

CHALLENGE



THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER OF PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

Rulers' Rivalry Hikes Gas Prices

The capitalist economic crisis is sharpening global competition for Persian Gulf oil and driving fuel prices sky-high. The working class is being dealt a triple body blow. In some parts of the U.S. workers are shelling out up to one-fifth of their pay for gasoline. Soaring energy costs contribute to a job-destroying economic slowdown and are driving up food prices worldwide.

While many politicians and pundits rail at greedy speculators, who are indeed cashing in on, and boosting, the price spike, its root causes are geopolitical (and rose immediately from Federal Reserve efforts to protect U.S. banks — see box below). China's and India's burgeoning economies now thirst for Mid-East crude supplies that U.S. rulers once claimed as private property. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were supposed to counter U.S. economic weakness by strengthening its control over the oil all rivals needed. But despite murdering millions, the U.S. war machine has failed to secure oil-rich Iraq or tame al Qaeda and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan and Pakistan bent on seizing Mid-East oil sources. Oil's grand prize, U.S. puppet Saudi Arabia, faces internal attacks. Meanwhile, Washington and its proxy Israel are trading escalating war threats with Iran's holy-roller oil barons, who kicked out Exxon Mobil three decades ago. And beyond the Gulf, an upsurge in political violence has slashed Nigeria's oil output.

BOTCHED BY BUSH, U.S. IRAQ GENOCIDE YIELDS RULERS LITTLE OIL

Unlike growth in China and India, the U.S. fiasco in Iraq — which is also central to the oil price-crunch — receives little blame from the rulers' media. U.S. bosses invaded Iraq in 2003 hoping to create a new "swing producer," in addition to its old one, Saudi Arabia, increasingly bedeviled by al Qaeda. A "swing producer" is one with sufficient spare capacity to steer world markets by raising or lowering output, according to its U.S. patron's wishes. (One reason U.S. rulers toppled Saddam Hussein was his constant jerking

Oil Companies Get No-Bid Contracts Back in Iraq



around of oil production, making for an unstable price market which Big Oil couldn't control.)

In the 1980s, Saudi Arabia helped the U.S. bring down the oil-exporting Soviet Union by pumping so much crude that its price fell to \$5 a barrel, depriving the Kremlin of needed foreign income. Months after the Iraq war began, the liberal Brookings Institution gushed, "Many analysts believe that Iraq might be able to pump up its production to as much as 6 mbd [million barrels per day] by 2010 and 7-8 mbd by 2020." (Brookings, May 2003)

But Bush didn't put enough boots on the ground to secure Iraq's oilfields, which now produce 2.5 mbd, even less than before the war. And with their own infrastructure in peril, Saudi princes can't take up the slack. "Saudi Arabia has arrested 701 Islamists in the past six months on suspicion of plotting attacks on oil industry installations." (AFP, 6/26/08) The Saudis just promised to hike output a meaningless 200,000 barrels a day.

The U.S.-Israeli standoff with Iran is another major factor

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U.S. BANK BAILOUT SPIKED OIL PRICES

While many politicians and pundits blame greedy speculators for skyrocketing oil prices, the immediate problem arose from the Federal Reserve's efforts to protect U.S. banks. Under capitalism, money serves two functions: (1) it has a "use value," enabling the buying and selling of commodities, from raw materials and labor power to finished goods; (2) its accumulation is a means of storing value for future investments and future payment. Capitalist hoards are claims on the future labor of workers and the surplus value they can create. (Workers are paid only part of the value they create. The rest is "surplus value" from which bosses' profits are reaped.)

Since last August the Federal Reserve has lowered interest rates and supplied billions of dollars to the banking system in an effort to limit the bank failures that began with the subprime mortgage crisis. This increase of money in circulation cheapened the value of the dollar. It now buys less in international markets.

As the value of the dollar fell 20% during the last year, so did the value of foreign investments in U.S. treasury bills and corporate debt. The decision to let the value of the dollar fall so quickly sharply reduced the value of hundreds of billions of treasury bills belonging to China and other rivals.

Looking for protection from such losses, investors (U.S. banks, pension funds, foreign governments) began buying gold and oil, commodities whose value could not be manipulated by the Federal Reserve. This increased buying forced up the price of both oil and gold, fueling new internal conflicts in the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf nations, immigrant workers, whose earnings are tied to the dollar, have staged strikes because the reduction in the value of their pay meant they can no longer feed their families back in India and Pakistan.

Faced with internal conflict, many Persian Gulf nations are again pressing to price oil in euros or yen, both worth far more than the dollar. (Iran already requires Japan to pay for oil in yen not dollars). This move has been limited only by the efforts of the Saudi royal family, the world's largest oil producer and a major holder of U.S. investments (including in Citibank). If oil was not priced in dollars, the value of the dollar and these investments would fall even further as countries dumped the dollar for other currencies.

This falling dollar stoked the already heated inter-imperialist rivalries for oil, further exposing the U.S. failures in Iraq and Afghanistan. ☺

☆ summer of communism 2008 ☆

Bosses' Imperialist Dogfight Sets Stage for Boeing Contract Fight

The July 16 strike sanction vote means the Boeing contract battle is in full swing. For nearly a year, the International Association of Machinists (IAM) leadership has been pushing the slogan, "It's Our Time, This Time." They say that if workers in union plants stick together, they can negotiate a contract to increase our wages, benefits and job security. Workers on the shop floor are not so sure. As one machinist puts it: "What part of capitalism don't they understand?!"

In this struggle, illusions won't serve us. Currently, Chinese, Russian and European capitalists are economically challenging the U.S. bosses, undermining U.S. rulers' political clout. War to maintain the empire is pushed to the forefront, with both presidential candidates offering plans for a "better" war. In this climate, the U.S. bosses are rebuilding their industrial military base on the backs of the working class, particularly those of us in basic industry. Racism and sexism lead the attack. Black and Latin workers — women and men — in the subcontractor plants were the first and most brutally attacked. (The subcontractors are non-union, low-wage plants to which outfits like Boeing farm out work formerly produced by higher-wage union plants — domestic outsourcing.)

The bosses use racist super-exploitation as a wedge to attack all industrial workers: 140,000

unionized senior autoworkers will be replaced by 77,000 new workers at half the wage. The UAW carefully isolated American Axle strikers for 83 days this spring, and then railroaded a contract through that cut 2,000 jobs and wages by a third to a half. The Nucor company is building the first integrated steel plant in the U.S. in four decades right outside Katrina-ravaged New Orleans to take advantage of some of the country's lowest, non-union labor. No matter what eventually happens with the tanker contract, the bosses, with the Pentagon's blessing, are determined to erect a "southern aerospace cor-

'When we exposed the Pentagon's role in promoting aerospace wage-cuts, we took aim at the dead-end flag-waving of the union sellouts.'

ridor" in non-union, low-wage Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia. The system depends on this kind of racist exploitation to build profits.

