we can stop every job from going overseas. I don’t believe that

we can – or should stop free trade.” (NYT, 2/19)

Contractors’ sex crimes get by

Ms. Kineston is among a number of American women who have reported that they were sexually assaulted by co-workers while working as contractors in Iraq but now find themselves in legal limbo, unable to seek justice or even significant compensation.

Many of the same legal and logistical obstacles that have impeded other types of investigations involving contractors in Iraq, like shootings involving security guards for Blackwater Worldwide, have made it difficult...to pursue charges related to sexual offenses. (NYT, 2/13)

Dems help widen Bush snooping

WASHINGTON – After more than a year of wrangling, the Senate handed the White House a major victory on Tuesday by voting to broaden the government’s spy powers and to give legal protection to phone companies that cooperated in President Bush’s program of eavesdropping without warrants.

... Some Democrats and many liberal advocacy groups saw the outcome as another example of the Democrats’... cold feet. (NYT, 2/13)

Rivalry With China Behind Bush's Africa Trip

(This part of the series on Africa will review Bush's current trip to that continent — the first was in 2003 — which took him to Tanzania, Rwanda, Liberia, Ghana and Benin.)

Bush's trip was supposed to highlight U.S. "aid" to fight AIDS, Malaria and poverty in Africa. This "aid," like all imperialist aid, mainly helps pharmaceutical corporations and other businesses making big bucks from selling drugs and helps local bosses who profit from the misery of Africa's super-exploited masses. But that's only a sideline. Bush's main purpose is fighting China's growing influence on that continent.

In 2007, oil represented over 90% of SubSahara Africa's exports to the U.S. Today, 10% of all U.S. oil products imports come from Africa, mainly from the Gulf of Guinea region. By 2015, it's expected to grow to 25%. That's what's behind the formation of AFRICOM, the Pentagon's newest command center, which now operates from U.S. bases in Germany but which the U.S. wants to transfer to Africa itself.

Presently, the U.S. only has a base in Djibouti, in a former French colonial outpost. Bush's Ghana speech denied that the U.S. is aiming to build military bases in Africa, trying to placate key countries (Nigeria, Algeria, and South Africa) which object to U.S. troops on that continent. Only Liberia — just recovering from a bloody civil war over diamonds

— has offered itself for U.S. bases, which is why Bush included it in his visit. Liberia was founded in 1847 by freed U.S. slaves, but for a long time was basically a colony of the Firestone Tire company.

Bush also labeled as "bull" the charge that the U.S. was competing with China in Africa. (Reuters, 2/20) But that's exactly the reason behind his trip. China has become a key player in Africa, investing billions, particularly in the oil-rich Sudan.

China's support for the Sudanese government is the reason for the "Free Darfur" campaign in the U.S., including liberal entertainment stars like George Clooney, Mia Farrow and Steven Spielberg. (Bush repeatedly blamed the Sudanese government for the massacres there, while ignoring the 5.4 millions slaughtered in the Congo since the 1990s as well as massacres in Ethiopia and other pro-U.S.-ruled countries).

Imperialism and capitalism have meant endless bloody wars in Africa, like the recent one in Chad where Exxon, Chevron and PetroChina operate while the French Army keeps the bloody Déby regime in power (see CHALLENGE, 2/27). No "aid" from any imperialists will liberate Africa's masses. The only long-range solution is for workers, students and peasants to unite, breaking with all tribal and national divisions and building a revolutionary communist movement. Communists must concen-

WHEELS FALLING OFF AXLE WORKERS



DETROIT, MI, Feb. 27 — Over 3,600 workers struck four plants of the auto parts supplier American Axle & Manufacturing Holdings in a fight against a pattern of wage-cutting contracts accepted by the UAW throughout the auto industry. Hourly wages would nose-dive from \$27 to \$14 for workers who haven't had an increase in eight years.

trate on the huge proletariat of South Africa, Nigeria and Egypt, which can lead the way. That's what PLP fights for.

'The Great Debaters'

The Fight vs. Racist Repression in the Jim Crow South



"The Great Debaters" is a stirring saga of struggle against racism and exploitation in the Jim Crow South. It is based on the true story of the debating team of the small, historically black, Wiley College coached by professor Melvin Tolson, a member of the Communist Party and an off-campus organizer for the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU).

The movie is about the lives of the four future debaters and their coach and is shown through a complex shifting of scenes. This technique helps acquaint the audience with the social and economic conditions of rural Northeast Texas in the 1930s. The college is an oasis in an area teeming with virulent racism, the poverty and desperation of the Great Depression, and the beginnings of a serious resistance.

Tolson (Denzel Washington) immediately establishes himself with his students as a rebel who looks to the Harlem Renaissance for artistic and intellectual guidance. He seeks out sharp and resilient students for the debate team. The exchange between Tolson and the students in tryouts raises political issues of the time, including relief (welfare) and war profiteering. The students chosen for the team, including 14-year-old James Farmer, Jr., are seriously tested mentally and physically by their coach. Tolson takes an authoritarian approach to learning, which he justifies by insisting that he is helping his students retain and develop their minds in the face of societal oppressors who mean to seize them.

The debate team is successful, and in the proc-

ess, learns a lot about reality. In a debate with one all-white college team, held off campus because of Jim Crow laws, the topic is whether black students should be admitted to college, and the debaters are forced to listen to their opponents argue that society is not yet "ready" for them. In a car on the way to another debate, they witness a brutal lynching by the Ku Klux Klan and barely escape with their lives when the mob turns on them.

The movie reflects the politics of the old CPUSA. Tolson, attacked for his communism and off-campus activities, says his politics are his own business. He tells Farmer's father that he is trying to keep his students as far away from politics as he can. This attempt to insulate the students fails of its own accord. In fact, whenever the debaters get too caught up in their personal good or bad times, real life seems to intervene. James Farmer, Jr. accidentally discovers Tolson covertly traveling to a local meeting of the STFU, which he is leading. As black and white farm-workers discuss uniting to fight the starvation conditions, scores of vigilantes led by the

local sheriff bust into the meeting and burn down the barn it was held in, beating the farm workers as they run away. Later, the Texas Rangers and sheriff barge into the college to arrest Tolson.

On balance, the movie promotes the idea that a small number of the oppressed can escape from their conditions through education. Although the movie entertains the idea of revolution, it ultimately comes down firmly on the side of reform. The final debate against Harvard College (in real life Wiley debated and beat U.S.C.) actually promotes the civil disobedience tactics of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. James Farmer, Jr., exposed to the militant reform politics of the CPUSA in his youth, later founded and led the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE). Unlike the militant Deacons of Defense of that era, CORE insisted on a pacifist response to the violent attacks of the KKK.

Despite its significant weaknesses, "The Great Debaters" is an excellent movie to watch and discuss with a group of students, young people, friends or co-workers. Its serious treatment of important history and multi-racial struggle against oppression is a refreshing contrast to the prominence of on-screen trash which demeans and dehumanizes working people, particularly black and immigrant workers. ☺

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