



one hemisphere

indivisible

permanent revolution
and neoliberalism
in the americas

by guerry hodderson

C Contents

Introduction	7
Looking back	9
Belt-tightening as a permanent way of life	12
Latin America: from dictatorship to “free trade”	13
Imperialism, war and Bonapartism	15
<i>The invasion and occupation of Iraq</i>	16
<i>Fractured antiwar movement</i>	18
<i>Bonapartism in the state</i>	19
A smaller world, a global class consciousness	20
Permanent Revolution in our time	21
The rise of neoliberalism in our hemisphere	25
Latin America: ruin and resistance	28
Going to hell in a handbasket	28
Antagonisms sharpen, protests mount	29
<i>Uruguay</i>	32
<i>Ecuador</i>	32
<i>Peru</i>	33
<i>Bolivia</i>	34
<i>El Salvador</i>	35
<i>Guatemala</i>	35
Elections put new regimes in power	35
Revolution on the agenda to the south	38
<i>Bolivia: a radical tradition</i>	38
<i>Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution</i>	41
Central America: civil wars end, but no peace	45
Mexico: in the sinister shadow of <i>Tío Sam</i>	48

© 2006 by Red Letter Press
4710 University Way NE, #100
Seattle, WA 98105 • (206) 985-4621
RedLetterPress@juno.com
www.RedLetterPress.org

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 0-932323-27-8



Latin American women: the unsung leadership of the most oppressed	51	The Party's tasks	88
<i>Taking on the dictators</i>	52	Defend workers' movements in Latin America	89
<i>The impact of neoliberalism on women</i>	53	Strengthen relations with Latin American revolutionaries and feminists	90
<i>NGOs: an arm of free trade</i>	54	For a political exchange with Central and South Americans	91
<i>Reproductive rights</i>	57	Spark a union revival	92
<i>Latin American feminism and Radical Women</i>	57	For a multi-issue, anti-capitalist movement to end the occupation of Iraq	93
Leon Trotsky lives!	59	Build the Party	95
What the "American Century" meant for the U.S. working class	62	<i>More socialist feminist election campaigns</i>	96
The Progressive Era	62	<i>Create a Leadership Training School</i>	97
The New Deal	63	<i>Back to basics in Marxist education</i>	97
The Great Society and the War on Poverty	64	<i>Support Radical Women</i>	98
New front opens in the offensive against workers and the poor	65	Conclusion	99
The theft of public wealth to boost corporate profits	67		●
Making a killing in education and Social Security	68	Notes	101
Capitalist punishment	69	About the author	106
What quality of life?	71	What is the FSP?	107
Split in the AFL-CIO: a window of opportunity for labor's ranks	71	Introducing Radical Women	110
Women, people of color and immigrants: firing up labor	75		
<i>The "second sex" moves to the fore</i>	75		
<i>African Americans: a living legacy of struggle</i>	76		
<i>Immigrant warriors</i>	77		
Capitalism: an ecologically unsustainable system	80		
Global warming	81		
Water is a feminist issue	83		
Oil, the diminishing resource	85		
Beautiful planet, destructive system	86		

Introduction

Written on behalf of the U.S. FSP National Committee, this sweeping investigation discusses anti-imperialist upsurge in Latin America and its meaning for U.S. workers and their aspirations. It was discussed and adopted at the January 2006 national convention of the U.S. section of the party.

The year 2006 marks the 40th anniversary of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP). Many things have changed in this country and the world since the Party was founded in Seattle in 1966. Still, the essential fact—that we live under an insatiable capitalist system in the most powerful nation on earth—has not. What U.S. workers do—how we vote, whom we fear, what we buy, what we value, what we bother to pay attention to and what we ignore—matters to the world even more now than it did at the height of the war in Vietnam during our Party’s infancy.

The U.S. working class is not important because the gods have blessed “our way of life,” as President Bush narcissistically intones. U.S. workers count because in our hands is a power greater than the hoarded gold of the largest, vilest multinational corporations: *the power to turn the incredible productive potential of this country into a force for global good instead of global destruction, chaos, and war.*

All that the tremendously beautiful, multiracial, and increasingly multinational U.S. working class has to do is make one short, well-organized and widely supported socialist revolution here at home. That is the as-yet-unfulfilled destiny of this mighty class. It’s a big responsibility, but there is

no other force on the planet that can do it. Argentinian revolutionary Che Guevara considered North Americans lucky for this reason, saying, “You are fighting the most important fight of all.”

Workers in other countries are striving to make their own revolutions. But they are hamstrung by the intervention of the U.S. military and diplomatic missions, by the manipulations of the White House, and by U.S.-dominated financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

In Latin America, the daily struggle against U.S. imperialism is heating up from Ecuador and El Salvador to Venezuela and Bolivia. Despite the difficulties they face, workers, peasants and indigenous people are putting the question of socialist revolution front and center. Impoverished fighters throughout our hemisphere need the material and political support of the U.S. labor movement and working class...*yesterday!*

If our class turns its back on its responsibility, it is hard to see how these revolutions, or the planet itself, can survive. Oil is running out. The climate is warming up. International arms sales are going through the roof. Many of the world’s people live in a permanent state of homelessness, starvation, disease, war, and desperation because of the unbelievable power concentrated in the hands of an infinitesimal number of capitalists in this country and a few others.

It is not as though these profit mongers make things so wonderful for workers in the heartland. Many people are struggling to keep body and soul together, especially those of color, the elderly, the young, and female heads of households. White male workers also find their privileged status slipping as well-paid, secure employment is eroded by “free trade.”

Awareness of the rotten core of capitalism has never been higher. In the U.S., only socialists called the profit system by its proper name 40 years ago. Now a nationwide

debate has sprung up over capitalism’s global and domestic role. Many people agree the system is flawed, but still think that it can be reformed, or believe that it is simply too powerful to challenge. Nevertheless, the level of worry about the future is rising.

Our place as a class and a party in the struggle for socialism in our time and in our hemisphere is the subject of this Political Resolution. The document looks first at where we have been, next at the upheaval against imperialism in Latin America, and then at social and political struggle in this country and how it is interlinked with revolution in Latin America. Finally, the paper outlines a course for the Party in the coming years.

Looking back

Since the launching of the FSP, the U.S. working class has scaled mighty fortresses and brought them tumbling down. The Party contributed to these campaigns in large and small ways too numerous to recount here.

Suffice it to say that ours is a proud history of being at the forefront in the areas of both theory and practice. While promoting ideas about how race, sex, and sexuality intersect with class and revolution, we created a Leninist, racially integrated socialist feminist party with the capacity to withstand “outrageous fortune.”

We are still here to celebrate our 40th anniversary because we are Trotskyists firmly rooted in those sectors of the working class needing socialist revolution more than anyone else: those who because of their race, sex, sexuality, age, and immigration status are doubly and triply oppressed under capitalism, even in the richest country in the world. These are the people who move the class forward.

And, over the past 40 years, perhaps their greatest achievement was ending racial segregation in the South. The wrath and quiet courage of workingclass African Americans from Little Rock to Los Angeles finally brought this scourge

to an end. But *economic* segregation lives on, as a furious Hurricane Katrina so heart-wrenchingly revealed. To be poor and Black is still to live the American nightmare, not the American dream.

Men and women of color and white women paid in blood, sweat, and broken bones to secure affirmative action and the “privilege” of proving they could do traditionally white male jobs as well as, or better than, any white man. They radicalized the once lily-white, all-male craft unions and expanded the definition of a “labor issue” to include social as well as bread-and-butter causes. Once affirmative action was shown to be highly effective in prying open the well-guarded doors of opportunity and generating interracial solidarity and a new male respect for female workers, the rightwing onslaught began, rolling back many of the advances made.

In 1966, women made up 38 percent of the U.S. labor force; by 2004, their numbers had climbed to 46.6 percent. During the intervening decades, women made great strides in forcing recognition of their elementary human and civil rights, including authority over their own bodies. Today, however, women still do most of the labor in the home, and the religious right is hell-bent on taking away reproductive freedoms. Making progress and holding on to it get more difficult all the time.

The powerful Chicano movement swept the cloak of invisibility from those who pick the fruit, work the fields, and clean houses and hotels. It fought for bilingual education, open borders, and respect for immigrant workers without documents. Farmworkers struck and unionized, winning state labor protections that had been denied to them in the past. Now, anti-immigrant militias patrol the frontiers of Mexico and Canada to capture media attention and mobilize xenophobic racists.

Three years after the FSP’s founding, the Stonewall Inn, a workingclass bar in New York City’s Greenwich Village,

became an international symbol of gay and lesbian liberation when drag queens of color flung open the closet doors and demanded RESPECT. Not many in these disunited states thought they should get it; it wasn’t an easy battle. Some of the biggest homophobes were on the Left (favoring the “revolutionary nuclear family” espoused by Stalin). But sexual minorities just wouldn’t go back, no matter what was thrown at them. Today, they find wider acceptance but elementary civil rights, such as the right to marry, still elude them.

The late 1960s also saw an upsurge in Asian American militancy. The movement challenged the myth of the “model minority,” forged alliances with other people of color, mobilized for ethnic studies, brought to light the radical labor heritage of figures such as communist and union organizer Carlos Bulosan (author of a soaring autobiography called *America is in the Heart*) and, later, demanded reparations for the chilling episode of forced Japanese relocation and imprisonment during World War II.

Poverty was just another name for genocide where Native Americans were concerned. Broken treaties, urbanization, fierce discrimination, and astronomical unemployment all contributed to the birth of a powerful ’60s-era indigenous movement that reclaimed fishing and hunting rights as well as stolen land. The organizers and foot soldiers of this rebellion were workingclass Indian men and women, many of them veterans of World War II, Korea, or Vietnam.

In 1966, the Vietnam War would drag on for another *nine* years. But a huge national antiwar and anti-draft movement, as well as their own combat experiences, politicized many young soldiers. Within a few years, large numbers had decided they would not fight “a rich man’s war”—a decisive factor in finally forcing the U.S. to withdraw. Now, in Iraq and elsewhere, another generation of workingclass men—and women this time around—are killing, maiming, and dying for the greater glory of capitalism.

Returning Vietnam vets were also a key component in the

lift-off of the disabled rights movement in the late 1960s, helping people with disabilities to achieve a new level of mutual support and radicalism. Demonstrations and organizing around the country demanded that society change to accommodate their long-ignored needs for housing, education, transportation, the use of public spaces, and employment.

In the battles mentioned above and many others, the most oppressed U.S. workers showed their mettle and courage, their strategic brilliance and tactical savvy, their capacity to collaborate and to make alliances, and their willingness to fight.

They transformed the country and yet, in many ways, it remained the same. The same class still ruled the state, regardless of which party was in power, the Democrats or the Republicans. The reforms won in arduous battles were always tenuous and perpetually threatened.

Belt-tightening as a permanent way of life

It was not immediately obvious at the end of the Vietnam War, but something else was changing: the world economy. The mid-1970s saw the end of the post-World War II economic boom. To fight rising inflation brought on by military spending in Vietnam, President Nixon froze wages and deliberately provoked a recession. Hundreds of thousands of people were forced onto unemployment.

Workers were told to tighten their belts; rewards were promised down the line for greater productivity and give-backs in union contracts. AFL-CIO leaders went along for the ride, preferring to maintain “labor peace” rather than to fight. They chose this course even when the hardest-hit sectors were those in which union strength was greatest—auto, mining, steel, and other industrial production.

As these jobs were lost to foreign competition, automation and speed-up, the information technology and service sectors grew. However, the pale, male leadership of the AFL-CIO simply refused to launch serious organizing drives among

women, people of color, and immigrants, who composed the majority of workers in these spheres. The labor bureaucrats feared these workers and, at the same time, underestimated them—and they strangled or co-opted their initiatives, such as the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW).

Since the labor tops didn’t fight much and didn’t organize, the only thing they had to offer were slogans. Their “Buy American” campaign was as ineffective in a burgeoning global market as it was jingoist and racist.

During this period, the social gains made in the preceding years came to an abrupt halt. Federal funds for anti-poverty programs evaporated. Urban renewal was abandoned and workers in inner cities were left to fend for themselves. Many communities damaged during the riots of the 1960s were never rebuilt; federal aid was promised, but it never arrived.

The end of the Vietnam conflict in 1975 did not bring an end to federal spending on war-making or result in a “peace dividend.” Instead, military spending *increased* as the economy relied more and more on arms production and “defense” industries to keep profits high. Over the next decade, the U.S. economy was frequently in recession, and it became clear that only military production was keeping a full-blown depression at bay.

With the economy tottering along and un-invested capital burning holes in the pockets of powerful financiers, the U.S. ruling class looked for ways to turn a higher profit.

Latin America: from dictatorship to “free trade”

During the 1960s and ’70s, nationalist and socialist movements emerged throughout Latin America, challenging the local oligarchies and U.S. economic interests. Fearing a repeat of the Cuban Revolution, U.S. policymakers developed the National Security Doctrine, which held that the Cold War represented World War III and that communists or suspect-

ed communists could be assassinated and imprisoned for their ideas alone. Using this doctrine as its framework, the U.S. created military dictatorships throughout South America, drawing heavily on graduates from the infamous School of the Americas.¹ Working with the CIA, these regimes launched a coordinated assault on democracy known as Operation Condor, which enabled them to track and execute political refugees fleeing repression.²

Many of these military regimes lasted for decades. By 1978, they ruled in 16 of the 19 countries of Central and South America—only Colombia, Venezuela, and Costa Rica were bourgeois democracies. Beneath the surface, however, resistance to dictatorships and juntas was boiling: one of the first to go was the military dictatorship in Ecuador in 1979.

Eventually, the U.S. realized that it was no longer efficient to rule by proxy through generals and dictators. These worthies frequently resisted opening markets and industries to foreign investment and tended to generate escalating protest and even revolutionary movements. Consequently, the U.S. switched strategies in Latin America and launched campaigns for “democracy and free trade.” Death-squad parties of the right wing, like the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) in El Salvador, were told to clean the blood off their business suits and transform themselves into “legitimate” electoral players.

The game had changed. Henceforth, the U.S. would be the world champion of “free” elections—as long as Latin Americans did not freely decide they wanted a socialist government, or even one which put national interests above the interests of U.S. investors.

The era of neoliberalism had arrived. Multinational corporations and financial institutions wanted unregulated access to natural resources, cheap labor and foreign markets. These could be gotten through restructuring capitalist relations on a global scale. Knocking down protective tariffs, deregulating banking and industry, shrinking government

intervention in national economies, privatizing natural resources and public industries, and destroying labor and environmental protections were all part of the new ballgame.

In Latin America, it soon became clear that neoliberalism is just another word for neocolonialism. As practiced inside the U.S., it is simply unfettered capitalism. In both places, it is war against the gains of working people using the rubric of trade policies.