The Boeing bosses have no illusions about the times — or their ruling-class needs. In late June, they eliminated defined pensions (ones with guaranteed specific benefits) for all non-union new hires, demanding the same of union workers when the old contract expires on September 3. They're pushing healthcare cuts disguised as a "wellness-based healthcare system." They've said our wages are "above the market rate" after they slashed the "market rate" through racist outsourcing — which they're accelerating. In order to afford to attack the world's workers, the bosses must attack us here at home — and Boeing bosses are doing their (very profitable) part!

Fight The Bosses' Ideas Within Our Ranks

Relying on deals with the company bosses — never wise — and believing their lie that "what's good for the company is good for the workers" is increasingly delusional in these times. The bosses' imperialist plans call for more war, nationalism, racism, sexism and attacks on our standard of living. The only viable answer is to smash the capitalist system with communist revolution — no easy, short-term task. We'll never succeed without waging a long-term fight against the bosses' ideas.

When union members struggled for our locals to participate in the immigrant rights May Day marches to fight anti-immigrant racism, they were building the class-consciousness we'll need this fall. When workers raised money for the Jena 6 on the shop floor and fought the union misleadership to protest this racist outrage, we were laying the anti-racist groundwork for the class struggle ahead. When we ex-

posed the Pentagon's role in promoting aerospace wage-cuts, we took aim at the dead-end flag-waving of the union sellouts.

In this vein, PLP is sponsoring Summer Projects in the Seattle area and among L.A. aerospace subcontractors. Building anti-racist, international solidarity between union workers and non-union super-exploited subcontractor workers takes aim at the bosses' divide-and-conquer strategy.

We face a tough battle, and may not win this round, but we can build our offense with strike preparations. We can struggle for the kind of class-consciousness and solidarity that teach us about workers' power. We can build forces among those already in basic industry and young revolutionary workers just entering the factories in order to eventually destroy this bosses' nightmare.☺

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!**

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Support the Seattle and Los Angeles Summer Projects

The Progressive Labor Party is organizing Summer Projects in Seattle and Los Angeles to both learn from workers' experiences and bring revolutionary ideas to workers, soldiers and students. We urge you to join us in going to factories, military bases, visiting with workers, and studying the science of revolution — Dialectical Materialism — as well as hearing from the experience of revolutionary workers themselves. Volunteers will learn first-hand from their class sisters and brothers and share experiences, which can lead to a lifetime of serving their class and fighting for a communist revolution. Please join us for a great revolutionary time! Make a donation and support a Summer Project volunteer.



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PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

Angry LA Workers Mobilize Against Racist Police Murders

HOLLYWOOD, CA, June 21 — Hundreds of workers — Asian, black, Latino, and white — expressed their anger at the memorial for Usman Chaudhry, next to the bushes where racist LAPD officers woke him up, handcuffed him, then assassinated him. Chaudhry was 21 years and had autism. Even though the kkkops had his identification the police didn't notify Chaudhry's family about his death for 21 days.

The event was also a protest against over thirty such executions since the beginning of 2008 that include Michael Cho who was killed by La Habra police and Brian Moore, 23, in Compton. Just five days later, all charges were dropped against the cops who killed Cho. The memorial challenged the climate of fear that hangs over this block and many others like it. "It was a good event," said a regular CHALLENGE reader who lives in the neighborhood, "because people really came together, at all levels."

On the one hand, we mourned with Usman's parents, sister, and brother, all of whom spoke, and with friends and family of Cho, Michael Bayoune, and others murdered. But the barely-suppressed anger of the crowd broke out during the closing

candlelight vigil, with raised fists and chants — led by PLP'ers — of "No Justice, No Peace — No Racist Police!" CHALLENGE and leaflets were warmly received by nearly everyone.

Workers and youth are up against a racist profit system that purposely uses police terror to force workers to submit to intensified exploitation in preparation for wider wars, and eventually World War III. Workers and soldiers have nothing to gain and lots to lose from these wars, beyond those killed and wounded. One in three homeless men are vets, and three-quarters of all vets have substance abuse or mental health problems. They come home to inadequate care and systematic police abuse.

PLP members criticized demands made by leaders of sponsoring organizations for federal investigations or police reform. Voting for Democrats is no solution. In the midst of budget cuts to health and education, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa wants more money for cops. Barack Obama has called for building up the U.S. military for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and maybe Iran.

The coalition that sponsored the rally is planning for more such events in neighborhoods across the



city this summer. PLP plans on bringing Summer Project volunteers to fight back against these racist attacks by organizing on the job and in the schools to build class unity. Imagine if each police murder were met with on-the-job protests as well as thousands marching in the streets. And then imagine the power of such a movement, based in the industrial working class and led by communist ideas, to take on the capitalist system that's killing us. ☸

Red Leadership Could Turn Lights Out on Con Ed's Scabs



A Con Edison Worker holding a sign in 2004

NEW YORK CITY, July 2 — Over 9,000 workers were set to strike the billion-dollar Con Ed electric company at midnight last night when a "tentative" agreement was reached in the early hours of this morning. Few details were released. The rank and file will be voting on it over the next month.

Con Ed was preparing a massive scab operation, ready to work non-union managers 24 hours a day on two 12-hour shifts, in automated control rooms, dispatch centers and on service trucks, but without routine maintenance.

The bosses had "offered" what amounted to a wage-cut: a one-half of 1% annual wage "increase" in a four-year contract, healthcare cuts, a switch to 401(k)-style pensions for new hires (which first reports said was scrapped) and a clause to make workers pay back workmen's compensation benefits from their pensions. With inflation mounting at 4.2% a year (excluding food and gas costs!), a less-than-one-percent wage "increase" is a gigantic slash in real wages.

Meanwhile, the "neutral" government has taken the company's side, with the State Public Service Commission saying, "Con Edison has a plan....We are confident...they are doing everything they should be doing" (NY Daily News, 7/1).

Yes, a "plan" all right — a massive strike-breaking scab operation to protect their tens of millions in profits reaped off

the backs of the 9,000 workers and from charging exorbitant rates to millions of customers.

How to beat such a plan, in a company thriving on automation? If the union was worth anything it could have been doing the following:

- Calling on workers throughout the city's labor movement to come out in support of Con Ed's workers, and together with them surrounding the company's buildings and barring anyone from entering or leaving;
- Better yet, preparing in advance to have thousands of Con Ed workers remain in the buildings in a mass sit-down strike to prevent any scab supervisors from performing union jobs;
- Mobilize New York's working class to the strikers' side, calling attention to Con Ed's constant rate hikes that impoverish electricity consumers, especially in black and Latino neighborhoods where non-payment of exorbitant bills lead to service cut-offs.

Such a plan would inspire the entire working class with a militant, no-holds-barred strike that could deal with the company's scab-operated automated equipment. No matter how automated, workers are still needed to operate it.