Imperialism, war and Bonapartism

Imperialism is the most developed and final stage of capitalism. It is characterized by the consolidation of multinational monopolies, the merging of industrial and bank capital, wars of expansion, increased national oppression, and “reaction *all along* the line,” as V.I. Lenin wrote in his seminal work *Imperialism—the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

The Political Resolution adopted at the Party convention in 2002 discussed this phenomenon in detail. Since then, U.S. imperialism has continued to dominate the world by means of economic sanctions, political and social dismemberment, military attack, and finally the occupation of whole countries. Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Haiti are the latest victims of U.S. imperial expansion and its “coalitions of the willing.” And the drumbeat of ever greater wars continues. Now Syria, Iran, North Korea and Venezuela are in the cross hairs along with Cuba, a perennial target of White House anti-communists.

Along with its hot and cold wars, Washington uses trade agreements against the workers and peasants of less developed former colonies. Through these deals, extorted behind closed doors, the imperialists achieve the ends of war—control of natural resources and cheap labor—using a less costly means.

But opposition is intensifying. And while no single force is powerful enough to defeat U.S. imperialism at this time, Iraqi resistance to occupation is tying down the U.S. military

and preventing it from mounting invasions elsewhere, especially in Latin America.

Still, there is a definite build-up for war in this hemisphere. The U.S. has expanded its military bases throughout the region. These include military installations throughout Colombia, secret bases in Peru, an air base in Paraguay near its border with Bolivia and Brazil, and a “forward operating location” in the Salvadoran international airport with unrestricted access for U.S. military personnel.³

The invasion and occupation of Iraq

On February 15, 2003, between 10 and 30 million demonstrated in 800 cities around the world to prevent the U.S. from invading Iraq. The number of demonstrators was unprecedented; never before in human history had such a thing happened.

Such widespread opposition should have stopped the war before it began. But President Bush and Company had been planning this one-sided war for too long—and the September 11 attacks gave them exactly what they hoped for to sell the idea to the public. It was a once-in-a-century opportunity to make a bundle of money, prevent anti-imperialist revolution in the Middle East, gain access to dwindling supplies of the earth’s oil, and shut up domestic critics who demanded greater government spending on social needs and respect for constitutional rights. The servile Democratic Party stood loyally by Bush, the unrepentant war maker.

However, instead of scoring an easy victory over an outgunned opponent, the U.S. is losing to a determined indigent resistance movement. It is failing its bid to consolidate a puppet regime and rule by proxy.

Support for the right of resistance was the Freedom Socialist Party’s position from the start of the war. In a statement entitled, “Victory to the Iraqis over U.S. imperialism,” which was distributed at antiwar demonstrations the night the invasion began, we wrote:

It violates every notion of sovereignty and self-determination for the U.S. government to consider “regime change” as its privilege to impose. It is the obligation of antiwar activists here to uphold Iraq’s right to self-defense against the neocolonial army of the U.S. and the right of Iraqis to take care of Hussein themselves.

This fight against U.S. occupation is a national liberation struggle and as such has a dual character, advancing the interests of working people in some ways and working against them in others. Today, the resistance includes Islamic fundamentalists, the three major trade union movements, feminists, intellectuals, students, and elements of Saddam Hussein’s old regime. Their political aims are divergent and the methods they employ in the struggle quite different. Nonetheless, their *right to resist* the imperialist aggressor is a basic democratic right that must be defended by all who oppose the occupation. We also call, however, for a secular, democratic Iraq with full civil and labor rights for workers, women, and national and sexual minorities. And we oppose



In Chicago, more than 100,000 people marched for immigrant rights on March 10, 2006.

the formation of a theocracy dominated by religious sects, such as exists in Iran.

After three years of war and three stage-managed elections, the carnage unleashed by the U.S. invasion continues to mount. It is estimated that 75,000 Iraqis have perished in the conflict. More than 2,300 U.S. soldiers have died, and another 17,200 have been wounded. When called up, 5,500 troops have failed to report for duty.

With the U.S. losing the ground war, Bush's popularity is falling in opinion polls. So, he has upped the number of air strikes: bombing runs in March 2006 *hit major cities every other day*. And U.S.-trained death squads connected to the Iraq Interior Ministry, the police, and the army are on a killing spree, snatching Iraqis from their homes and executing them. The threat of civil war looms, opening up the possibility that Iraq could be divided into small fiefdoms—a prospect that the U.S. officially opposes but secretly endorses. A divided Iraq would be easier to manage; small oil-rich regions under U.S. control would solve the problem of attempting to rule the whole country.

Already the costs of the Iraqi invasion and occupation have been astronomical. The government has spent more than \$300 billion on its “war on terror,” including its aggression against Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴ These expenditures are critical to keeping the U.S. economy afloat. But at the same time, they generate an exploding national debt that is exacerbating domestic social crises such as the lack of universal healthcare and low-cost housing, a deteriorating public education system, and xenophobia against immigrants who use public services.

Fractured antiwar movement

Unfortunately, the fragmented leadership of the U.S. antiwar movement has so far been unable to unite the diverse sections of the population who are opposed to the war and lead them into militant mass action.

The national coalitions have a reflex for competition instead of a drive to form united fronts. They want complete organizational control and combine this with simpleminded single-issue politics and/or a sick symbiotic relationship with the war-endorsing Democrats.

ANSWER (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism), formerly led by the Workers World Party, organized the first large antiwar demonstrations after September 11, 2001—a courageous act given the hysterical political climate at that time. But WWP maintains rigid authority over any event it coordinates. By refusing to share power, it has lost its hegemony in the movement. United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), a liberal-dominated coalition, now competes openly with ANSWER for adherents.

Neither group wants to work with the other. In May 2005 and March 2006, they held separate, conflicting antiwar demonstrations.

To mobilize sufficient forces in this country to end the occupation of Iraq, it is necessary to connect the war to domestic problems and struggles that workingclass and oppressed communities face here. Protest leaders must be community-based and connected to the labor, immigrant rights, youth and other movements of those who are disenfranchised by lack of economic resources and are willing to fight back. Democratically run coalitions with elected steering committees can provide the kind of structure needed to develop a broad-based political program that includes the issues participants bring to it. This is the road to building a worker-led and inclusive antiwar movement.

Bonapartism in the state

Bush used the September 11, 2001 attack not only to justify his foreign wars, but also to open a war on the U.S. Constitution. Through various legislative acts, administrative decisions, assertions of presidential privilege, and the expansion of the military's role in domestic affairs, the power of

the state and the imperial presidency have been strengthened to a degree never seen before, at least in this country. This circumstance is known as Bonapartism.

Bonapartism is associated with intensified conflict among social forces—for instance, the kind that a prolonged war is guaranteed to generate. The measures taken by the Bush administration, many of them secret, are a preemptive strike against the *potential* for greater domestic unrest and growing global opposition to U.S. imperialism.

Bush sells himself as being above contending social classes, the sole trustworthy representative of “the people,” his only concern. Using this argument, Bush has authorized widespread spying by the Pentagon and National Security Agency on Internet traffic and phone calls. Secret prisons, torture, arrests without charges, paying journalists and PR firms to plant favorable stories in the press, as well as conducting criminal investigations against those in government and journalism who report on the secret doings in the White House—these are the tools of the trade of this Bonapartist regime.

Brave civil rights attorney Lynne Stewart, found guilty by a federal jury in New York City on trumped-up charges of conspiracy and supporting terrorists, is one of many victimized by the police state measures adopted by this administration.⁵

A smaller world, a global class consciousness

Free-traders were betting that neoliberalism would give capitalism a second wind and, for a while, it did. But over the past few years it has been stirring up more resistance than revenue, not just in Latin America but also in the U.S.

While breaking down tariffs, neoliberalism has also broken down national divisions within the global working class. Working people who win today understand that their battles occur on a worldwide playing field, and they see themselves as part of an international team with common enemies. The isolation of the past is fast evaporating and a worldwide

movement against capitalist globalization is spreading.

The destinies of workers in this hemisphere are bound together. If U.S. and Canadian workers look, they can see their future in the lives and livelihoods of their sisters and brothers to the south. The “race to the bottom” is a fact. The privileges once meted out to North American *white male* workers are not as lucrative as they once were. Finally, after hundreds of years, a painful change in conditions makes obvious what was true all along: that it is in the interest of workers in the North to make common cause with those in the South. More than that, it is a necessity for mutual survival.

This is the gift that neoliberalism has brought the workers of our hemisphere. “Buy American” is dead. Long live international workers’ solidarity!

Permanent Revolution in our time

With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, the world became an even more dangerous and unstable place. During the Cold War, imperialist extension was somewhat curtailed by the threat that the Soviets would oppose power grabs. On the other hand, the U.S. could rely on the Stalinist bureaucracy to hold socialist revolution in other countries in check to avoid a direct confrontation with imperialism that could lead to the bureaucracy’s removal from power.

The overthrow of socialized property relations in the Soviet Union and the reestablishment of capitalism there (distorted and fragile though it is) broke the Cold War’s uneasy equilibrium, and U.S. imperialism went on an expansionist binge. Every corner of the earth was a potential source of natural resources, cheap labor, and open markets. National sovereignty meant little to the gladiators of this muscle-bound Anglo-Saxon empire, though its victims felt otherwise. From Palestine and Iraq to Bolivia and Venezuela, they have been resisting the New World Order with every means at their disposal.

As working people today wage the fight against the re-

consolidation of unfettered capitalist rule worldwide, they are affirming Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution.

Trotsky, co-leader with V.I. Lenin of the Russian Revolution, maintained that it was impossible for socialism to be achieved in one country or confined to two distinct stages (with the fight for socialism coming only after an indeterminate period of capitalist democracy), as the Stalinists had claimed. Instead, Trotsky explained, oppressed people's struggles for liberation are international in scope and, in this era, pass over quickly from struggles for democratic rights to the struggle for socialism. This acceleration occurs because capitalist democracies cannot and will not liberate women, redistribute land, recognize indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, free sexual minorities from oppression, grant workers the power to control their own destinies, end poverty and hunger, or do any of the other countless things that would free humanity from oppression. It wouldn't be good for investors. Instead, these jobs fall to the proletariat and its allies.

The importance of international revolution has its roots in the character of the world economy and the world scale of class struggle. Capitalist development creates an international division of labor among nations based on the uneven development of industrial technique and the unequal distribution of resources. All national economies become subordinated to the world market. Therefore, resolving national inequalities takes on an international character because there are no national solutions to the injustices created by a global capitalist economy. Workers' battles everywhere are interdependent and connected. Without revolution in the stronghold of imperialism, revolutions elsewhere are in constant danger of being crushed.

These are the reasons why Trotsky emphasized the importance of a socialist revolution in the U.S. His unshakable confidence in the powerful U.S. working class to awaken from its sleep and change the world should give revolution-

aries of all countries courage and hope. By the time he died in 1940, Trotsky knew a great deal about making and losing revolutions, and he never abandoned his faith in the socialist future or the capacity of U.S. workers to bring down what was, even then, the most powerful empire on earth.

From today's vantage point, one can see the fires of Permanent Revolution burning brightly in this hemisphere. Indigenous peoples' organizations are an electrifying political force that is challenging regimes throughout Central and South America to recognize their rights to self-determination, land reform, and control over natural resources. Women and youth are in the vanguard of these and many other struggles for human and labor rights. Unemployed workers challenge the dictates of free trade and take over abandoned factories to operate themselves. They invade houses of parliament and demand that privatized industries and natural treasures be returned to the people.

As the impulse toward revolution gathers steam, Trotsky's ideas are finding a new audience, creating a precious opening to explain the value of the Trotskyist feminist program of the Freedom Socialist Party. It is a powerful moment in the Party's 40-year history: a chance to spread the rich trove of Trotskyist ideas, to break out of the isolation forced on the Party within world Trotskyism by the male chauvinism and blinkered politics of much of the movement, and to forge ties with other socialists in our hemisphere. It is an opportunity to learn from these revolutionaries and to share the knowledge we have acquired about building an interracial party where women's leadership is respected and appreciated, in an atmosphere of comradeship between men and women.

In *The Transitional Program*, written for the founding of the Fourth International, Trotsky characterized the crisis of our epoch as a crisis of radical leadership:

All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not "ripened" for socialism is the product of ignorance or

conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for proletarian revolution have not only “ripened”; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.⁶

To the best of our collective abilities and means, the Party plays its part in resolving this crisis by training new leaders, offering support to other struggles and prefiguring in our daily work what a mass U.S. revolutionary movement will look like and what it will fight for.

On the Party’s 40th anniversary, the U.S. section is looking to our own hemisphere to cement connections with other revolutionary organizations and movements in the hope of strengthening the revolutionary vanguard here in the Americas.

The rise of neoliberalism in our hemisphere

Neoliberalism is the new name for an old idea that has been resurrected by U.S. economists whose perspective coincides with the current interests of imperialism.

Classical economic liberalism is the set of theories that identifies the unhindered operation of the capitalist market as the engine of economic growth. Adam Smith, the 18th-century English author of *The Wealth of Nations*, is its best-known advocate. He described the market as an “invisible hand” working to maximize economic growth and human happiness.

The Great Depression of the 1930s shook many people’s confidence in the unregulated market. The theories of Karl Marx and John Maynard Keynes, who in very different ways advocated a greater state role in managing the economy, were given more credence. In Latin America, classical liberalism was supplanted by state-led development of domestic industry (frequently called import-substituting industrialization).

However, economic liberalism never died out. In the 1950s and ’60s, free-enterprise advocate Milton Friedman revived the theory at the University of Chicago. Interested in exporting his philosophy abroad, the university’s Department of Economics made a deal with Chile’s Catholic University in 1956 to run an instructional program centered around Friedman’s ideas. The most promising students were subsequently offered postgraduate studies at the University of Chicago.

By 1964, the Chileans trained in Chicago were in charge of the economics department at Catholic University. Aided by funding from the Ford Foundation, a project was then mounted to bring students from other Latin American countries to Catholic University for undergraduate work, scattering neoliberalism to a wider audience.

In 1973, General August Pinochet staged a U.S.-backed coup against Chile's socialist president, Salvador Allende, and began to reverse the ambitious program of nationalizations in mining, industry, and banking which Allende had initiated. Searching for economists to help undo Allende's programs, the general first looked to those affiliated with the Christian Democratic Party. However, the men he approached demanded that he quit murdering the opposition as a condition of collaboration. The "Chicago Boys" had no such scruples. "An appreciation of the democratic process does not figure among the priorities of the School's discipline" is how one writer put it.⁷

The Chicago Boys had a clear mandate to act on their basic thinking, described by another writer as: "Visible hands needed to be replaced by invisible ones. Accordingly, nationalized enterprises should quickly be privatized; public expenditures should be dramatically curtailed; the system of [tariff] protection should be rapidly dismantled, opening the economy to trade and investment with the rest of the world."⁸

In 1982-83, Chile experienced a deep recession that the "invisible hands" failed to correct. The government was forced to rescue a number of banks, including some that had been privatized. Fifty enterprises were renationalized and a number of protective tariffs reintroduced. However, the bulk of the Chicago Boys' reforms remained in place—even after General Pinochet left office in 1989—for one simple reason: the IMF required this as a condition for its loans.

Over the next 25 years, the medicine prescribed first by Friedman, and later by the IMF and World Bank, became the

dominant economic program of U.S. imperialism abroad.

And not only abroad. At about the same time the Chicago Boys were riding high in Chile, the ruling class in the U.S. peddled the glories of free trade to cure domestic economic distress. Using both the Democratic and Republican parties, it launched a program of government cutbacks and attacks on unions and public employees here at home.

The pace of the assault on the gains of labor and the social movements was slower in the U.S. than in Latin America for two reasons. First, because of the relative strength of the U.S. working class and its unions; and, second, because the imperialists could afford to share with U.S. workers a little of the booty they stole from the underdeveloped world. It was a small price to pay for labor peace and AFL-CIO backing for U.S. foreign policies that pulverized workers' rights and organizations abroad and created housebroken, anti-communist unions throughout Latin America.

At home, as the anti-worker attack has intensified, more than a century's worth of labor and social reforms have come under the knife—thanks in no small measure to the AFL-CIO's anti-communism and collaboration with the bosses.

Latin America: ruin and resistance

By late 1989, Washington-based international financial institutions were in agreement on fundamental economic policy for Latin America. Known as the “Washington Consensus,” this agreement tethered development money from the IMF and World Bank to certain conditions. Chief among them were privatization of state-owned enterprises and services, price stabilization, fiscal austerity, and market-friendly policies that favored international financial markets and local elites.

This consensus of the powerful produced massive layoffs and unemployment in Latin America, along with spiraling underemployment, recession, union-busting, official corruption, and cutbacks in government services. It not only failed to narrow the gap between rich and poor, as advertised, it turned the gap into a chasm, leaving many poor people on the outside looking in.

Going to hell in a handbasket

In its report “2003 Labour Overview: Latin America and the Caribbean,” the International Labor Organization (ILO) concluded: “Despite...signs of a modest economic recovery, Latin America continues to show high levels of unemployment, a decline in the quality of employment, an increase in informality in new job posts, a fall in real wages and a reduction in the productivity of the labour force.”⁹

The ILO reported that the average urban unemployment rate was 11 percent across Latin America in 2003. In Argenti-

na, the jobless rate was 15 percent; in Venezuela 18.9 percent; in Uruguay 17.4 percent.

Youth unemployment in these countries was twice or nearly twice the overall rate. And, according to the ILO, “Unemployment still mainly affects women. Even in the countries where unemployment was reduced, that reduction was less for women than for men [in 2003].”

For those lucky enough to have regular employment, inflation shrank the purchasing power of their wages—in some countries by as much as 19 to 23 percent.

Tens of millions of other workers did not have employers and were forced to eke out a living selling homemade food, services, and trinkets on the street or door to door, while scrounging for bare necessities. In some countries, this “informal economy” employs more people than the formal economy, in which workers with jobs can at least count on regular paychecks. In Colombia, the informal economy accounts for six out of 10 jobs.

Between 1994-2004, the ILO reported that seven out of 10 new jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean were created in the shadow economy, in which 80 percent of the jobs offered no social protections.

It is not hard to understand why 40 percent of Latin Americans do not earn enough to meet their survival needs.

Antagonisms sharpen, protests mount

In the late 1990s, insufferable conditions created a groundswell against free-market capitalism. A great many Latin Americans became completely disenchanted with open markets, privatized utilities, minimal government services, and foreign investors. In a 2001 survey conducted by the Inter-American Development Bank, 63 percent of respondents in 17 countries said that privatization had not been beneficial.¹⁰

A “People’s Consensus” emerged that neoliberalism enriches corrupt government and business elites, multinational

corporations, and U.S. imperialism. Instead of wealth trickling down to those on the bottom, wealth trickles *up* through regressive taxes and then *out* as pilfering public officials make themselves, their friends, and their families rich by robbing the national treasury.

In October, investigators in Chile revealed that General Pinochet—the first leader to implement free-market reforms in Latin America—stole millions of dollars during his reign and stashed it in bank accounts abroad. As a result, Chileans now rank former President Allende more favorably than Pinochet—for the first time since Allende’s death.

Changes in opinion polls are the mildest form of expression the Latin American public has used to show its disgust with crooked elites. The backlash against the Washington Consensus has led to violent confrontations with governments; regional and national general strikes; the growth of social movements and neighborhood associations; mobilizations by indigenous people; takeovers of factories, housing, and land by workers and squatters; formation of peasant associations; cynicism about elections and parties; and the fall of numerous presidents from Bolivia and Ecuador to Argentina.

Worldwide, the Washington Consensus is responsible for helping to create a movement against capitalist globalization that has grown in influence and power over the last decade. Attempts to enact trade pacts have become a major ruling-class headache, sparking protests throughout Latin America, Europe, Asia and North America. Cities such as Genoa, Seattle, Miami, Québec and Cancun have become symbols of resistance. Some agreements, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), may be permanently stalled, putting a stake through Bush’s plan for a hemisphere-wide free market that would stretch from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Other accords, e.g. the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), are signed only over the highly organized opposition of workers in numerous countries. The dirty deals that



are cut to pass these measures further erode public confidence in bourgeois political institutions.

One catalyst for mounting hostility to free-trade measures was the chain-reaction currency crisis that began in Asia in 1997, spread economic turmoil to Russia and Latin America, and contributed to the economic meltdown of Argentina in 2000. The Argentinean catastrophe—which left the country \$141 billion in debt, its banking system in ruins, and one in five people unemployed—then added new fuel to

the cycle of ruin and resistance in Latin America. Following are some examples of the escalating clashes.

Uruguay

Uruguay, which relies on the Argentinean market for its exports, was strongly affected by its neighbor's problems. Argentina made massive withdrawals of dollars deposited in Uruguayan banks, causing a plunge in the Uruguayan peso. Between 1999 and 2002, Uruguay's Gross National Product fell 17.5 percent. By 2004, 31 percent of the people lived below the poverty line and unemployment was 15 percent—this in a country which had once been called the “Switzerland of South America” because of its high standard of living.¹¹

In a 2003 referendum, a majority of Uruguayans voted to repeal a law that would have ended the monopoly of the state-owned oil company and opened it up to outside investors. In 2005, they also passed a referendum, sponsored by labor unions and community groups, which makes surface and subsoil resources “part of the state public domain” and mandates that sanitation and water services be provided *exclusively* by the state.

Ecuador

Two decades of structural adjustments, privatizations, mass unemployment, inflation, and cutbacks in public services came to a head in Ecuador in December 1999 when the government announced a plan to base its economy on the U.S. dollar. A month later, urban workers and peasants in the highlands brought down the government in six days of protest. The bourgeoisie was divided; the armed forces were unhappy about military salaries, upset over government corruption, and not inclined to put the uprising down. The problem for the workers and peasants, however, was that their insurrection—led by the Ecuador Indigenous Nationalities Confederation (CONAIE)—had no organization willing

and able to take state power. So while Ecuador's president was forced to leave office, the vice president stepped into his place. “Dollarization” went ahead, reducing the value of wages by 40 percent. Altogether, protestors have brought down three presidents in the last five years. The last one, Lucio Gutiérrez, was ousted by Congress in April 2005. Now his successor, Alfredo Palacio, is in trouble.

Indigenous protesters have repeatedly forced oil production to a standstill, demanding that oil revenues be invested in their communities. On March 8, 2006, oil workers at Petroecuador, a state company, went on strike for 48 hours demanding payment of back wages. Within days, national protests erupted over talks between Palacio and U.S. trade representatives on the Andean Free Trade Agreement. Indigenous people, who compose 35 percent of the population, opposed the deal as a threat to their agricultural economy and their culture. They blocked roads across the Andean highlands and marched in cities. The Interior Minister resigned and Palacio declared a state of emergency. Indian leaders demanded a referendum on the proposed deal, a new constitution, and the expulsion of U.S.-owned Occidental Petroleum. Future trade talks in 2006 are sure to provoke new protests.

Peru

In Peru, persistent poverty, widespread layoffs and government corruption caused rapid disillusionment with Alejandro Toledo, the U.S.-approved choice to replace former President Alberto Fujimori. Elected in April 2001, Toledo is the first indigenous person to serve as head of state; however, he has done nothing to hold the military accountable for its crimes against unionists, community activists and leftists during Fujimori's regime.

Poverty persisted under Toledo, despite growth in the economy. After a year in office, he broke his campaign promise not to sell off the country's two state-owned electricity-

generating plants. Riots and protests by peasant and labor organizations forced him to withdraw from the deal.

By late 2005, Toledo's overall job performance approval rate ranged between 5 percent in the capital and 7 percent in the country. Despite his unpopularity, in April 2006 he signed a free trade agreement with the U.S.—three days *after* presidential elections in which his party could not field a candidate because it was so discredited by Toledo's five-year rule.

A nationalist career military officer—Ollanta Humala—appears likely to replace Toledo in the election runoff to be held in May. Humala launched a coup along with his brother against Fujimori in 2000 and is accused of torturing leftists. He compares himself to Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia but says he is “neither right nor left.” His mother has called for executing gays, his brother is in prison for a 2005 coup attempt, and his father founded an ultranationalist movement called “ethnocacerism” that celebrates the superiority of the indigenous race over those descended from the Spaniards. Humala's opponent in the runoff is ex-president Alan Garcia, who left the economy in ruins during the 1980s.

Bolivia

In Bolivia, President “Goni” Sánchez de Lozada was overthrown in 2003 for trying to push through IMF-mandated privatization and austerity programs and for threatening to sell rights to Bolivia's natural gas supply to the United States. Indigenous groups, which had already been organizing around agricultural issues and demands for autonomy, joined unionists to play a central role in the rebellion. The protests became focused on respect for the indigenous majority, Bolivian national sovereignty, and “gas for Bolivians, for the workers, for the unemployed, for the humble families,” as one protest leader put it. President Lozada fled to Miami and Vice President Carlos Mesa took his place, only

to be forced out himself in 2005 by protests calling for nationalization of oil.

El Salvador

In 1996, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) guaranteed loans worth \$43.7 million for a Public Sector Modernization Technical Assistance Project in El Salvador, whose aim was to privatize public services outright or open them up to “new forms of private sector participation.” Targets included telecommunications, power, water and sewage, and the social security system, which includes healthcare.

In the decade since, the IMF and World Bank have continued to make loans to facilitate this process. In September 2002, doctors, nurses, and other workers in the healthcare system struck in protest over plans to turn over public medical services to private contractors. Demonstrations in their support culminated in a march of 200,000 people in the capital in October 2002. In June 2003, the president withdrew the privatization plans and the IDB dropped its loan proposals for “reform” of healthcare.¹²

Guatemala

In Guatemala, where 41 percent of the population is under 15 years of age, the struggle against privatization today centers around the Concessions Law. If enacted, this legislation would permit the government to lease or grant concessions of state-run businesses to private parties, often for upwards of *50 years*. Teachers are putting their lives on the line in strikes and protests against this measure—all in a desperate bid to save what is left of public education for poor children.

Elections put new regimes in power

Anger and frustration with unscrupulous governments, development agencies and financial institutions exploded into a “throw the bums out” political climate throughout

Latin America.

Venezuela was the first to embrace change. President Hugo Chávez, a former paratrooper, was elected in 1998 on a platform promising social reforms and a campaign against corruption, defeating candidates of two parties that had ruled for 40 years.

Chile followed suit by electing President Ricardo Lagos, an economist and Pinochet opponent, in 2000. Lagos is a leader of the Socialist Party, which is in a coalition with the Christian Democrats. This coalition oversees one of the most open economies in the southernmost part of the continent, a heritage of the Pinochet years. Socialist Party leader Michelle Bachelet replaced Lagos as president in January 2006. Her election was historic in one sense only: she is Chile's first woman president. She is giving women a higher profile in her Cabinet, but assured the country it would be neoliberal business-as-usual when it came to economic and political policies.

Argentina went through the most dramatic upheaval during this period, throwing out four presidents in nine months between 2001-2002. Massive layoffs from privatized industries and manufacturing firms left half the employable population without jobs. In the first election after the economic meltdown, voters chose President Néstor Kirchner. He restructured Argentina's \$104 billion debt with the IMF while promising to create a greater role for the state in the economy. In August 2004, he called out police to put down street protests by the unemployed and striking workers.

In 2003, Brazilians selected former shoeshine boy and union leader Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva of the Workers Party as their president. Da Silva promised to end hunger, fight poverty (22 million Brazilians live on less than \$1 per day), and distribute land to landless peasants—while at the same time paying off IMF loans.

One of his first acts as president was to appoint a former director of the Bank of Boston as his finance minister. In ev-

ery way, Da Silva is proving he and his party are better at administering a neoliberal state than the neoliberals.

Interest payments on the country's loans represent almost *half* of Brazilian government expenditures and are considerably higher than the amounts spent on Zero Hunger, land reform or First Job—a few of Lula's well-publicized social programs. As a result, income distribution is no better, and probably worse, than when he took office.

Da Silva and the Workers Party now face a spreading corruption scandal. The party's president, secretary general, and treasurer have all been forced to step down amid charges of bribing members of Congress. His chief of staff and the finance minister also were forced to resign for accepting or distributing payoffs and/or perjury and malfeasance in office. Once called "the party without bosses," in reference to its roots in the labor and social movements, the Workers Party has become a vehicle for personal ambition and winning elections, not social change. Lula has paid off the country's IMF debt *two years in advance*, purchased expensive weapons systems, and sent Brazilian troops to occupy Haiti. Meanwhile, starvation, high unemployment (around 16 percent), racism, and illiteracy still stalk the daily lives of millions of people.

In 2005, Uruguayan voters elected President Tabaré Vázquez of the Encuentro Progresista-Frente Amplio (Progressive Encounter-Broad Front). The front is a coalition of social democrats, Christian democrats, radicals, and ex-Tupamaro guerrilla fighters. Vázquez immediately reestablished diplomatic relations with Cuba and announced a sweeping "Social Emergency Plan" that contains food, health, job, and housing initiatives estimated to cost \$100 million. But he, too, has promised to pay the country's IMF loans while working "miracles" for the poor at the same time.

According to some political observers, these changes in governments are a case of leftists sweeping the southern hemisphere. In reality, these new regimes, with the exception

of that of Chávez in Venezuela, reflect a change in words, not deeds. While pledging to give government assistance to the poor, they continue to follow the dictates of international financiers—policies that have bankrupted their nations.

Revolution on the agenda to the south

Real change for the oppressed and exploited people of Latin America unavoidably means *radical* change, change at the roots. And that is not accomplished at the ballot box, but through socialist revolution. There are two countries in Latin America where the conditions for this outcome are most developed: Bolivia and Venezuela.