A sit-down strike could hold Con Ed's billion-dollar automated plants hostage, just as the communist-led autoworkers did in their 1936 seizure of GM's key plants to win their demands on threat of immobilizing the company's machinery. In fact, the utility workers industrial union itself grew out of the militant CIO in the 1930s, largely led by communists, and is responsible for the wage and benefit levels these workers have today.

No doubt Con Ed would cry that the workers "don't care about the public." But it is the bosses who don't care, raking in millions in profits while offering what amounts to a huge wage-cut to workers who are suffering skyrocketing costs in food and gasoline and being forced to pay for the bosses' trillion-dollar oil wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

While Irish and Italian workers have long-dominated the workforce, lately half

PL's Politics Make Mark at LA Social Forum

LOS ANGELES, June 30 — Last weekend, the Los Angeles Social Forum drew a few hundred attendees. CHALLENGES and PL leaflets were distributed throughout the event.

One workshop presented the struggles in building worker-student solidarity on their respective campuses. Discussion in both break-out groups and the workshop in general offered different ways to achieve this. PLP members showed that historically the only effective path is building a base in the working class, bringing out communist ideas in class struggle. We also emphasized that while campus work is important we must spread these ideas throughout the working class, especially among industrial workers. An important avenue this summer is participation in the Los Angeles or Seattle Summer Projects, where we will be doing precisely this — building a worker-student and soldier alliance.

The presidential election came up, and while there was mostly agreement on rejecting Obama, there was certainly disagreement over how to react to his campaign. Some wrote it off and condemned participating in it. We advocated the importance of seeing the contradictions within those who are attracted to his campaign. Many working-class youth and adults are drawn to the prospect of change, especially amid the failing economy, budget cuts and the war. We noted that such people can be won to pro-working-class, communist politics if we dare to join the struggle.

It's important to talk with Obama supporters and show them an alternative — communist revolution — where, instead of giving away our power to politicians and their system of empty promises, we take power ourselves and attend to our needs through a communist society.

Another workshop portrayed the anti-war movement through the soldier's perspective. A clip from the Winter Soldier forum depicted what soldiers have been required to do in this war, leading to some soldiers becoming more politically conscious. A veteran described the war as imperialist, saying the working class must and could change the world so that imperialism could not exist. A comrade explained that her experience in the anti-Vietnam War movement had taught her that activists needed to understand the reasons for the war and base their activities on anti-capitalist, communist politics.

The discussion illustrated what soldiers have done to end wars, be it the Vietnam War or the current ones in the Middle-East. Some said mass marches and rallies are important, but organizing soldiers both within and outside the military is much more vital to halting this war and building for a communist revolution. Soldiers are ultimately the ones sent to fight these wars for profit. A comrade concluded that the class consciousness of the soldiers on the panel and their stance against racism demonstrate the great potential the working class has for revolution.

Some high school students participated for the first time in the struggle to defend our ideas. Our emphasis on understanding that capitalism is the political basis of imperialism and that the solution is communism resonated with some newly anti-imperialist forum-goers. As we continue to prepare for our summer actions, the LA Social Forum reinvigorated our confidence in the working class and PLP's politics. Overall our activity at this Forum revealed the importance of putting forward communist revolution and building a base for it. ☸

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Liberals’ School Reforms Serve Profit System, Leave Kids Behind

At the coming American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Chicago convention, nearly everyone wants to reform or repeal NCLB (“No Child Left Behind” or, as some call it, “No Corporation Left Behind” or “No Child Left Untested”). McCain and Obama both support NCLB’s goals and its testing to measure schools’ success, but both want “changes.”

McCain emphasizes “market forces” (privatization) and freezing federal education spending. Obama backs more active federal government intervention. “More accountability is right,” he says. Neither candidate can or will change the basis for the U.S. educational system: it has always served the needs of the capitalist class, not of workers and our children.

The current educational reform movement’s two wings are more alike than they appear. Straight from U.S. rulers comes the \$60 million “Ed in ‘08” campaign, sponsored by The Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, the Gates Foundation and the Broad Foundation. Comparing U.S. students to those in other industrialized countries, they conclude, “The world is changing, jobs are evolving, and far too many students are simply not being prepared to be successful adults.... Many of those who do graduate are not ready for college, for the workplace and for life.” For the sake of “our economy” (meaning U.S. capitalism that exploits millions worldwide), they want “strong American schools.” “Improving our educational performance will pay huge economic dividends” — for these capitalists.

U.S. imperialists are facing unprecedented competition from European and Asian bosses, a sharpening rivalry leading to ever wider wars. So, led by Roy Romer (former Colorado governor and ex-superintendent of LA schools), they’re pressuring presidential candidates Obama and McCain to support their agenda: privatization (charter schools), accountability (teacher pay based on students’ test scores) and union-busting (ending tenure).

A new coalition, led by NYC school head Joel Klein and ex-FBI informer and Democratic Party hack Al Sharpton, is joining Romer and his billionaire pals to brand these capitalist policies as an “Education Equality Project.” They stress that black and Latino students still lag far behind their white

counterparts in test scores and graduation rates, fifty years after court-ordered school desegregation. But capitalism is racist to the core. It reaps \$250 billion super-profits annually from the difference in income between white families and black and Latino families.

Broad or Broader?

The other reform wing (the Forum on Educational Accountability and the Forum on Education and Democracy) advocates “A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education,” appearing to challenge the “Ed in 08” program.

But the two sides are essentially similar. The “Broader, Bolder” group also wants to make NCLB “work better” by backing expanded early childhood education and better health care. While not rejecting aspects of privatization (charters) they

‘For schools to serve the working class, we need a society that serves the working class, not the capitalists.’

also want the federal government to spend more money on “accountability systems” (testing).

They want schools to promote “upward social mobility,” but don’t challenge class society where a few wealthy at the top profit from exploiting the many workers on the bottom. They want to retool schools to produce the loyal and well-trained workers and soldiers urgently needed in the pre-World War economy: “The increasingly inter-connected world of the 21st century places a premium on the preparation of all of our young people to take their places as effective workers, citizens, and family members.”

The “Broader, Bolder” group includes many Clinton administration officials; Chicago schools boss Arne Duncan Rudy Crew, Bella Rosenberg (long-time associate of former AFT President Albert Shanker), members of the Brookings Institution and

the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, Harvard’s Christopher Jencks and William Julius Wilson, and a raft of well-known liberal reformers. Several (including reported Obama advisor Linda Darling-Hammond), are also part of the Forum on Education and Democracy (FED), with its roadmap for education reform entitled “Democracy at Risk.”

The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) is a broader coalition of over 140 liberal organizations with similar goals and policies. It’s “committed to the No Child Left Behind Act’s objectives of strong academic achievement for all children and closing the achievement gap....The federal government has a critical role to play in attaining these goals. We endorse...an accountability system that helps ensure all children, including children of color, from low-income families, with disabilities, and of limited English proficiency, are prepared to be successful, participating members of our democracy.”