Bolivia: a radical tradition

Many factors have put the possibility of revolution front and center in Bolivia. The country has a revolutionary socialist tradition that lives on in workingclass organizations, especially in the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), or Bolivian Workers Central, the Trotskyist tin miners' union. In 1946, the COB aligned itself with the Trotskyist Fourth International, and from 1952 to 1985, the union was the vanguard of the Bolivian Left.

In 1985, when the neoliberal model was imposed on Bolivia through Decree 21060, the tin mines were privatized. Tens of thousands of miners lost their jobs and were forced to migrate to find work. Many went to El Alto, a working-class suburb of the capital, La Paz, or to the tropical Chapare region close to the city of Cochabamba, where they became *cocaleros*, or coca farmers. There, they helped create a radical *campesino-indígena* movement of *cocaleros*.¹³ Wherever they relocated, the miners took their revolutionary traditions with them. Today, COB is the most cohesive revolutionary force in Bolivia.

Seventy percent of the Bolivian population is indigenous, extremely poor and ready to fight. Longtime ethnic discrimination against indigenous groups has created among them a

deep desire for respect and political power, and this desire has become a mighty force. Indigenous groups such as the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (United Trade Union Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia) play an important and often radical role in the confrontations over government policy.

Social antagonism over privatization of natural resources and who should benefit from these resources has ignited increasingly combustible rebellions: the Water War of 2000; the Gas War of 2003; and the Hydrocarbons Law War of 2005. Each time these conflicts reached a fever pitch, the question of state power has been posed, but no organization has been ready to take the reins of the state in the name of the working class and the oppressed. After the October 2003 Gas War, COB declared that the upsurge had failed because of the “lack of a revolutionary party.”

The ruling class in Bolivia is divided over how to deal with the crisis. Wealthy businessmen and landowners in the eastern and southern provinces—whiter, more prosperous areas where the hydrocarbon resources are located—have launched a secessionist movement. They are able to issue this divisive call because the central government in La Paz often has little support and cannot rely on the military or the police to defend it.

In December 2005, Bolivians elected coca farmer Evo Morales, leader of Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), or Movement for Socialism, as their president. His party won a majority in Congress but not in the Senate. He is the first Indian to serve in this position in a country that rivals South Africa for its racist attitudes toward indigenous people.

Morales was hell-bent to become president of Bolivia and moved steadily rightward as his electoral aspirations grew. In the 2003 insurrection sparked by demands for nationalization of gas, he supported turning the presidency over to Vice President Carlos Mesa. Later he endorsed Mesa's referendum on gas, derisively called a “trickerendum” by the mass-

es because of its deceptive wording; COB expelled him for his role in this struggle. During 2005, when the social movements and unions were fighting to nationalize oil, MAS called for 50 percent royalties. When President Mesa was forced to resign, Morales supported Eduardo Rodríguez, the head of the Supreme Court, as his replacement.

Morales's massive win in the 2005 election—53.7 percent versus 28.5 percent for the candidate of the oligarchy and imperialism—had more to do with the five-year-old social upheaval in Bolivia than with his program. Unable to resolve the crisis of revolutionary leadership and mount a successful insurrection, the masses took the electoral avenue. But a man can not sit between two chairs; in a poor country, it is impossible to simultaneously please workers and the multinationals. Morales will be pushed left or thrust out of office by the movement that put him in the presidency. His visits to Cuba and Venezuela right after the election are symbolic of anti-imperialism; his public assurances that he will respect private property rights, emphasize support to micro-business and cooperatives, and sign a free trade agreement with the U.S. are meant to quiet the worries of foreign investors. The U.S. is keeping its options open. The Bush administration is preparing to both buy and bully President Morales, whatever works.

For now, MAS is directing the sentiment for change into a constituent assembly that will convene in August 2006 to discuss rewriting the constitution. The meeting will be held in one of the most reactionary provinces in the country. And participation is stacked against unionists and representatives of women's and peasant organizations, who must either get a political party's backing or the equivalent of 2 percent of registered voters in order to run for a place in the assembly. Rightwing parties and reactionary business leaders created this highly selective and undemocratic process.

In the absence of a left party capable of leading the revolutionary process in Bolivia, it seems that COB is the only

candidate. First of all, it is conscious of the need for a revolutionary vanguard organization. Second, COB is a national workingclass formation that has demonstrated the capacity to build alliances with other social movements. Trotskyists in Bolivia and elsewhere are raising the slogan "All power to COB," which is the correct slogan, as far as can be discerned from a distance.

Venezuela and the Bolivarian Revolution

Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez is the mouse that roared. He simply refuses to play by the rules of the animal kingdom where the lion is king. A former paratrooper, Chávez led an unsuccessful coup in 1992, riding a wave of popular unrest over deteriorating economic conditions. While in prison his popularity grew. Upon release in 1994, he launched his political trend, the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement.

Since his election in 1998, Chávez has made a national pastime of tweaking imperial power. From offering gas at reduced prices to poor communities in the U.S. after Hurricane Katrina to demanding equal time with Bush when addressing the United Nations, Chávez knows how to make the pompous and powerful look cheap and puffed up.

The FSP has characterized him as a populist—one who uses left-sounding rhetoric to appeal to the disenfranchised but who does not fundamentally challenge the system. But it seems that he is becoming something more than that. In the last year and a half he has begun to talk about the necessity for a socialist revolution, openly and enthusiastically, and to embrace Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. However, actions speak louder than words. Chávez has moved neither to nationalize industry under workers' control nor to expropriate privately held land for distribution to landless farmers. At this point, Chávez is best described as an anti-imperialist and a bourgeois nationalist whose political viewpoint appears to be going through a transition. The

A Venezuelan farmer shows his determination to carry out Chávez's promised land reform, January 2005.

question is, how far will he go?

Chávez is a man doing a balancing act between various forces: imperialism; the lower ranks of the Venezuelan army, who are a key element of his power base; and the Venezuelan masses, who saved his regime during the failed coup in 2002.

The Bolivarian movement, on which his power rests, is composed of impoverished peasants, workers in the informal economy, and the minority who have regular jobs. While this movement has no clear ideology, two wings have emerged as the discussion about ideology progresses within it. One tendency wants to consolidate the gains made so far, while the other wants to go toward socialism. The pro-socialist wing appears to be influenced by the ideas of Trotskyist intellectuals and activists. Union militants play an important and radicalizing role in the movement. They are raising demands for “co-management” of both state and private industries. However, this call seems to have different meanings to different people, from actual workers’ control to sharing power with management. A leader of the union at Cadafe, the state-owned electrical company, was unequivocal about its meaning for him: “[W]hat we want to develop is a completely new model...called Bolivarian socialism, which transforms the capitalist relations of produc-



Fernando Llano/AP

tion and where we workers have the power.”¹⁴

This vision of society, however, is in conflict with the essence of the Bolivarian Revolution, which is codified in the Venezuelan constitution. The constitution upholds private property rights and, in the past, Chávez has said he will not go beyond it. Thus far, his government only approves land or factory seizures if the property is abandoned or underutilized. And in some cases, like that of the U.S.-owned Heinz tomato processing plant, the government negotiates to compensate for seized property.

Chávez is planning to introduce constitutional reforms that will in some way address the issue of private property. However, as of this writing, the whole proposal is extremely ill-defined and dependent upon whether Chávez’s ruling party, the Movimiento Quinta República, has a two-thirds majority in the legislature. If so, Chávez could pass legislation easily and rule by decree without consent of the opposition. Various innovations are being discussed. These include changing the name of the country to the Bolivarian Socialist Republic of Venezuela and, according to Venezuelan diplomat Nelson Davila, “changing the constitution to reflect democratic socialism,” which “maintains private property, but ensures that there is no concentration of ownership.”¹⁵ If this happened, basic class relations would remain untouched—and capitalism would remain in place.

Without question, Chávez has improved the lives of poor and working people, although poverty is still astronomical. Using money from oil revenues, he has set up structures outside the state apparatus called social missions that provide free healthcare (with Cuba’s help), free education including literacy programs, and job training. He has also created a supermarket chain with highly subsidized prices and new banks where the poor can easily get credit. Price controls on basic foodstuffs and household items have also been instituted.

These improvements in daily life especially help poor and workingclass women, who comprise 70 percent of those

who live in poverty. They are among Chávez's most ardent supporters. The Land Reform Law established that women heads of household have preferential rights to the land. It also promised government subsidies to pre- and post-natal women. And on March 8, 2006, the government initiated wages for housework (\$185 U.S. per month) for 100,000 female heads of households; another 100,000 will be inducted into the program in six months. All these aforementioned government-subsidized programs are funded by oil profits and loans. The day the price of oil falls will be a day of reckoning for Chávez.

Indigenous peoples' rights to their land, language, culture, and tribal organization are recognized in the 1999 constitution. Land rights are spelled out as collective, inalienable and non-transferable. Mission Guaicaipuro, a plan to provide land titles to all of Venezuela's 28 tribes, has already distributed 317,000 acres and plans to award land to 15 more indigenous groups by the end of 2006.

A new trade union federation, the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores de Venezuela (UNT), or National Union of Workers, was founded after the 2002 coup attempt and the lockout at the state oil company in 2003. UNT covers almost all public workers and negotiates 50 percent of all private-sector contracts. Luis Primo, national coordinator of the UNT, recently toured the U.S. speaking unequivocally on the need to begin the socialist transformation of Venezuelan society. However, the leadership of UNT reflects the same division as the rest of Venezuelan society on the question of how far the Bolivarian Revolution should go. A long-promised national congress to elect the body's leadership has never been held. And the Revolutionary Workers Front of Occupied and Co-managed Companies complains that there are bureaucrats in the Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Industry who sabotage the expansion of workers' control at every opportunity.

Chávez is forming a militia to defend the country. As envi-

sioned by his administration, Unidades Populares de Defensa (Popular Units of Defense) will encompass 100,000 to 150,000 men and women who will operate at a community and workplace level in units of 50 to 500 people. If Venezuela is invaded, they will become the basis of a guerrilla movement.

With Cuba, Argentina, and Uruguay, Chávez also set up a 24-hour news network to challenge the rightwing media outlets in Venezuela, whose lies surpass even those of FOX News in the U.S.

On an international level, he has formed a political bond with Cuba and reaches out to the poor and oppressed around the world. He opposes FTAA and calls for an alliance of Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay) to form a market of equals.

All this is fine, but it does not make Chávez a revolutionary socialist. He continues to pay on the external debt and is borrowing from private banks to fund many of the reform measures, giving the banks power over his regime. He has also allowed the state apparatus to remain in place, leaving 800,000 government bureaucrats in a position to sabotage or block the reforms.

Ultimately, the formation of a revolutionary party based on the workers and poor is necessary if the social transformation in Venezuela is to go forward and socialism is to be achieved. The Fourth International (United Secretariat) recently reported on a group that hoped to become such a party. However, at its founding meeting the women present were forced to protest the all-male panels!

Venezuela is at an historic crossroads. Clearly, defending the nation against U.S. military and political intervention of every sort is the job of all serious revolutionaries, as is engaging in the exciting ferment in political ideas now going on.

Central America: civil wars end, but no peace

Never has there been a more tortured "peace" than that in Central America following the civil wars and thwarted

revolutions in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador. Poverty so grinding it stunts life expectancy—and causes starvation as well as spiraling urban violence, femicide, and gang warfare—is the price of being a neighbor of the world’s richest, most powerful country. Corrupt governments and daily interference by U.S. diplomatic missions and business executives in regional politics are outrageous facts of life.

The once powerful guerrilla movements in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador traded in their guns and their copies of Marx’s *Capital* for a chance to become bourgeois electoral parties. But none have succeeded in simultaneously winning a presidency and a congressional majority. They are the loyal opposition, making deals and alliances as necessary to attain severely limited goals within the capitalist framework.

In Nicaragua, the Sandinista revolution came to an ignominious end when the U.S. engineered the defeat of Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega in the 1990 presidential election. Years of low- and high-intensity warfare by Reagan’s *contra* army and the CIA paved the way, but the Sandinistas themselves bear a share of the responsibility. They advocated the Stalinist “two-stage” revolution—with Fidel Castro’s encouragement—and stopped far short of instituting a planned, not-for-profit economy under workers’ control. Instead, they created a “mixed economy”—partially socialized and partially privately owned. This hybrid was an open invitation for sabotage by the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie.

Economic and social conditions throughout the region deteriorated at the end of the civil wars in the 1990s due to the world economic slowdown. Unemployment, climbing prices for household goods and food, cutbacks in services, rising sales taxes on the poor, privatizations, and the introduction of free-trade zones—all of these have caused mass emigration from Central America.

It is estimated that between one and three million Salvadorans live abroad, almost a third of the population. Today,

these émigrés form a vital part of the region’s economy. The money they send to their families is often more than the country’s income from major exports. In 2004, they sent \$2.5 billion home in remittances.

El Salvador suffered its own form of hell with the introduction of the dollar as the national currency in 2001. Prices skyrocketed, the value of wages fell, and foreign investors surged into the market. Conversion to the dollar was a blow to national pride and a loss of sovereignty. Now the U.S. can set interest rates and make financial decisions that directly affect the Salvadoran people, but in which they have no say.

Common to the whole region are some of the most felonious public officials on earth.

Alfonso Portillo, president of Guatemala from 2000 to 2004, is accused of taking payoffs from the Taiwanese government and working with a group of top military officials to embezzle \$50 million. (Portillo and his gang of thieves wisely left the country when his term as president ended.)

Former Nicaraguan president Arnoldo Aléman (1997-2002) is serving a 20-year prison sentence for money laundering and for embezzling \$100 million in state funds. Despite this, the Sandinistas formed a political alliance with Aléman in 2005 in an attempt to unseat the current president. The U.S. State Department recently denounced this maneuver and threatened to quit doing business with those who supported it.

Two former presidents of Panama, Mireya Moscoso and Ernesto Perez Balladares, are accused of rigging up a private foundation that received a \$45 million “gift” from the Taiwanese government to build a hospital for the people of Panama. One problem: the hospital had no equipment or patients.

Finally, despite this stiff competition, the Honduran government was rated the most corrupt in Central America by Transparency International in 2004.¹⁶

All this political pollution is a definite plus when it comes to passing violently unpopular legislation like CAFTA. Poli-

ticians buy off their opposition with money stolen from public coffers. In this way, it buffers them from protests by workers and peasants and allows them to feather their nests so they can continue to live the high life once they are out of office. It partially explains why CAFTA was approved by every Central American country but Costa Rica.

Despite this bleak picture, young people throughout the region are in motion. They are determined to have a better life and are among the strongest opponents of free trade, privatization of education, the oppression of women, and authoritarian states. They are organizing unions, building alliances with students in other countries, and generally taking up the struggle where an older generation left off.

Cross-border demonstrations have grown over the years, especially against Plan Puebla Panama, a multi-billion-dollar development plan, and liberalized trade agreements hatched in secret negotiations. Strikers, union organizers, human rights advocates, indigenous organizations, and women's groups keep the pressure on despite death threats, murders, and economic retaliation. Their courage is contagious.