These groups appeal to teachers and school activists who are rightly appalled by the present situation. Their programs might seem to be “a step in the right direction” despite their continued embrace of federal “accountability” and intensive testing. But reforming the system means making it work better — for the bosses who run it! To fight for our children and our future, amid sharpening inter-imperialist rivalry and war, we need to destroy that racist system before it destroys even more of us.

For schools to serve the working class, we need a society that serves the working class, not the capitalists. We must unite students, parents and teachers in a class struggle against the rulers’ attacks. Out of this struggle, with red leadership, we can acquire the understanding needed to end the racist profit system with a communist revolution that abolishes wages and inequality, building this movement in the factories, barracks, communities and schools. That means teaching and learning everything, from the history of our class to the philosophy of dialectical materialism, from politics and economics to science and mathematics. Join the Progressive Labor Party in this historic task! ☸

Student’s Answer to Testing: ‘Shut the School Down!’

NEW YORK CITY, June 30 — The ruling class has been forcing NYC teachers to give testing so the bosses can intensify fascist practices at home, enabling them to continue their imperialist wars. Some PL teachers met to discuss the new preparatory tests that would presumably “predict” what students would do on the final tests. These would be given three times a year, administered by teachers, then graded by the State. One PL teacher was in a high school that was administering the test, a joint partnership between the State and Houghton-Mifflin Corporation. The PL teachers decided that a written report on the test was needed.

As part of his training, the PL teacher saw the computer program of the standardized test. One screen correlated the teachers, the number of students taking the test and the students’ scores on that test. The rulers will use this test to determine what teachers teach in the classroom. They want to tie a teacher’s tenure to the test scores, which would provide a basis for their merit pay schemes. Communists must lead the working class to struggle against the bosses’ attempt to implement this new weapon against us.

A week later the school discussed the testing. The bosses’ puppet facilitator tried to explain that “data-driven education” would be positive. The PL teacher exposed the test as a “tool of oppression,” to loud applause from the majority of teachers. Every teacher who spoke afterwards

condemned the test. Only the school administrators showed even tacit support for it. This did not happen in a vacuum. Over 100 CHALLENGES are distributed in the school, more than 20 among the staff. Years of friendship and political discussion with these teachers encouraged them to express their anger toward the ruling class’s plans.

With PL’ers confident in our ability to extend the struggle among teachers, it was time to involve the students directly. PL’ers have patiently built ties among the students for over four years. More than 80 students read CHALLENGE regularly; 10 have joined the Party.

After carefully estimating the balance of forces, the PL teacher encouraged his freshman classes to boycott the test. He told them his job was to give them the test, but they could decide whether or not to take it. He informed them that over \$100 million had already been spent on the test.

The students were already frustrated with standardized testing and asked if the tests would affect their grades. The answer was no, but the State could come down on them hard. One student declared, “Well, let them throw the first punch and we’ll shut the school down.” Another replied, “Just give us the excuse.” (Continued next issue.) ☸

Red Leadership Could Turn Lights Out on Con Ed’s Scabs

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the workers hired are black and Latino, with one in five women. The company would like to use this situation to drive a wedge between the older and newer workers. The fact that for decades the older workers had not fought to integrate the workforce could be coming home to roost now, giving Con Ed the racist tool with which to divide the workers, and feel it can get away with offering such a lousy contract.

The kind of action needed to carry out the above plan won’t happen with the current crop of union leaders whose main aim is to elect “pro-labor” politicians and who always side with the bosses. Workers need a long-range plan to build communist leadership. Organizing solidarity and unity in this current battle could help prepare the workers for the kind of action that, with red leadership, would result in a revolution that would shut off Con Ed and their partners’ in the bosses’ state.☸

Mid-West Floods: Another Disaster Created by Capitalism

The wholesale failure of any flood protection system in the ravaged Mid-West has once again exposed another disaster created by capitalism. The ruling class's neglect of the country's infrastructure has made tens of thousands of working people homeless; killed at least two dozen residents along the Mississippi and its tributaries; submerged 100 blocks of Cedar Rapids, Iowa — a city of 200,000 — under water; destroyed tens of thousands of houses; flooded 160,000 acres of cropland in Illinois; and has seen the failure of 20 levees. And virtually all of this death and destruction was preventable if not for the anarchy of the profit system.

This failure of the flood protection system was long predicted. Army Corps of Engineers brigadier general Gerald Galloway told the NY Times, "We told them there were going to be more floods like this....This shouldn't have happened in the first place."

The Times (6/22) cited a chaotic system of levees, "owned and maintained by all sorts of towns, agencies, even individual farmers." It reported the levees "have poor construction, signs of stress, trees growing on them, [and] animal burrows. A 1994 report urging a more uniform approach to flood control along the Mississippi river system was largely ignored. That report stated, "Many levees are poorly sited and will fail again."

In fact, the situation is so chaotic that Galloway said, "We don't even know where some of these levees are."

The Wall Street Journal reported (6/19) that scientists believe the unplanned and chaotic development has made floods worse. "By building along the riverbanks and forcing the Mississippi into a bed that is half the width of where it ran a century ago, residents are displacing water and forcing the river to run faster and higher."

The racism of the system was revealed in the levees supposedly protecting impoverished East St. Louis, Illinois, with its large black population, where leaks were discovered on the Illinois side. The Associated Press reported that at one place "water was bubbling out of the ground like a volcano."

John Barry, author of "Rising Tide" about the 1927 floods, told the Christian Science Monitor that the low standards governing U.S. levees are a joke around the world. The Dutch inland standards are 12 times as rigid as the U.S. and their ocean levee standards are 100 times as rigid.

The politicians, from Bush to McCain to Obama,



Flooding in the Mid-West

paid lip service to the flood victims, posing for photo ops in brief visits with survivors. These ruling-class servants are ready to spend trillions on imperialist oil wars while never caring about workers' lives, from the Mid-West to the Mid-East. Capitalism's priority lies in its drive for maximum profits, not in protecting people's lives.

D.C. Rally Hits Profit-Driven Housing Shortage in AIDS Fight

WASHINGTON DC, June 21 — Over 50 people rallied for more effective HIV prevention and more affordable housing in the Congress Heights neighborhood — one of D.C.'s worst hit areas in terms of HIV. Every 3rd Saturday of the month, the Metropolitan Washington Public Health Association's Health Disparities Committee (MWPHA) and several other groups visit neighborhoods to raise the awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

PLP has been organizing within MWPHA for some time now. We have struggled with our friends to not just hand out condoms but also to directly confront the bosses for their racist neglect of HIV patients. Out of that struggle we have won the group to have these rallies and to link the fight against HIV/AIDS with the fight for housing, jobs, drug treatment, and more youth programs, including sex education in all schools as a way to see that we must fight the whole capitalist system. One of MWPHA's major demands is for more affordable housing for everyone living with HIV/AIDS to help people prevent and manage HIV. PLP members distributed about 35 CHALLENGES and plan on having study groups to discuss how communism can ensure health equity for all workers.