Mexico: in the sinister shadow of *Tío Sam*

"Poor Mexico: so far from God, so close to the United States" is a folk saying that eloquently sums up the problem of being an underdeveloped country sharing a frontier with a powerful, wealthy neighbor. The border of the U.S. and Mexico is the only place in the world where such a rich country rubs shoulders with one in which the people are so poor.

Sheer geography has dictated a longstanding economic, social and cultural interdependency between the U.S. and Mexico. The U.S., of course, has the upper hand. Still, both ruling classes recognize the need to balance political independence with economic interdependence. The greater the exploitation by U.S. banks, corporations and investors, and the greater the suffering it causes, the stronger the resistance and nationalistic rhetoric on the part of the Mexican bour-

geoisie. U.S. racism and Mexican nationalism are the background music to the political relations between the two countries and their populations, despite their strong ties.

The election of former Coca-Cola executive Vicente Fox as president in 2000 marked a turning point: the end of one-party rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which lasted 70 years. Now there is a three-party system. Fox's party, the rightwing National Action Party (PAN), and the PRI dominate Congress. The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), a bourgeois liberal opposition, does not disagree significantly with the other two.

President Fox is committed to breaking down the remaining barriers to foreign capitalist penetration, dismantling social welfare, and selling off state-owned enterprises. He pushed Plan Puebla Panama and signed free-trade agreements with Central American countries, Japan, Israel and the European Union, among others. He wants to privatize the oil industry and proposes to contract out exploration and exploitation of natural gas, even introducing a constitutional amendment to make this possible.

The years of NAFTA and free-market development have widened the gap between Mexican and U.S. living standards. In 1975, manufacturing workers in Mexico earned the equivalent of 23 percent of average U.S. wages; by 2000, this figure had fallen to 11 percent.¹⁷ Today more than half of Mexico's 104.5 million people fall below the poverty line. Forty million Mexicans suffer extreme poverty, living on less than a dollar a day.¹⁸

Migration under these circumstances is a logical act of survival. Poverty at home is why 9.2 million Mexicans are living in the U.S. (four million of them without documents). These economic refugees represent 16 percent of the Mexican electorate and will be able to vote in the 2006 Mexican presidential election. They could well determine its outcome. Like Central American exiles, they are a critical part of the Mexican economy: the remittances they send home totaled \$17

billion in 2004.

It is too bad that Mexican voters will have so little to vote *for* (a miserable situation they share with U.S. citizens). The least reactionary of the three main parties, the PRD, will run former mayor of Mexico City Andrés Manuel López Obrador—who favors business initiatives and crackdowns on crime. His persecution by the PRI and PAN has substantially upped his popularity.

The Mexican constitution, a product of the 1910 revolution, assures workers and peasants ample rights to the fruits of their labors. But without the state power to enforce them, these are only words on paper. In the last two years, strong social movements have emerged in the countryside against the effects of NAFTA and, in the cities, against privatization and the dismantling of the welfare state.

During his election, Fox promoted himself as an advocate for women—but his commitment to the cause is about equal to Bush's. Since 1993, at least 400 women have been murdered in Juárez. Members of their families, feminist organizations, unionists and radicals have had to build an international movement to demand an end to impunity for the murderers as well as for the police and courts, which have ignored the femicide under their very noses. As the struggle for justice for the slain women continues, another notable community-based mobilization centers on the demand for generic medicines to counter HIV/AIDS.

The Zapatista movement, meanwhile, has been an inconsistent force in Mexican politics. After attempting unsuccessfully to win a constitutional amendment granting formal autonomy to the indigenous population of 10 million in 2001, it seemed to move to the sidelines for a time. Then, in 2005, it issued its “Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona.” The message:

...[W]hat we want to do in Mexico is to make an agreement with persons and organizations just of the left

because that is where the idea of resisting neoliberal globalization is...we will make a plan for going to all those parts of Mexico where there are humble and simple people like ourselves... What we are going to do is ask them what their lives are like, their struggle, their thoughts about our country and what we should do so they (the ones who would sell the country) do not defeat us.¹⁹

The Zapatistas, whose ideology is essentially anarchist, have rejected the perspective of trying to build a movement to vie for state power, either through revolution or electoral campaigns. They are an organization in search of what their Sixth Declaration calls a “national program of struggle.”

It is a shame that most of the once promising Trotskyist Left has, in one way or another, abandoned revolutionary politics, with many Trotskyists becoming part of PRD. A closer look at Mexican politics is needed to see if there are other Trotskyist parties with whom the FSP might work.

Latin American women: the unsung leadership of the most oppressed

After overthrowing the regime of Sánchez de Lozada in 2003, Bolivians brought down another government on June 6, 2004. And guess who was in the vanguard? Indigenous women. They marched at the head of the rallies against President Carlos Mesa and appealed to the police in the capital not to attack the demonstrators. It was a scene straight out of the first day of the 1917 Russian Revolution. But it is possible to read reams about these protests in La Paz without ever discovering the essential contribution made by women.

Likewise, it is possible to read about the Russian Revolution without ever learning that female factory workers ignited the revolution on International Women's Day—against the advice of their male comrades. Both Lenin and Trotsky acknowledged and praised women for their courage and recognized that their militancy was born out of the special

suffering they experienced as the “slaves of slaves.” For this reason, Trotsky wrote in *The Transitional Program*: “Turn to the woman worker!”²⁰

Lenin said of Russian women:

In Petrograd, here in Moscow, in cities and industrial centres, and out in the country, proletarian women have stood the test magnificently in the revolution. Without them we should not have won, or barely won. That is my view. How brave they were, how brave they still are! Just imagine all the sufferings and privations that they bear. And they hold out because they want freedom, communism. Yes, indeed, our proletarian women are magnificent warriors. They deserve admiration and love.²¹

Women’s role in Latin America today is dynamic and revolutionary. But it is unfortunately undervalued by the Left and underreported in the mostly male analyses of neoliberalism (or at least those written in English).

Taking on the dictators

At some point in the last 40 years, U.S.-supported dictatorships ruled Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and many other Latin American countries. The number of people killed by these regimes will never be known, but it must be in the millions.

Women’s groups often were the first to publicly challenge the military by demanding to know the whereabouts of family members seized by police and death squads. Women also joined the guerrilla movements as political cadre and fighters. In Guatemala, the armed insurgents were 80 percent indigenous and 15 percent female. In El Salvador, women constituted 29.1 percent of combat forces; in Nicaragua, it is estimated they were 25 to 30 percent.²²

Heroism and self-sacrifice during the guerrilla wars should have guaranteed that women’s rights and needs

would be prioritized in the Sandinista revolution and during the negotiation of peace accords in other Central American countries. Some legal advances were made. For the most part, however, women and their concerns were sidelined by sexism, sheer male political opportunism, and Stalinist ideology (which dictated revolution in stages, and female freedom as the very *last* stage).

But the revolution is permanent, and demands for female liberation not met in one time or place will surface again in another. And so it was that in 1994, indigenous women in Chiapas, Mexico, burst onto the scene in the Zapatista movement carrying guns and speaking with the authority of leaders demanding emancipation for their sex and their people.

The impact of neoliberalism on women

The introduction of neoliberalism in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s had a profound effect on women’s role in the economy, the family, and society.

First of all, rising poverty forced members of “the second sex” to join the job market in greater numbers in order for their households to survive. In the past, many women had been relegated to private service to their families by strong cultural influences, including the Catholic Church’s emphasis on motherhood as their appropriate role. Of course, peasant women already worked on the land, but this was seen as an extension of their domestic labor and therefore undervalued.

The shift to work outside the home happened at the same time that governments cut public subsidies and spending for food, transportation, public education, sanitation, healthcare, pensions, early childhood support services, and gasoline.

Women in the public sector lost good jobs and all women were forced to carry more responsibility for social reproduction, i.e., all those activities and processes by which human beings directly and indirectly maintain ourselves materially and psychologically. Feminist writers such as Amy Bellone Hite and Jocelyn S. Viterna have characterized this as wom-

en being used as buffers for the neoliberal state or as “shock absorbers” for the economic reforms.²³

In 2004, 61 to 94 percent of female heads of households were in the labor force throughout Latin America; in male-headed households, 38 to 59 percent of women worked outside the home. These figures are expected to climb in the years ahead.²⁴

Also by 2004, 41 percent of working women and 39 percent of working men were part of the informal sector, which is growing so fast it is beginning to rival the formal economy in some countries.

Just as in the U.S., income parity between male and female workers grew as men’s paychecks shrunk and good jobs evaporated. Still, women’s wages are nowhere equal to men’s. For instance, women in Mexico make 58 percent of what men make; in Guatemala, they make 55 percent; and in Panama, they make 83 percent.

Women working in the informal economy do not have legal protections or regular wages. That is why export-assembly manufacturing jobs in *maquilas* can look good in comparison, despite long hours, the absence of unions, the chance of uncompensated injury, and frequent layoffs. Jobs for women have outpaced jobs for men in this quickly growing sphere, in part because employers believe they are getting a docile workforce. But organizing drives by women in these plants have proven the opposite.

In the process of becoming a crucial part of Latin American industrialization, women are also becoming full-fledged members of the working class. This should be good news for revolutionaries and trade union leaders who take off their blinders and see the potential for radicalism, self-sacrifice and valor that women bring to struggle.

NGOs: an arm of free trade

It is estimated that most of the world’s current 37,000 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which deal with social

problems around the world, came into existence during the 1980s and 1990s. The ostensible aim of these entities is to “form partnerships with governments and overseas development assistance organizations in promoting and improving the lives of the poor.”²⁵ Their actual *raison d’être* is to derail the development of revolutionary movements that target capitalism and to create a vast social caste whose interests (and livelihoods) lie with being a buffer for imperialism.

Powerful international NGOs are often funded by the U.N., which itself is dominated by U.S. policy makers. Governments, banks, the Vatican, and industrial giants all get into the funding act, as do fabulously endowed foundations and billionaires like George Soros. These funding sources are not neutral actors in the class struggle; they are pillars of capitalism and demand loyalty from those whose fancy salaries they pay.

NGO staff are expected to sell gradual reformism, “to spread the gospel of the free market and democracy and to



Rodrigo Abdi/AP

Protesters clash with police in Guatemala while opposing the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

speak of the virtues of social democratic 'civic organization' and action within the local spaces available within the national power structure."²⁶ In the U.S., many idealistic young people go to work for NGOs only to be used as defenders of a system responsible for the very social conditions they detest; in Latin America, NGOs are sometimes the only alternative to employment in the informal economy. But no matter where NGOs operate, their handouts foster dependency and elite social service bureaucracies, not militant action and self-organization to confront the systemic overlords.

During the 1980s and '90s, national economic policies enacted by neoliberal regimes in Latin America put intense new pressures on whole communities. Women, however, were especially affected as gas, water, and electricity were privatized and the prices of schoolbooks and supplies rose along with transportation and housing costs. Amy Lind writes that these changes led both to the "intensification of women's work and to their need or desire to organize collectively."²⁷ Women formed grassroots groups around survival issues.

These were soon viewed as ideal recipients for money from NGOs whose mission was to promote neoliberal development projects. In Ecuador, a virtual explosion of these projects occurred during the 1980s when 500 to 800 grassroots women's groups were established to address the needs of communities and families. In Quito, women organized to build houses, stake out pieces of land, buy food in bulk, and establish stores and businesses.

However, NGOs are not membership organizations; the people affected by the work they do are not the decision-makers. NGOs turn poor women into "clients" whose free or cheap labor is necessary to keep grassroots programs going. The funding is never enough to allow these "clients" to gain self-sufficiency, so the need for NGO handouts is self-perpetuating.

"All these programs," explains Amy Lind, "whether sponsored by governments, international development orga-

nizations, or NGOs, rely on the assumption that women have endless amounts of time to participate, do not require high (if any) salaries, and do not mind extending their traditional reproductive roles to the realm of community management." Women "are expected to take over service delivery and distribution where the state no longer provides it."²⁸

Reproductive rights

Abortion is outlawed throughout South America in all but exceptional circumstances—leading to the deaths of at least 4,000 women every year. If Pope Benedict XVI has anything to say about it, this situation will continue. However, the Catholic hierarchy is out of step with the views of the grassroots. According to an in-depth study in 2003 by Catholics for a Free Choice, 90 percent of Catholics in three representative countries—Bolivia, Colombia, and Mexico—believed that adults, married and unmarried, should have access to all means of contraception. Ninety-five percent approved of the use of condoms to fight AIDS.²⁹

Unfortunately, male politicians on the left and the right capitulate to the Church or simply express their own sexist views when it comes to prioritizing women's rights. Efforts to liberalize abortion laws are stalled in Uruguay and under threat in Brazil. Chile and Ecuador planned to distribute contraception without a prescription until the Church made a fuss.

Clearly, one of the most important battles for Latin American women is still control of their own bodies.

Latin American feminism and Radical Women

The FSP's sister organization, Radical Women, has been working with women in El Salvador for the last five years. There is now a proud branch of RW, Mujeres Radicales Cuzcatlecas, in San Salvador. *The Radical Women Manifesto* has struck a chord with many women there with its Marxist analysis of women's oppression and their leadership role in

the class struggle and the pursuit of socialism.

Along with its greater economic inequality and poverty relative to the U.S., Latin America has a tradition of thinking in class terms due to its vibrant left and labor history. It has produced a strain of feminism “in which the struggle against class inequality was integral to theory and practice. ... The liberal model of feminism dominant in the U.S.—with emphasis on legal rather than structural change—was far less prominent.”³⁰ Socialist feminist theory receives a warm reception because it acknowledges, as a founder of *Mujeres Radicales* once said, “Women are the *best* fighters.” Promoting the *Manifesto* in Spanish and working with *Mujeres Radicales* has also brought the Party new and fruitful relationships with Trotskyists in Central and South America.

The collaborative relationship shared by the Party, a Leninist organization, and Radical Women, an autonomous mass organization of women, is unheard of in Latin America—and just about anywhere else! Unfortunately, a great deal of the Trotskyist movement has been afflicted with the notion that women’s liberation is a middleclass movement that must be sharply opposed as reformist, even when revolutionary women form revolutionary feminist organizations like Radical Women.

However, there are signs that this is not the case everywhere. In San José in Costa Rica, we met with representatives of the Revolutionary Workers Party, and their interest in Radical Women and socialist feminism was a joyful breath of fresh air. Also, a young Peruvian Trotskyist, with the Socialist League of Peru in Cuzco, sought out the comrades in San Francisco. His group had learned of our existence through the Costa Ricans. Members of the League were especially interested to understand more about our analysis of women’s oppression and how it relates to gay oppression. One other connection made recently was with a member of the Socialist Workers League in the Dominican Republic, who contacted the FSP in Harlem while visiting New York

City. He, too, was interested in our feminism and our view of other Trotskyist tendencies in Latin America.