During this last rally we chanted, "Affordable Housing is the Name of the Game, Soccer Stadium - Shame, Shame, Shame!", "Racism Means Fight Back, HIV Means Fight Back, Housing Mean, Fight Back," and much more. People marched around the neighborhood with signs and distributed a flier that compared the amount of public money of-

fered to a soccer stadium developer — up to \$225 MILLION — with the amount of housing that could be provided to people who need homes. Over 25,000 people are on the waiting list for housing vouchers (Section 8) and about 200 people with AIDS are waiting for housing funded by a federal program called HOPWA.

Housing and HIV

People with no stable housing are 3-9 times more likely to get HIV. Unstable housing puts people in very vulnerable positions that often lead to drug addiction and exchanging sex for a place to stay. Homeless individuals with HIV or AIDS have much more trouble taking their medications correctly or at all (National AIDS Housing Coalition, www.nahc.org). Meanwhile, affordable housing has been disappearing because capitalism puts making profits — high rental costs and sparse housing assistance — over the needs of workers. In the 1970s MWPHA requested over 400,000 vouchers for rental assistance; in 2003 the budget included less than 40,000 vouchers.

Revolution...Communism...HIV?

A revolution for a communist society gives workers the power to eliminate profit in all aspects of society so we can meet the needs of our class. It also eliminates racism that developers and their politicians use to favor stadiums and condos over workers' basic necessities for life. In China when the working class had control, everyone had access to basic health care, lived free of epidemics like schistosomiasis, and had an average life expectancy that increased from 35 to 68 years. Unfortunately, they abandoned this system and gave control of health to private organizations that charged for services and required health insurance. Infectious diseases and infant mortality rates have soared (Blumentha D, Hsiao W. Privatization and its discontents — the evolving Chinese health care system. New England Journal of Medicine; 2005. 353(11): 1165-70). Progressive Labor Party invites all of our activist friends to join us in raising the class struggle for a workers' dictatorship, so we can really save the health of our class. ☺



High Gas Prices

continued from front page

in oil prices. "Speculators and others may be acting on the assumption that Washington and its Israeli ally will proceed to 'take out' Iranian nuclear facilities, because that is exactly what Bush and his allies are implying will happen if the Ahmadinejad regime does not comply with U.N. resolutions." (Newsweek, 7/7/08) In turn, Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard, promised, "Iran will definitely act to impose control on the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz" (Los Angeles Times, 6/29/08), the world's most important chokepoint. Through it 17 million barrels of oil pass every day. In such a case, \$10-a-gallon gas would be cheap.

WITH CRUCIAL FUEL SOURCES AT RISK, RULERS FEEL A DRAFT

To ease their oil woes, U.S. rulers are planning a solution involving far more than reducing fuel consumption or regulating speculators. Harvard University's Kennedy School and a group called Securing America's Future Energy, headed by former Marine commandant P.X. Kelly, are staging a war-game program, "Oil ShockWave," on campuses across the U.S. The New York Times (11/2/07) reported on one imminent scenario presented last year:

"Iran had drastically cut its oil production in response to Western economic sanctions imposed because of its nuclear weapons program. The Venezuelan leadership of Hugo Chavez followed suit, driving prices beyond \$150 a barrel. The Iranian nuclear program touched off talk of war. The military advisers urged redeployment of the bulk of America's naval and air power to the Persian Gulf in anticipation of war, and urged reinstatement of the draft for young men and women."

Hang onto your hats. At press time oil hit the \$143-per-barrel mark and talk of war with Iran has begun. "Oil ShockWave" deliberately targets college students, who, ever since Vietnam, have been reluctant to support the Pentagon's murder machine. The program springs from the highest levels of the liberal Establishment. In addition to its Harvard pedigree, "Oil ShockWave" boasts Robert Rubin, Citigroup chief and Clinton Treasury-Secretary, as a leading participant.

Like openly militaristic McCain, "Barracks" Obama favors the mobilization a broader Gulf war requires. He vows to add 92,000 troops immediately upon inauguration. But his threat to invade Pakistan "searching for Osama bin Laden" and the Taliban would require hundreds of thousands of troops and could kick off a war in a country possessing the A-Bomb. Some "anti-war" candidate!

Voting for either candidate would prove a serious political error. War is a result of capitalist crisis and inter-imperialist rivalry. A new president can change the appearance of the crisis, but not its essence. The solution is to work towards the ultimate elimination of the profit system that causes these endless oil wars. Our revolutionary communist Party has this goal. ☺

LETTERS



Building Allegiance to the Working Class Among GI's, Families

Some of us who are working with people in the military and their families (MFSO, IVAW, Veterans for Peace, GI Rights Hotline) just recently started to go to a major army base in our area to distribute "care packages" to soldiers. These "care packages" contained a copy of the DVD of "Sir! No Sir!" as well as information, newsletters from the various groups, and cookies. There were 10 of us that went the last week of June, and it was a big step forward for some of the folks who participated. We distributed close to 100 bags.

Those of us who have done this many times before were bolder, and actually tried to engage the soldiers in some conversation. One carload that I met said that they would take the info if it was anti-war. One soldier told me that he was voting for Obama. I asked him if he really thought that Obama would get us out of Iraq. He said that he didn't really know, but that he was better than McCain. Later the whole group got together in a restaurant to discuss our experiences and make plans to do this again in August. I suggested going to off-base housing to talk to military families and a few people thought this was a good idea.

Five years ago when I first joined MFSO, I tried to get the group to go to the base and talk to soldiers on their lunch hour, as well as talking to the families in the neighborhood. This was shot down immediately by the leadership. After five years of pressure from soldiers, their families and veterans, the national leadership has reversed their position in their email bulletins! Yes, it seemed like forever, but we continued to struggle with people. Another important factor has been the growing leadership of members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW). Having these local soldiers in the antiwar movement has changed it from passive to active. They have many events planned this summer.

Of course, we do too! A summer project in Seattle and one in Los Angeles will involve many young people who are heading for the military or the industries that supply the war. This will be a tremendous chance for us to win students, soldiers, military families, and industrial workers to unite and bring this struggle to the next level. Politicians, the union misleaders, or peace groups often talk of building a new patriotism, a patriotism that somehow will benefit the working class. This is a deadly trap. We need class struggle... so that we can eventually bring down this capitalist system and establish workers power internationally. This is going to be an exciting and challenging summer! Let's get started!

Military Mom

CHALLENGE Readers' Password: "Power to the Workers!"

Recently, the company transferred me from one plant to another in the same company. The first day I ran into a worker who had gotten CHALLENGE before. When we greeted each other, he was talking to another worker to whom he said, "look, this is a communist," and the other worker extended his hand and said, "good, now there are two of us." A pleasant welcome.

A week later I gave CHALLENGE to the "other communist," who really liked the paper a lot. He and my old friend invited me to sit down with a group of them at lunch time. Every day at lunch we have discussions about sports, UFO's, racism, sexism, imperialist wars, and the need to build a communist workers' movement.

While I was in such a lunch meeting, a new friend came up who had been invited to join our table. One of those present, when seeing him approach, said to him, "if you want to sit here, you have to say the communist password." Another worker said to the new one, "Tell them, 'Power to the Workers,'" which he did, and we all laughed.

This atmosphere has given me the confidence to be bolder in discussing communist politics and looking for new CHALLENGE readers. For example,

once I gave the paper to the "other communist" in front of another worker who I had already planned to give it to also. I gave it to the other worker, and when he had it in his hands, he asked, "This paper is communist, right?" "Yes," we answered. "Is it illegal?" he asked us. "Not right now, but have no doubt that it will be. Because this paper opens your eyes and you'll find out what others don't want you to know," answered the "other communist." After this, we gave him a more full explanation about the paper and what we fight for.

All these opportunities have been created with many political and personal discussions inside and outside the plant. With some of these new friends we went to visit some farm worker comrades. In the plant where I worked before, there are also other workers who read the paper and they're willing to come to activities with workers from my new plant. These are opportunities which open the way to expanding the network of CHALLENGE readers. Our next steps are to start a study group and to recruit.

Red Organizer

Workers to Racist Punk: 'Get Off Our Bus!'

During a visit to Chicago, I was on a CTA bus when a young racist thug started verbally harassing a young Hispanic woman. After answering her cell phone in Spanish, he started saying ignorant stuff like "Don't speak that s--t! This is America! In my country you speak English!" He cursed her out and told her "You ought to be thrown out of the country!" Another passenger (a Korean-American woman) and myself yelled at the racist, telling him "You need to get off the bus!" The bus driver (an African-American woman) along with some white workers yelled at the punk to leave. I said to him, "Dude, no one wants you on the bus, you need to leave now!" The racist finally got the message and left, and the driver notified the police.

The lessons to be learned from this: If a party member is by himself/herself, and there is a racist attack on a black or Latino worker, try to give leadership to other workers to fight back against the attack. The racist on the bus was frightened by the multiracial unity of the bus passengers. And also, the police (who are no friends of the working class) should not be called if at all possible. In a communist society there would be still be struggle around bad ideas left over from capitalism. Racist ideology

would be dealt with by the workers.

A Comrade

BBQ Brings Food For (Marxist) Thought

Our Party-led study group had a barbecue recently. Besides the delicious food and some wonderful songs written and sung by another comrade, we had a great discussion of art and politics. We talked about what Marx meant when he said that the superstructure of society (laws, politics, education, religion) reflects the economic base of that society (how production is organized, with owners and workers in capitalist society). For example, the U.S. constitution reflects the property interests of the wealthy plantation owners and merchants who created it, and most of our laws are simply measures to protect the interests of corporations. Anyone who doesn't think so should try not paying their mortgage, or their rent or their credit card bill, and see what happens!

We also looked at some examples of artists who consciously tried to expose the nature of capitalism and to encourage anti-capitalist struggles. We read one short story, "Afternoon In the Jungle," by Albert Maltz, one of the blacklisted "Hollywood Ten." The story is about a boy living during the Great Depression, whose parents are struggling with poverty wages, and who discovers a 50-cent piece lying at the bottom of a sewer. He's unsuccessfully trying to retrieve the coin when a down-and-out man comes along, a man who makes a living finding lost coins. The ensuing heart-wrenching fight between

the boy and the man illuminates the dog-eat-dog nature of capitalism, in which workers are reduced to fighting each other for scraps.

We then had an exuberant but comradely debate about the merits of the short story. Some said they thought the story was cynical because it provided no solution, while others felt it should be seen as part of a larger literary project to have workers see the vicious nature of capitalism and resolve to bury it.

*Comradely,
CUNY activist*

Finds Axle Articles Come Up Short

CHALLENGE has carried many articles on the Axle strike. As a communist newspaper, our purpose is to support the strikers and at the same time give guidance as to what, in the longer term, workers can do to break away from capitalist ideas and oppression — to be a source of truth for our class. In some ways, the articles were not on target.

(1) The headlines and leading themes of the articles could lead to the belief that the main problem for the workers is that the UAW "is in the hip pocket" of the bosses. But the fact is that Axle has already shown that it can move away from Detroit and profit from cheap labor elsewhere. They were not bluffing about closing the plant. It is not serving our cause to imply that a more honest leadership could have killed the deep wage-cuts. Globalization has changed the worker's battlefield.

The June 18 article does point out how the bosses say the wage-cut agreement "addresses market reality," and in its closing section the article does get to the heart of the matter: "No matter what gains workers make through bitter struggle, when capitalism's market asserts itself...the workers wind up at the bottom of the heap." Marx didn't claim that low wages are a product of bosses' personal greed. The profit system requires them to seek maximum profit or go under. These ideas should be front and center.

(2) Having finally conceded "market reality," the end of the June 18 article says that the only real course for the workers is to build the revolutionary party to smash the system. This is true, but it implies that union struggles are near-useless, which is not, of course, what we mean. But only one very short passage (June 4) in the long series of CHALLENGE articles gives some suggestions for worker activity here and now (quoted in its entirety): "Without a company-wide organized opposition in the union, ready to break the laws, stop scabs, spread the strike here and in Mexico, and REACH OUT TO THE REST OF THE WORKING CLASS (emphasis added), workers would be hard-pressed to take on Axle, GM and the UAW."

It seems to me that more space in these articles should have been devoted to elaborating on such ideas, instead of confining them to one, negatively phrased paragraph. PLP aims to help workers to act as a broad, powerful class, and our articles should try to influence strikes in that direction.

Ancient Red

CHALLENGE COMMENTS: The letter reviewing our coverage of the Axle strike makes two main criticisms;

1. "The headlines and leading themes of the articles could lead to the belief that the main problem for the workers is that the UAW 'is in the hip pocket' of the bosses...It is not serving our cause to imply that a more honest leadership could have killed the deep wage-cuts;" and,

2. "Having finally conceded 'market reality,' the end of the June 18 article says that the only real course for the workers is to build a revolutionary party to smash the system. This is true, but it implies that union struggles are near-useless, which is not, of course, what we mean...PLP aims to help workers to act as a broad, powerful class, and our articles should try to influence strikes in that direction."

On the face of it, these two criticisms appear to
continued on next page

Autoworkers Need International Solidarity to Fight Bosses, Union Hacks

SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL — Almost 200 delegates from 27 countries met June 16-18 for the 12th International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) World Auto Council "to address fundamental challenges of [the] industrial and enterprise restructuring process sweeping the auto sector." But little could be expected to deal with the problems faced by autoworkers worldwide at a meeting where the keynote speaker was Ron Gettelfinger, president of the UAW and the IMF Automotive Department.