These are exciting and beneficial new relationships on which both the Party and Radical Women can build, just as we have already done through our connection with the *Escuela Obrera y Campesina* (Workers and Peasants School) in El Salvador.

The transformative combination of Marxist feminism and growing numbers of women in the workforce will do its part to shape the socialist future of our hemisphere.

Leon Trotsky lives!

The fall of the Soviet Union caused convulsions throughout the communist movement worldwide. Trotskyists and Stalinists alike abandoned revolutionary organizations and joined the search for something purportedly new and refreshingly different. They never came up with more than a retread of reformism.

Then the anti-globalization movement blossomed dramatically into life. And suddenly, all the basic questions about reform or revolution, capitalism or socialism, revolution in stages or Permanent Revolution were timely once again.

A sign of the change in the times is that the ideas of Leon Trotsky are being discussed in our hemisphere by serious thinkers, at least one national leader, and a new generation of young people.

Celia Hart Santamaria is a physicist and the daughter of Cuban revolutionaries Armando Hart and Haydée Santamaria, who fought against the Batista dictatorship and helped to build the Cuban workers state. After living in East Germany under a Stalinist regime, Hart was ready to give up on socialism. Then she discovered the writings of Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg: “When I read Trotsky and Rosa, I realized that no, that [Stalinism] wasn’t socialism,” she told an interviewer from *La Jornada*.³¹

Hart abandoned her scientific career to dedicate herself to political discussion and the investigation of Trotsky's theories and the history of the October Revolution with Cuban youth. She says young people are often disillusioned with the Cuban Communist Party because it is bureaucratized.

But now the thing isn't trying to reform the party, but to form groups that will first debate the ideas, so we can reach an agreement. ...What I hope for my generation is very strong: that we can structure a revolution within a revolution, a revolution that might fracture Cuba but may triumph in Venezuela or some other part of Latin America.³²

Since initiating these discussions, Hart has written a number of articles applying the theory of Permanent Revolution to the world situation. Saying "an isolated revolutionary Cuba cannot survive," she is unequivocal about the necessity for socialist revolution elsewhere in Latin America.³³ At the December 2004 World Gathering of Intellectuals and Artists in Defense of Humanity in Caracas, Hugo Chávez, too, referred to Permanent Revolution and said that he agreed with Trotsky that "there are no national solutions to global problems."³⁴ The next month, when he spoke to 20,000 participants at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, he said: "Every day I become more convinced...that it is necessary to transcend capitalism...through socialism, true socialism, with equality and justice."³⁵

Whether Celia Hart can impact the Cuban Communist Party, however, is an open question. She is a woman on a tightrope, making a point of saying that she would never criticize Fidel Castro while encouraging study of an ideology—Trotskyism—that casts a harsh light on many of the stands and actions Castro and other Cuban officials have taken over the decades.

The bureaucracy that Hart found so repellent in the Sovi-

et bloc has its echo, in a more muted form, in the Cuban workers state. One expression of this is Castro's insistence on a one-party state, essentially as a matter of principle. The FSP does not call for the introduction of multiple parties into the Cuban system *at this time* because of the strong likelihood that any new parties would become conduits for U.S. counterrevolution. But a permanent one-party state, which prevents real workers' democracy, was certainly not the vision of the original Bolsheviks, and it is not ours.

For all of its history, revolutionary Cuba has had to battle to survive. It did this at first by relying heavily on support from the USSR, which proved a costly strategy. One of these costs was a susceptibility to the notion of the possibility of socialism in one country, and to the corollary that this could best be achieved by not rocking the boat too violently elsewhere. This led Cuban government figures to give advice to movement leaders in places such as Nicaragua and El Salvador that retarded, rather than advanced, revolution in this hemisphere.

The FSP is proud of our record of vigorously defending the Cuban revolution and opposing U.S. moves against it. At the same time, we have engaged whenever we could with Cuban leaders, especially in the Federation of Cuban Women, over issues of internationalism, workers' democracy, Stalinism vs. Trotskyism, feminism, and gay rights.

We will continue to do this, and we should initiate a dialog with Celia Hart if at all possible. But regardless of the influence that she or we may be able to have on the Cuban Communist Party, the exciting discussions about Trotsky and Trotskyism open up potentially grand opportunities for our Party. Young people in Cuba and in the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean are looking for answers, and it is with this new generation that the ever-radical ideas of the Old Man will find the most fertile ground.

What the “American century” meant for the U.S. working class

For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, business successfully shaped conventional wisdom in the U.S. As a result, ordinary people had a dim view of the state taking responsibility for social problems. This was quite different than in Canada, Europe and Australia, where there were strong social-democratic labor parties, or than in Latin America, where populist governments nationalized resources and industries and created trade unions.

The U.S. had neither a labor party to promote a state welfare system nor a labor movement oriented to fight for large social reforms, except during crises. Without these things, the dominant bourgeois ideology—of limitless opportunity, pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps, and what’s good for business is good for America—has usually prevailed.

But there are important exceptions, times when advances were won.

The Progressive Era

During the Progressive Era in the 1890s, exposés of the harm created by unfettered capitalism generated public anger and reform movements aimed at bettering conditions. Reformers, including many socialists and unionists, managed to outlaw child labor, compel school attendance, create a juvenile court system, win pensions for mothers, and pass protective labor legislation for women.

The U.S. Children’s Bureau was established in 1912 based on the “revolutionary” idea of a public responsibility for social ills. Before this time, religious charities and churches had provided the only care available for orphans, those labeled insane, the sick, and the poor. Priests and preachers did not take kindly to having their “work” secularized. They fought tooth and nail to preserve their domain by continuing to provide services under state supervision.

Today private philanthropy, rather than taxing the rich, continues to be an accepted way of dealing with inequality in the U.S.

Bill Gates, the wealthiest man in the country, with \$51 billion in assets, is lauded for his “charitable” work in Africa. The fact that he has a tax haven in Reno, Nevada, which shelters Microsoft from paying Washington state taxes on \$60 billion in revenue is rarely mentioned.³⁶

The New Deal

During the Great Depression in the 1930s, U.S. workers realized that they could not be held responsible for their precarious situations when the whole world was in the throes of an economic collapse. This crisis, plus the presence of socialists and communists in the labor movement and the militancy of super-exploited workers of color and women, created a radical mobilization for fundamental change. President Franklin Roosevelt, fearing a socialist revolution was possible, introduced the New Deal to preserve capitalism.

The New Deal consisted of: massive public works and employment projects; the first direct federal subsidies to farmers; the Tennessee Valley Authority, which brought construction jobs and public electricity to rural areas in seven states; the Social Security Act, which created unemployment compensation, the first old-age insurance system, and Aid to Dependent Children; and the Wealth Tax Act, which increased levies on business profits, inheritances, and the sale of property.

During this period, public employment grew as more federal and state money was devoted to improvements from roads and bridges to social services.

The Great Society and the War on Poverty

Once again, during the civil rights movement in the 1960s, rulers feared that revolution was a possibility if the African American liberation struggle were to link up with the youthful antiwar movement and radicals in the other movements of the era.

Between 1964 and 1967, African Americans rioted in Harlem, Watts, Detroit, Newark and other major cities. President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed the Kerner Commission to investigate the cause of these rebellions. The commission's conclusion: "chronic poverty is a breeder of chronic chaos." Johnson's answer was the "Great Society" in which racial injustice and poverty would be "eliminated."

In 1964, Congress responded to Johnson's call for a war on poverty with the Economic Opportunity Act. This was the first government-sponsored attempt to involve the poor directly and formally in decision-making, advocacy and service provision in their own communities. Congress also created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and pumped federal money into job training for youth and adults, childcare for impoverished working mothers, preschool education, public housing, work-study programs for college students, and a domestic Peace Corps called VISTA.

Medicare, Medicaid, clean air and water regulations, the food stamp system, retraining programs for displaced workers, and a rent supplement program: all these were enacted between 1962 and 1967.

But antipoverty programs were underfunded from the start and, within a few years, the stepped-up price tag of the war in Vietnam cut federal monies even further. Cities were unwilling and unable to take up the slack.

Between 1968 and 1981, the War on Poverty subsided to a skirmish as both Democrats and Republicans axed one project after another. President Nixon disbanded the OEO. President Carter offered little support for the remaining Community Action Programs, and President Reagan dismantled the Community Services Administration where these programs had been sent to die.

New front opens in the offensive against workers and the poor

Ronald Reagan did not believe in government directly providing *any* services unless they were military "services" to support U.S. corporations abroad. Even then he contracted out fighting the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to a private *contra* army.

At the beginning of his administration, Reagan proposed to privatize the Amtrak railroad system, the federal prison system, the Government Printing Office, the U.S. Postal Service, the Bonneville Power Administration (a government agency), and the Naval Petroleum Reserve.

For the next 25 years, every administration followed suit. President Bush Sr. hailed the end of the Soviet era as proof of the success of free-market capitalism and contracted out 9,000 jobs in the Persian Gulf war.

President Clinton eliminated 377,000 civilian government jobs, reducing the federal workforce by 17 percent over eight years. Announcing that "the era of big government is over," he dismantled Aid to Families with Dependent Children (or welfare). Presidential candidate Al Gore peddled the Clinton administration's concept of "reinventing government" by looking for federal programs to sell off and jobs to contract out. Somehow this escaped the AFL-CIO's notice, and the federation endorsed Gore as labor's candidate in the 2000 election.

Then came George W. Bush with "compassionate conservatism." Wielding this mantra, he meant to "liberate" the poor and aged from their state of "dependency" on federally

funded programs such as public housing and Social Security. Henceforth, only billionaires and oil magnates would be permitted to enjoy a sense of entitlement. Everyone else could make do with indirect help from the government via faith-based (i.e., religious) charities or for-profit or non-profit organizations contracted to provide services.

In his second term, Bush proposed shrinking Medicaid, reducing Section 8 subsidies for low-income renters, and cutting back Community Development Block Grants, the main conduit for funneling federal money to cities.

Myron Magnet, one-time editor at *Forbes* magazine, praised Bush's "ownership society" in the *Wall Street Journal*: "If there was a permanent class of poor, the cause was not a failure of capitalism, but of the War on Poverty which reinforced...self-defeating attitudes."³⁷ According to Magnet, antipoverty programs reflected the "political culture of America's old cities, with their hordes of government-supported clients, employees and retirees...exactly what the Bush administration doesn't want."

Over the course of the last decade, working folk have ended up right back where they started at the beginning of the last century: they are independent members of a cut-throat society in which they are expected to make their way in life without assistance or solidarity from a single other person except for their immediate families, with an occasional handout from the nearest mega-church.

With this ideology triumphant, young people especially have been targeted by advertisers, the media, and entertainment industries offering the American Dream—which now consists of stock options, profit-sharing, gambling on the stock market, and getting rich through one scheme after another. How else could they be enticed to acquire tens of thousands of dollars in debts to go to school?

This petty-bourgeois sales pitch—in which each person designs and "owns" their future, just like Donald Trump—has a swiftly approaching expiration date.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina revealed how meaningless all this babble is when the federal government is incapable of, and unconcerned about, evacuating the primarily African American working class of a major U.S. city. Clearly the "ownership society" belongs to someone else.

The theft of public wealth to boost corporate profits

Privatization is the policy of shifting production of a good or provision of a service to the private sector, often by selling off government-owned assets. It encompasses everything from contracting out janitorial services to opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. A wider definition includes "public-private partnerships" such as voucher systems for education or publicly funded rent subsidies that benefit profit-making entities.

In the last decade, 100 countries have privatized \$445 billion worth of state-owned assets. Reason Foundation, a right-wing think tank with ties to the Bush administration, estimates that even more serious privatization in this country could produce \$382 billion in one-time proceeds from federal sales.³⁸

Alongside deregulation, contracting out local and federal government jobs has been a key form of privatization in the U.S. in the last 20 years.

Bush Jr. announced at the beginning of his first term that he would move 425,000 government jobs to the private sector, and he doubled this goal after the midterm elections in 2002. The targeted agencies include the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Internal Revenue Service, Defense Department, Environmental Protection Agency, and Homeland Security Department. Along the way, using the excuse of the "war on terror," Bush has denied collective bargaining rights to 500 Justice Department workers, 60,000 airport screeners, and 170,000 Homeland Security employees.

Today, hundreds of thousands of federal workers are forced to prove they can do a better and cheaper job than

private contractors in order to hang on to their paychecks. This is called “competitive sourcing”; Bush claims it improves efficiency. What it *really* does is to force federal employees to cut their numbers, increase their own workloads, and, ultimately, provide only a portion of the public services needed, in the hope of keeping their jobs in-house.

Competitive sourcing, which invites malfeasance, does not save the public money. In one egregious example of corruption, the Defense Department contracted out the job of overseeing government subcontractors in Iraq to corporations that had business relations with the very operations they were supposed to keep an eye on!

Making a killing in education and Social Security

Bush proposed to partially privatize Social Security by encouraging people to invest a portion of their Social Security contribution in the stock market. It now appears that this scheme, which would have cost something like *\$7 trillion* to implement, is stalled due to the rising price of the Iraq war and the damage caused by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina. This is good news. A similar plan in Britain was a disaster.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher created the first privatized retirement system in 1986. British workers were given the choice of opening private investment accounts much like 401(k) plans. However, when the insurance companies handling their money took their cut in administration fees, commissions, and upfront charges, the plans cost more than the interest earned! When the stock market crashed in 2001, half a million people switched back to the traditional government retirement plan.

Despite setbacks for Bush on privatizing Social Security, a substantial push continues to privatize education through voucher programs, charter schools, and Education Management Organizations (EMOs). Investors see a *\$600 billion* annual market to tap, calling education the “largest government

sector untouched by privatization.”³⁹ Not quite untouched: universities, for example, already contract out a number of operations including bookstores, student healthcare, dining halls and food services, physical plant maintenance, law enforcement, payroll, and other administrative services.

Now, everything from daycare centers to colleges and from textbooks to test preparation is up for grabs. Moving in on the action, EMOs are for-profit companies that contract with a state or school district to run public or charter schools. Currently, EMOs run more than 300 public schools.

Capitalist punishment

Crime *does* pay. In 2004, there were 158 privatized adult prisons in 30 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC. They housed 7 percent of the prison population, or about 95,000 inmates, and the Bureau of Prisons wants to increase this number by another 20,000 within a few years. Wackenhut, the second-largest corporation doing prison business, grossed \$2.5 billion in 2000.

Youthful offenders are also generating corporate profits. In 1995, there were 40,000 juveniles in over 2,000 privately operated facilities. These numbers have grown in the last decade—as have instances of death, abuse, and corruption, which, in addition to destroying lives, waste millions of taxpayer dollars.