While parroting, "We must develop a pathway to build union strength at the major global auto producers and suppliers," in practice under Gettelfinger's leadership the UAW has done the opposite. The last example was the sellout of the Axle strikers in Detroit and other U.S. cities (see CHALLENGE, June 4).

Gettelfinger and most union hacks worldwide have done everything possible to help companies cut autoworkers' wages, jobs and benefits. Nationalism and pro-company unionism have been the norm for these hacks, and not just the UAW. The Canadian Autoworkers Union has just seen its strategy of "trading concessions for job security" blown to bits when GM announced the closing of its big Oshawa, Ontario plant. In Mexico, union hacks have announced their willingness to accept even lower wages, making them competitive with "China's low wages."

On June 17, IMF delegates attended a strike solidarity rally with workers at the Cummins Engine plant in Guarulhos. It followed the meeting's closing speech by IMF General Secretary Marcello Malentacchi pledging to end precarious (non-permanent, low-paid) work. But this symbolic rally was just for show, to pretend these hacks are actually fighting union-busting.

The IMF is calling for a Global Day of Action on October 7. Class-conscious and militant autoworkers must turn this day into one of real

international solidarity, blasting the hacks' nationalism, exposing how the attacks workers suffer worldwide are caused by an international capitalist system faced with sharpening competition for markets, resources and cheap labor, which is leading to endless wars.

This is the only kind of political leadership that can confront the auto bosses growing attacks, and it won't come from the UAW, CAW or IMF hacks. It requires a red leadership whose goal is, "Workers of the world, unite! We have nothing to lose but our chains!"

Brazil's GM Workers Need International Solidarity

Not far away from the IMF meeting place, GM has been trying to hire 600 new non-union workers with lower wages at its assembly plant in São José dos Campos. Meanwhile, the local city government has given GM tax exemptions and other concessions. The company, the local government and the media have attacked the workers opposing this wage-cut scheme, claiming they "oppose the creation of new jobs." Now GM is threatening to transfer jobs to a plant in São Caetano do Sul, which has a pro-boss union leadership and already has 1,500 workers earning less and with less benefits.

Contrary to the U.S., Canada and Europe, Brazil's auto industry is enjoying a boom because of the rise of the local market. GM controls 20% of it, making huge profits.

A coordinated struggle of rank-and-file GM workers in Brazil, Canada, Mexico and the U.S. behind the slogan, "Same enemy, same fight, autoworkers of the world, unite!" would go a long way to fight these bosses' attacks, something they won't get from the IMF's pro-capitalist leaders. ☛

MORE LETTERS

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be contradictory. On the one hand, we shouldn't imply that "better" union leaders would make a difference. On the other, we need to offer better leadership and direction to the struggle. I think this reflects the struggle around reform and revolution that has always challenged the communist movement, including our Party.

Criticizing the UAW leadership on the picket lines and in home visits was no small thing. Some fake-leftists made reformist criticisms and offered their solution of "electing strike committees" and so on, while the rest of the left was "in the hip pocket" of the UAW.

As the strike wore on, workers became more and more angry with the UAW, but never really challenged them. How could they without an alternative leadership? We tried to organize meetings to begin to provide that alternative, but there was a lot of fear and passivity to go with the anger. The pregnant wife of a worker (who came to May Day and wants to become active) wanted to picket Solidarity House (union headquarters), but we couldn't mount a serious effort to do that, given our limited political base among the workers.

We had limited ties to the strike and no Party club. We tried to use the strike to re-establish the Party in Detroit. Having May Day there and bringing a group from there to Chicago, with strikers at both, was achieving our main goal.

Without going over every article in the three-month strike, CHALLENGE consistently exposed the imperialist competition among the auto bosses, talked about China, India and global production, racism, war and made it clear that this was not the result of a greedy boss or corrupt union leader. We could have done better at painting a picture of how we would lead this struggle, trying to sharpen the contradictions at every level, breaking the laws, mass violence, etc.

Sometime over the summer we will have a mass leaflet at several gates, saying that the main lesson of the strike is that capitalism is a bosses' dictatorship, and the only answer is communist revolution and a workers dictatorship to keep the bosses from coming back. Self-critically, we should have made this point more clearly throughout the strike and in the paper. ☛



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

Ousted by Hussein, big oil is back

From the first days that American-led forces took control of Iraq, the conquering army took pains to broadcast that it was there to liberate the country, not occupy it, and certainly not to cart off its riches.... There was suspicion that the war was a naked grab for oil that would open Iraq to multinational energy giants.... Oil, and its critical importance to the American economy, has for decades been a paramount interest of the United States in the region....

That basic question was yanked back to the fore recently when word emerged from Baghdad...that the Iraqi oil ministry was close to awarding contracts to service its oil fields to some of the largest Western oil companies....

Some 40 companies from around the world had jockeyed for the contracts, but they were being awarded with competitive bids, the report said. Those about to land the deals — Exxon Mobil, Shell, BP and Total — had held oil rights in Iraq before Mr. Hussein nationalized the fields and kicked them out more than three decades ago....

The companies that failed to capture a foothold: the Russian oil giant Lukoil...and Chinese firms... (NYT, 6/29)

Iran oil is real US target

To the editor:

The reality is that Iran is not a problem, Iran is a

prize, or more specifically Iranian oil and gas is a prize, which is sought by China, India, Europe and the US.... The reality is that the US is on course to exercise its military might to achieve its objective. (GW, 6/13)

Obama policy team: imperialists

Obama had promised something different in foreign policy.... But last week.... Obama's new foreign policy team were a roll-call from the past. There was Madeleine Albright, Clinton administration secretary of state and ambassador to the UN. She was joined by another Clinton heavy-hitter, Warren Christopher, her predecessor.... There was the former national security advisor, secretary of defence, and others, most of whom had supported the decision to go to war in Iraq. "People who anticipate real change should feel betrayed.... What they're getting is a warmed-over Clinton cabinet "...[with] contempt for international legal norms and backing military solutions to complex military problems." (GW, 6/21)

Few jobs for poor black and Latin kids

The labor market is now caving for teens from all backgrounds. But for low-income, black and Hispanic kids, it's the "Great Depression," according to a new report by Northeastern University's Cent-



er for Labor Market Studies....

In the inner city, minority kids work at extraordinarily low rates. Only 15 percent of poor black teens had jobs last summer — versus 60 percent of white teens in affluent suburbs. (Cheaters Syndicate)

In poverty, more non-wedlock kids

In 2006, for the first time in U.S. history, a majority of all births to women under 30 — 50.4 percent — were out of wedlock. Nearly 80 percent of births among black women were out of wedlock.... For Hispanics, it was 51 percent.

One of the main reasons out-of-wedlock births have skyrocketed in recent decades is because it has become so difficult for poor and poorly educated young men to earn enough to support a family....