Jailing people is profitable because sentences get longer and longer and more and more adults and youth are incarcerated. The U.S. ranks *first in the world* for both the absolute number of people imprisoned and the ratio of prisoners to the population. In 2004, a staggering *2,267,787 people* were behind bars in the United States.⁴⁰

Prison demographics reflect the political economy of race, sex and class in this country as well as the effects of the “war on drugs” which has eroded constitutional rights, led to the militarization of the police, especially in urban ghettos, and targeted young women and men of color for persecu-

tion. While all people of color face some form of discrimination in the justice system, no group suffers more than African Americans.

The statistics speak for themselves. In 1993, the incarceration rate for Black men in South Africa *under apartheid* was 851 for every 100,000 people; by midyear 2004, the U.S. had imprisoned *4,919 Black men for every 100,000 people*.^{41,42} According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, African Americans are two times more likely than Latinos and five times more likely than whites to be imprisoned. Blacks also receive longer sentences than whites for the same crimes, end up on death row four times more often, and have a harder time getting probation.^{43,44}

Women are currently the fastest growing segment of the prison population, and the incarceration rates for African American women of every age group reveal exactly the same racial and ethnic disparities as for African American men.⁴⁵

Minority youth and immigrants also compose a disproportionate segment of those behind bars. For instance, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, 52 percent of imprisoned young people aged 10-17 were youth of color, even though they made up less than a quarter of the total population that age.⁴⁶

When the Abu Ghraib scandal broke, the whole world got a peek at what goes on daily in U.S. prisons: torture, human rights violations, confessions obtained through violence and intimidation, and death sentences without fair trials. The U.S. military simply exported the domestic prison system and assigned U.S. prison guards to rule the roost in occupied Iraq.

Prison overcrowding is still a national scandal. By the end of 2004, federal prisons were operating 40 percent above capacity and 24 state prison systems were operating at or above capacity.⁴⁷

In the midst of this disgrace, the prison privatization juggernaut continues. As Curtis Blakely, the author of *America's Prisons: The Movement Toward Profit and Privatization*,

writes: "The movement to privatize prisons is reflective of a larger socio-economic and political movement occurring worldwide. Referred to as 'neo-liberalism,' corporations involved in this movement embrace a capitalistic fervor that seeks the abolition of government intervention and the expression of free enterprise."⁴⁸

What quality of life?

Neoliberalism has done its destructive work in the U.S. as elsewhere.

The quality of life has deteriorated as public services have been cut, sold off to the highest bidder or pushed back onto caregivers, in most cases women. The infrastructure, from electrical power grids to levees and bridges, has also slid toward ruin as tax money for maintenance and repairs has been siphoned off into tax givebacks to the wealthy and corporations and into funding for drug wars, oil wars, and military occupations. Money flows in a river of gold from working people to the government, ending up as an ocean of profits for Halliburton and other big contractors.

Poverty continues to grow, especially among children, the elderly, and single-parent households. And the boom in nonprofit agencies contracting with the government to deliver services to those in need has done nothing to alleviate the problem. Rather, it has demobilized militant community action as programs fight each other for funding.

The systemic nature of poverty under capitalism is never addressed by service providers. With a few exceptions, they have been co-opted and sidelined by the establishment they once opposed and now are among its most effective defenders.

Split in the AFL-CIO: a window of opportunity for labor's ranks

During the decades of Democrat and Republican administrations openly attacking unions and destroying social

welfare programs, labor movement officials failed to challenge them, with predictable results. As comrades Megan Cornish and Heidi Durham wrote in *Women Workers: Spark-plugs of Labor* in 1990, “Membership has gone downhill because unions have gone downhill, refusing to organize or represent workers in self-defense against the bosses.”⁴⁹

There were plenty of opportunities to mount a combative defense of labor rights in the 1980s and '90s. Instead, labor racked up an impressive record of abject defeats.

Reagan busted the 1981 strike by PATCO (the air traffic controllers' union) without any significant opposition from the AFL-CIO chiefs. In 1984, Greyhound bus drivers tried to make a stand, but the AFL-CIO didn't want them to stop any buses and the strike was lost. The 1986 Hormel strike was defeated by its own international union leadership despite heroic sacrifices by the rank and file.

The AFL-CIO elected a new slate of leaders in 1995 topped by John Sweeney, then president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Sweeney promised a revitalized labor movement that would *fight*, especially for women and workers of color. Instead, the federation concentrated on electing Democrats. In 1997, after Detroit newspaper workers had struck for a year and a half, the AFL-CIO told them the struggle was won and ordered them to return to work. But there was a slight flaw in the AFL-CIO plan: management would not take the strikers back.

And so it went...until the current fracturing of the AFL-CIO led by Andy Stern of SEIU and James Hoffa, Jr. of the Teamsters. Their vehicle, the Change to Win Coalition, has not renounced the utterly useless and entirely discredited strategy of pouring money into campaigns for Democrats instead of into organizing drives and strike funds. Rather Stern and Hoffa promise to do *both*.

But labor's problems are *political*, not a matter of tweaking organizational strategy or putting old wine in new bottles. Durham and Cornish put it succinctly:

The reasons for the historic weakness of the North American labor movement are that it has always been characterized by (1) national isolation (U.S. workers over workers of other countries) (2) severe internal schisms, men over women, whites over people of color, the elite over the low-paid, and (3) an abysmal level of political class consciousness (anti-red, chauvinistic, class collaborationist).⁵⁰

Change to Win warmly embraces business unionism and that ain't no change at all. It is exactly what the AFL-CIO has been doing since the federation's founding: identifying more with bosses than with workers and advocating co-operation, givebacks, belt-tightening, and concessions. If anything, Change to Win could be worse than the AFL-CIO. “Business principles infuse the rebel unions' strategies, both in organizing campaigns and also internally,” reports the *Seattle Times*. Change to Win organizers talk about getting “market share,” “product lines” and “strategic leverage.”⁵¹ This is not a good sign.

However, the split does present the ranks on both sides with an opportunity to discuss labor's *purpose*. Workers do not need a labor movement like the present one. That is why it is dying; it is not doing its job. What's needed now are rank-and-file caucuses to push for union democracy; sending material aid to unions in motion in other countries; representation in union leadership of women and people of color; putting forward a program of class struggle; labor history classes and shop steward training programs in every local; free childcare and translators at union meetings; building up strike funds and refusing to cross picket lines; paying labor officials no more than the highest-paid worker in the bargaining unit; and cutting loose from the Democrats and Republicans and running labor candidates.

Because the decline of labor has been so precipitous in the last 30 years, a generation of workers exist who have no



Social services “terminator,” governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, finally meets his match in the California Nurses Association.

idea what role unions can play in winning basic protections. All they know is that the dues cost plenty and that they rarely, if ever, see a union representative, much less talk to one. They feel it is a case of taxation without representation and they are right.

To turn this situation around is going to take a concerted effort that includes educating about the proud moments in labor’s past and training members to represent the union on the shop floor. Bureaucratic labor officials resist doing these things because a charged-up and empowered rank and file makes more demands on the leadership. Still, it is the only road to survival. Labor is a social movement, not a business. And if it starts *acting* like a movement and fighting for more than the minimum, it will grow again. Despite everything, one in three people in this country say they would like to be in a union. If that isn’t fertile soil for success, nothing is.

Women, people of color and immigrants: firing up labor

Workers doubly and triply oppressed because of their race, sex and/or immigrant status comprise the *majority* of unionized workers in the U.S.; 42 percent of union members are women and 30 percent are workers of color. Together women and people of color make up 60 percent of the U.S. labor movement.

The concerns of these workers go far beyond the plant gate, store entrance, or field border. They encompass major social issues: ongoing sex and race discrimination in every facet of society; deliberate business and government policies allowing for decay and gentrification of city neighborhoods; high incarceration rates and police abuse in minority communities; U.S. immigration policies; multi-ethnic education; the lack of job opportunities for workingclass youth, especially youth of color and young women; military recruitment; national healthcare policies, including the right to abortion and contraception; workplace, urban, and global environmental problems; and many others.

However, discussion about these issues with the specially oppressed workers who make up labor’s majority was not even remotely on the agenda during the AFL-CIO split. Why? Because the union power structure is still white, male-dominated and undemocratic. And yet super-exploited workers in the House of Labor are ready to put up a super-fight for labor rights and *human rights*. They are the workers already in militant motion, and they will surely ignite a new movement for civil and labor rights across the nation.

The “second sex” moves to the fore

Since 1962, the share of union members who are female has grown from 19 to 42 percent. But you would never know it to look at the current union leadership. In 2005, out of 56 unions in the AFL-CIO, women headed only two: the Screen Actors Guild and United American Nurses (the labor arm of

the American Nurses Association).⁵² This is a shameful undervaluing of the dynamic contributions women bring to the labor movement.

Female workers link workplace struggles with the broader world of social issues. For this reason, they are more radical—especially women of color, like those who made up the majority in the historic Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles in 1990. In 2005, the California Nurses Association took on Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger over nurse-patient ratios and other healthcare issues and won public support with unconventional confrontations at Hollywood screenings and bodybuilding exhibitions. CNA wants to change the entire healthcare delivery system, not become part of the old union boys' network.

Flight attendants created CHAOS—Create Havoc in Our System—to draw attention to deteriorating working conditions. Forty-nine thousand childcare workers signed up with SEIU during the spring of 2005. Homecare workers are now signing union cards in 10 states. Clearly, the future of the labor movement lies with militant, underrepresented women.

African Americans: a living legacy of struggle

Black workers have a strong tradition of fighting for labor rights. It includes heroic battles like the general strike by slaves during the Civil War, which was the critical element in the Northern victory; Black Reconstruction governments in the South that reached across the racial barrier to make alliances with poor whites; the wave of industrial organizing that occurred in the 1930s and 1940s; and the courageous mobilizations to break free from the stranglehold of the segregationist, anti-labor South.

This history is part of the reason why Black workers are more likely than other workers to be union members. In 2005, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 15.1 percent of African American workers were union members, compared to 12.2 percent of whites, 11.2 percent of Asian Ameri-

cans, and 10.4 percent of Latinos.⁵³

But this also means that job losses in more heavily unionized sectors hit Black workers harder. In 2004, for example, union membership declined by 300,000 to stand at 12.5 percent of U.S. workers. Of the total union jobs lost that year, 55 percent belong to African Americans; of the jobs lost by women, 70 percent belonged to African Americans.⁵⁴ Further, during 2003-2004, wages for Black unionists declined, even though they increased for Latinos, Asian Americans, and whites.⁵⁵

Every attack on labor rights falls doubly hard on African Americans. But this very fact puts them in place to play a vanguard role in defending the whole working class. From the ports of South Carolina and California to the New York City streets and subways, they have been at the forefront of recent battles. In Midwest auto plants such as Delphi, in the Southern California grocery strike, and in labor actions by teachers, government employees, and communications workers, African Americans are leading some of the most vigorous struggles in recent years.

It is no coincidence that the 2004 Million Worker March in Washington, DC, was Black-led. Key organizers from the International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU) supported building “an independent workers’ movement free from the shackles of the pro-big business Democratic and Republican parties.” Today, these organizers are involved in a workers’ solidarity movement with the Black community of New Orleans.

Immigrant warriors

The future also lies with immigrant workers, who bring their experience contending for justice in their home countries to energize U.S. labor. Most often, they are not chasing the American Dream but simply escaping a nightmare of natural disasters, economic crises, civil war, crime or persecution for union or political activities. Desperation spelled NAFTA or CAFTA drives landless peasants and jobless workers to put their lives into the hands of untrustworthy

“coyotes” to make the dangerous trek into the U.S.

Ramped-up xenophobia has made their journeys more perilous than ever. Since 1998, border-crossing fatalities have risen to 2,000 because new walls and beefed-up official monitoring compel immigrants to take death-defying routes through the desert. In addition, vigilante militias composed of Nazis, racists, and ultranationalists are adding their numbers to “patrol” the border. Meanwhile, voters in the Southwest are passing legislation that denies services to immigrants.

Undocumented immigrants also come by boat, from as close as Haiti and as far away as China. Only Cubans are permitted to stay once they touch U.S. soil. Prison, detention camps, deportation await all others who are caught by Homeland Security.

Eight to 12 million undocumented workers live in the United States. Of these, 1.2 million work in agriculture, a million or so in restaurants, half a million in construction, and an equal number as domestics. For U.S. multinationals, it’s a win-win situation. Conditions created by U.S. free-trade policies around the world make billions for investors and drive workers from their native countries in search of jobs. Then, once in the U.S., these men and women provide a super-cheap workforce to exploit and expel as needed.

The giant immigrant workforce—composed of people with and without documents—is a largely unacknowledged powerhouse in the economy. It is useful to employers, but an easy target of racist xenophobes in government eager to find scapegoats for U.S. problems. Proposed federal legislation to build a fence along the 700-mile Mexico-U.S. border, turn immigrants without papers into instant felons, and make criminals of anyone who helps them, lit a wildfire of protest in March 2006. In Denver, Phoenix, San Jose, Atlanta, New York, Chicago, Seattle and Los Angeles, millions of immigrants, unionists and civil rights advocates took to the streets to demand justice. “The giant is awake” read a hand-lettered sign at the largest march of any kind in Los Angeles history.

The various bills being considered by Congress are all bad, including the bipartisan McCain-Kennedy bill. This proposal does not include a fence along the border but would institutionalize undocumented workers’ exploitation. Ostensibly an aid to immigrants becoming “legal,” this law would allow employers to use its documentation process to fire millions of workers and then rehire them at starting wages. As soon as workers had papers, they would be dependent on employers to renew their papers to stay in the country. Bosses could use the threat of firing them to bust organizing drives. If workers went 45 days without employment, they could be deported. Before they could be readmitted they would have to prove that they had a job lined up, opening yet another door to unscrupulous labor contractors.

Immigrant workers are victimized, but they are not victims; they are class warriors. Their courage and collective spirit propels the labor movement forward. They have led exceptionally militant—and successful!—struggles in recent years, from Justice for Janitors to taking on the Las Vegas hotel industry.

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida uses direct action to make its point even without union contracts. When a construction contractor beat an immigrant worker, they marched on his house. When they discovered slavery rings involving 1,000 agricultural workers, several members went undercover and busted five illegal operations. In a Truth Tour, they jumped on tables at Taco Bells to expose the job conditions of farm workers. They marched 200 miles to protest in front of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and 50 miles to protest the FTAA in Miami. Anyone who attends two meetings gets a coalition card. The coalition is so well known for its in-your-face tactics that workers whose employers are causing them trouble only have to show their cards, and the bosses change their tune.

Now *that* is a labor movement!

Capitalism: an ecologically unsustainable system

In the long run, capitalism cannot preserve itself because it destroys the basis for its own existence, namely, the reproduction of nature and labor power (Marx's term for the capacity of the working class to work). The necessity for ever-rising profits threatens the continued existence of the planet and the human race.