The U.S. economy does not come close to providing decent employment... for everyone who wants to work. At the lowest end of the economic ladder the crisis in employment is reminiscent of the Great Depression in its intensity.

It is in this group of poor and educationally deprived young people that out-of-wedlock births are highest. (NYT, 6/27)

Constantine's Racist Sword Aided Imperialism

"Constantine's Sword," based on a book by former Catholic priest James Carroll, is a documentary film that depicts the vile history of Catholic anti-semitism. During the 1960's, influenced by the anti-war movement, Carroll became painfully aware that if the U.S. had been dropping contraceptive pills on the people of Vietnam, the Church would have been the first to condemn the war, but because it was dropping napalm, it supported it. He soon left the priesthood and became a writer.

Carroll decided to investigate the origins of Catholic anti-semitism. He went back to Emperor Constantine, who adopted Christianity as a way of uniting the Roman Empire around a strong ideology that placed him as God's representative on earth. Other belief systems, including paganism and Judaism, were competitors that were violently suppressed. Jews were blamed for the death of Christ, a false charge that was repeated over the centuries in the Passion Plays that depicted the crucifixion and death of Jesus. In Europe the Passion Plays were often followed by pogroms, violent at-

tacks on Jewish communities. Jews were called "marranos," or swine. 2,000 of them were burned at the stake. In 1492, the Jews were expelled from Spain. Later, the Arabs (called Moors) were also expelled.

Carroll correctly points out that the 20th century persecution and mass murder of Eastern European Jews could not have occurred were it not for the centuries of Christian anti-semitism that prepared Germans, Poles and others to see Jews as Christ-killers and a threat to Christians. The film shows how the Vatican refused to speak out against fascist attacks and killings of Jews, either in Italy itself or in the rest of Europe. It signed a Concordat (treaty) with the Nazis in order to preserve the property and functioning of the Catholic Church, and shared much of the conservative vision of fascism, especially its anti-communism.

Though Carroll remains a Catholic, he warns about the growing theocratic danger of religion and government merging to become one. He shows how the Air Force Academy in Colorado has allowed cadets to proselytize evangelical Christianity on campus, and where non-Christians have been harassed. Yet Carroll fails to examine the dilemma for the ruling class when it comes to religion. On the one hand, evangelical fervor can motivate believers to join the military and risk their lives in the supposedly holy cause of fighting radical Islam. On the other hand, this resurrection of the "Crusades" creates considerable anger and resentment among Arabs and Muslims throughout the world.

Carroll's critique of Catholic anti-semitism is limited, never seriously examining the overlap between the conservatism of Catholic and fascist



ideology. The film neglects to mention the role of Vatican officials in helping high-ranking Nazis to escape to Latin America after the war. It says nothing about the role Catholicism has played in indoctrinating the oppressed to accept their unfortunate lot in life and wait for the kingdom of heaven, or the alliances that the Catholic hierarchy has made with wealthy elites and fascist regimes throughout the world.

Christianity became the official religion of Rome because it guaranteed the rule of the Emperor. It became one of the central institutions of feudalism, based on the exploitation of peasants. Today, the Vatican — worth billions of dollars — hypocritically criticizes capitalism for its fixation on material wealth (profits), but even more avidly condemns Marxism for wanting to bring an end to capitalist exploitation and religious superstition. Based on medieval prejudices, Catholicism, like ALL religions, fights to keep working people subordinate to the rulers.☸

'Catholicism, like ALL religions, fights to keep working people subordinate to the rulers.'

tacks on Jewish communities.

Later, the Crusades, which began in the late 11th century, lasted almost two centuries, and were aimed at seizing Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims. Blessed by the Pope, fueled by Christian fanaticism, and led by the cross, the crusading armies marched toward the Holy Land, stopping along the way to murder thousands of Jews in German towns. Later, during the state-sponsored Spanish Inquisition, tens of thousands of Spain's Jews were forced to convert, to become "conversos." However, that wasn't sufficient, because converted Jews were suspected of secretly practicing Juda-

Obesity series will continue in the next issue.

U.S.-England, China Rivalry Behind Zimbabwe Turmoil

On June 29, Robert Mugabe was inaugurated for a sixth term as President of Zimbabwe. Plans for a Kenya-style solution (sharing of power among different political factions after the violent turmoil in that country in the beginning of this year) were scrapped after the opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) dropped out of the elections. This followed the terror campaign waged by Mugabe's goons which left 104 dead and 3,500 injured. Tsvangirai left the country and basically abandoned his followers to their own fate.

Zimbabwe's economy is a mess. Hyperinflation has led to a bottle of Coke costing 15 billion Zimbabwean dollars in the black market (Wall St. Journal, July 2). The embargo imposed by Britain and the U.S. only hurts the working-class masses even more. Washington and London are taking a stand against Mugabe not because he steals elections — hell, Bush and many other U.S. allies worldwide have done that — but because of China's growing influence in Africa. When U.S. Secy. Of State Condi Rice went to Beijing and asked the Chinese rulers to join the arms embargo against Zimbabwe, Chinese Foreign Secretary Yang Jiechi refused, saying that the only solution was for Mugabe to enter talks with the opposition.

The opposition MDC, led by Tsvangirai, an ex-union leader, is considered totally in the pockets of Western imperialists. In 2002, the MDC opposed the take-over of the white capitalist farmers despite the popularity of the move (these agricultural bosses were a leftover from Ian Smith's white-supremacist regime before a guerrilla war ended it). Mugabe seized some of the richest farms to reward his cronies. The MDC also favors neo-liberal policies such as privatization and free trade which would worsen the lives of the working masses.

But Mugabe himself is a good example of how a militant nationalist who helped lead the fight against the racist rulers of Rhodesia (Ian Smith's racist regime) turns into just another exploiter. In the 1990s, the Mugabe regime imposed International Monetary Fund-type austerity measures against the working class, attacking pay and welfare services and selling off state industries. The opposition MDC actually came from the working-class resistance to these measures when the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZACTU) broke with the ruling ZANU-PF and in 1995 organized a general strike. Tsvangirai headed the union federation and gained a reputation as a militant leader.

But it didn't last too long. He joined with NGOs and even with multinational corporations and white agricultural bosses and became a pawn of London and Washington. So Zimbabwe's workers had no

choice between two anti-working-class politicians (Mugabe and Tsvangirai).

It's unclear what will happen next. Will Mugabe be able to hold onto power with China's support, under pressure from the U.S. and the UK and their local allies in Africa? Whatever happens, the future is bleak for Zimbabwe's working urban and rural masses. A South African-style solution is no answer. Witness the recent anti-immigrant pogroms in South Africa which attacked Zimbabwe immigrant workers there, whose earnings helped their families back home. There's no shortcut out of this capitalist hell except the hard and long task that revolutionary-minded workers must carry out here and in Africa to build a revolutionary communist leadership.☸

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