Economist Milton Friedman, in a few cold-blooded words in his book *Capitalism and Freedom*, articulates what only a small number of business or political leaders dare to say aloud but which, nonetheless, guides their actions:

Few trends could so thoroughly undermine the very foundations of our free enterprise society as the acceptance by corporate officials of a social responsibility other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible. This [idea of social responsibility] is a fundamentally subversive doctrine.⁵⁶

Capitalism can never allow this “subversive doctrine” to interfere with its insatiable desire for profit. But without it, the system is creating a planetary crisis. Global warming, falling crop yields, deforestation, soil erosion, declining fish populations, ozone depletion, air and water pollution are all signs of the calamity. The increasing commodification of nature is one aspect of the disaster. Everything from seeds used in farming to genetic sequences that may predispose people to certain diseases or traits can be patented and sold.

What was once the collective inheritance of humanity—the gene pool of people and animals, clean water and air—is on the block to the highest bidder. Private property rights are elevated above all others and those groups without specific proprietorship over nature's bounty—for instance, medicinal herbs which may lead to the discovery of new drugs—are the losers.

Ecological degradation also affects workingclass communities on an everyday level. Hurricane Katrina highlighted the problems faced by residents along an 85-mile stretch of the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans that is known as Cancer Alley, a hotbed of environmental racism. For years, oil refineries and petrochemical plants have been dumping hazardous waste into the river. But because the people who live there are poor and largely African American, governmental agencies have moved slowly or not at all to clean up health-threatening sites.

Three endangered natural resources are today reaching a critical stage of global contamination or depletion: water, oil, and the atmosphere.

Global warming

Until Hurricane Katrina hit, the U.S. media often presented the two sides in the debate on global warming as if they were evenly divided. Suddenly, it is clear to almost everyone that there is only one side—global warming is here *now*. “Scientists” who spin the idea that global warming is just another theory based on mass hysteria are being exposed for their links to such fuel industry giants as Exxon and the American Petroleum Institute.

Global warming is mainly due to emissions of carbon dioxide, the biggest contributor to an array of “greenhouse gases” that increase the atmosphere's ability to trap heat. These greenhouse gases, overwhelmingly the product of human activity, cause the sun's heat to be stored in the sea and air and on the land rather than radiating back out to

space. Melting glaciers, earlier spring seasons, steady rises in global average temperature and in the temperature and level of the oceans (which are expected to rise six feet in the next century) are just some of the results of the increased gases. While there are natural cycles of planet warming, the rapid pace of the current cycle is squarely in the hands of mankind.

As the atmosphere gets hotter, glaciers are shrinking so rapidly they may disappear by 2050. Not only would this have cataclysmic effects on major cities in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, which rely on glaciers as their primary source of water during the dry season, but the rising ocean levels imperil every coastline on the planet.

Escalating sea temperature may also increase the ferocity of hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons. As the temperature differential between the surface of the sea and the air above a storm grows larger, the potential for more powerful tropical storms grows.

Each year, humans dump 8 billion metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere—6.5 billion from fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal) and 1.5 billion through deforestation. Only 3.2 billion stays in the atmosphere to warm the planet. Forests, grasslands and ocean waters absorb the rest. But as the Amazonian forests and grasslands are destroyed, less can be absorbed and the danger grows.

The U.S. accounts for 25 percent of greenhouse gas emissions although it only represents 4 percent of the world population. China, with its growing love affair with the automobile, will soon be a powerhouse of greenhouse emissions itself.

Clearly, there is no local solution to this problem because everyone on the planet must use the same atmosphere. Conservation can be part of the answer—dismantling the Pentagon to fund free, fast public transportation systems would be a great start! The rest of the answer may include planting new forests to absorb more excess carbon, and setting up fields of solar panels and hillsides of giant wind turbines. But there can be no trusting capitalism to develop alterna-

tives like these. Until humanity can achieve socialism, the threat from global warming remains.

Water is a feminist issue

For developing countries, a shortage of fresh water tops the list of environmental dangers in the 21st century.

The planet has plenty of water, but 97 percent is salty and 2 percent is frozen, leaving a fragile 1 percent for drinking, irrigation, and industry; 70 percent of this 1 percent is used in agriculture.

Today, 1.2 billion people do not have access to clean water, 2.5 billion have no sewage or proper toilet facilities, and the number without access to drinking water is expected to rise to 2.7 billion by 2025 if present consumption remains the same. Children are the majority of those who die from diseases linked to contaminated water and inadequate hygiene and healthcare.

The infrastructure of Latin American cities devolved catastrophically under neoliberalism as money from national



The growing scarcity of clean water, due both to privatization and pollution, keenly affects women like this Honduran.

budgets was diverted to pay interest on loans. Water and sewage systems have not been repaired and the water supply is often unsafe. Only those who can pay for bottled water can drink without fear of disease.

In the 1990s, the “market geniuses” at the IMF and World Bank promoted privatizing publicly owned water systems to generate greater investment in infrastructure and to increase efficiency. They often made privatization of water a condition of their loans and debt relief to underdeveloped countries.

As might be expected, only the stockholders and management at energy monopolies got anything out of these deals, especially the three French conglomerates that control 70 percent of the private water market.

Efficient delivery of water declined, while prices rose along with profits. A huge backlash developed internationally against the industry. In country after country—Bolivia, Argentina, Hungary, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand, France, and Canada to name a few—massive protests resulted in preventing privatization or terminating experiments already begun.

The need for improved water delivery systems is all too real. Fetching clean, safe water for domestic use is “women’s and girls’ work” throughout the developing world. It is their birth burden to supply water for their families and communities. The U.N. Development Program estimates that women and girls are forced by underdevelopment and the patriarchy to spend more than *10 million person years* annually hauling water from remote sources.⁵⁷ In Africa and Asia, it is estimated that they walk an average of 3.74 miles per day and carry an average load of 42 pounds performing this task, which sometimes takes them up to eight hours a day.

Time hauling water is time that they cannot spend in school, farming, employment, or organizing. Securing water is a ball and chain to them. And because they work without compensation, within the confines of the family, this labor is devalued.

Women and girls suffer more than men from water scarcity and pollution in developing countries. They must use water to cook, wash clothes, and maintain family hygiene and sanitation. Water impurity causes miscarriages, stillbirths, and other specifically female health problems. Out of a sense of collectivity and self-interest, women frequently take responsibility on a local level to decide informally among themselves the amount of water needed for each family and the best methods for conserving it and keeping sources clean. Because they are keenly affected by degradation of the environment, they are its best protectors. But women are not living under a system that empowers them to make the decisions on a national or international level that would protect their communities and countries. This is what international socialism could bring.

Oil, the diminishing resource

National Geographic puts it concisely: “Humanity’s way of life is on a collision course with geology—with the stark fact that the Earth holds a finite supply of oil.”⁵⁸

The horrors unleashed by the U.S. on the Iraqi people are chiefly driven by U.S. determination to get its hands on the oil supply of Iraq and the region. In Venezuela, the approaching end of cheap oil produced a U.S.-inspired coup attempt against Hugo Chávez’s Bolivarian Revolution. It is not hard to figure out why: Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the Americas.

Nature itself has placed Iraq and Venezuela in the epicenter of anti-imperialist resistance at a time when the world’s most powerful capitalist country has an 80-million-barrel-a-day oil habit. Simultaneously, oil production capacity worldwide is about to reach its peak and then decline.

No one knows exactly when this decline will occur. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates world production will peak in 2040; UK-based Colin Campbell predicts 2016; and Kenneth Deffeyes of Princeton University in New Jersey believes

it has happened already, at the end of 2005.

In the U.S., production peaked in the 1970s. Yet the U.S. uses more oil than any other country, and its consumption is expected to grow by *50 percent* in 20 years!

A quick survey of oil reserves comparing producers in the Americas to those in the Middle East and elsewhere explains why the U.S. invaded Iraq and not Colombia.

It is likely that new oil sources will be discovered. Exploration is ongoing, including off the Louisiana coast where British Petroleum is planning to set up 25 wells in the gigantic Thunder Horse field. As time goes on, however, fewer and fewer new sources of oil are being found, and these contain smaller amounts. Accordingly, as oil quantities diminish elsewhere, it is expected that the Persian Gulf will supply one-third to one-half of the oil for the world market. Clearly, this is the determining factor that drives U.S. policy in the Middle East, from Bush's insults and verbal attacks against Iran and Syria to the arming of Israel and occupation of Afghanistan.

Beautiful planet, destructive system

The most conclusive argument for international socialist revolution is what the reigning economic system does to the planet. There simply are no national solutions to this crisis, which puts the inherent chaos of capitalism and the wars it engenders in conflict with survival of the human species and our home. Driven by ceaseless competition to increase profit margins, CEOs everywhere have a perspective that is short-term and anti-social: if it works for the stockholders, we don't care if it's good for humanity. This is one reason workers' control of major industry is an important transitional demand. Such a step would open a window to a socialist world in which dog-eat-dog, bottom-line attitudes will be replaced by collective decision-making about what is good for people and good for the planet.

And now is the time to act. Astronomer Carl Sagan put it

very well: "Anything else you're interested in is not going to happen if you can't breathe the air and drink the water. Don't sit this one out. Do something. You are by accident of fate alive at an absolutely critical moment in the history of our planet."

The best argument for becoming a revolutionary socialist may be that good planets are hard to find.

The Party's tasks

Some days the drumbeat of bad news from around the globe is so loud it drowns out hope. And that, of course, is why it is repeated over and over again without analysis or, frequently, even any facts. This treatment of world events is especially disturbing because there is no pattern to what is portrayed, no suggestion of what might be done to prevent calamities in the future or how present happenings may relate to the past. Marxism is the opposite of this. As well as being a movement, Marxism is a method of reasoning, the one which aims to understand things concretely in all their movement, change, interconnection, and contradiction. This kind of thinking, dialectical materialism, helps us to understand where humanity stands in its development and what our role is as a party.

The Party has a rich theory, history, and practice to draw upon; it begins with *The Communist Manifesto* and the Russian Revolution and goes right through to the present. Our revolutionary lineage extends from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky to James P. Cannon, the founder of Trotskyism in the U.S., and to Murry Weiss, co-author with Cannon of the "Theses on the American Revolution." FSP founder Clara Fraser was herself taught by Cannon and by Weiss, who later became a member of the Party. These much-loved philosophical titans contributed immensely, in one way or another, to what the Party is today; and they have a great deal to teach us if comrades take the time to study and learn from them.

The FSP is an *orthodox* Trotskyist party, in the sense that it

is Leninist and respects the necessity for accountable leadership, democratic centralism, internationalism, and the primacy of program. It is also an *unusual* Trotskyist party because of the centrality accorded to feminism and the most oppressed in the task of building egalitarian revolutionary ties to advance world revolution.

In this we look to August Bebel, Frederick Engels, Leon Trotsky, Alexandra Kollontai, V.I. Lenin, Clara Zetkin, James Connolly, and many other socialist women and men, including our founders, who recognized the Woman Question as a revolutionary question of the first order.

The Party proudly upholds the radical traditions of the past while working to create a socialist future. We are not attracted to destruction for destruction's sake or to the new and outrageous for the sake of being shockingly modern. We want to create something new by taking the best of the old and melding it with the innovative. We respect what has already been absorbed through centuries of struggle and we seek to consolidate this legacy and extend it.

One of the most important lessons of the past is that the working class must produce its own leadership and quit relying on other classes to determine its fate. That is why the FSP exists: to provide independent workingclass leadership in all the struggles our class is engaged in, whether here in the U.S. or abroad. Sometimes that leadership is in the form of active participation or material support; at others, it is in the realm of ideas. Either way, it is this commitment that guides us as we prioritize our work.

Defend workers' movements in Latin America

For the first time in two decades, it seems that socialist revolution is possible in our hemisphere. Even if that does not occur in the near future, intense struggles are bound to continue as the standard of living plummets in Latin America, especially as China becomes a greater and greater com-

petitor in providing cheap labor and unrestricted trade zones for multinational corporations.

Through various channels—our unions, local committees, protest actions, letter-writing, international solidarity visits, and sponsoring speaking tours in the U.S. by Latin American unionists and radicals—we must do everything in our power to defend Marxist, labor and social movements in our hemisphere.

Strengthen relations with Latin American revolutionaries and feminists

Unlike the last time revolution was on the agenda in this hemisphere, the Party now has meaningful ties with women, young people, unionists and socialists in several nations. And we are forging new ties as word of our organization spreads through publications, visits to various countries, our friendly relations with the Cuban Women's Federation, and participation in events like the World Social Forum.

In some cases, we have been sought out *because of our feminism* by Latin American Trotskyists and unaffiliated feminists and leftists. In other cases, we have met groups who, while unacquainted with our work, are interested to learn more about socialist feminism and the Party's practice. This is dramatically different from the instantly hostile and condescending attitude we have come to expect from most European and U.S. Trotskyists. These new friends are a breath of fresh air for us—and we are for them! The fact that the Party is *not an NGO* means that we have a relationship of equals with these groups; our mutual solidarity strengthens us both instead of being a lopsided bond of charity and/or control.

We should continue to build on these relations, especially with the Revolutionary Workers Party of Costa Rica and the Workers and Peasants School of El Salvador, and to publish as much as is possible in Spanish. We can begin by translating the Red Letter Press pamphlet on Trotsky to post on our website, along with other new statements; many Latin Amer-

icans are seeking us out on the Internet.

For a political exchange with Central and South Americans

After the last Party convention, our visiting colleagues from the Workers and Peasants School spoke at several labor and community halls about the role of the AFL-CIO in destroying radical labor leadership in Central and South America through the use of anti-communist propaganda and organizational sabotage. Up until then, this was a taboo topic in the U.S. labor movement, not addressed by the numbers of other unionists from Latin America and the Caribbean who have come here on tours sponsored by the AFL-CIO.

Subsequently, Party comrades worked with other unionists to pass resolutions bringing the issue of AFL-CIO cooperation with the CIA and State Department before federation officials. While the AFL-CIO leaders have taken no action to rectify the record of betrayal, the initiative taken by the Party produced important educational results.

Frank political exchange is desperately needed so that workers in our country have a better understanding of how imperialism affects labor leaders who see themselves as “partners” with the U.S. government abroad. At the same time, it is important to send Party delegations to Central and South America to learn about the conditions of workers in these countries firsthand, so that our representatives in the labor and social movements can speak from experience about what is going on. It is also vital that workers elsewhere learn more about what it is like to be a worker in this country. The fact that it is not a bed of roses here means working people in our hemisphere have something powerful in common: class exploitation.

These delegations should be organized *well in advance*, with sufficient time to plan fundraising events to pay for the trips. Comrades who wish to take on the responsibility to represent the Party in Latin America should try to learn

Spanish (community colleges have inexpensive courses). They should commit themselves to working closely with the Party leadership on all aspects of a delegation's activities, including consultations while traveling and timely reports upon their return home. They should also be timely in preparing lists of people they meet and following up with correspondence to them.

Spark a union revival

U.S. unions have never been worse off, except when union membership was illegal. And while the blame lies first with the corporations and their pets in government, the labor leadership is also responsible. The CEOs and politicians are just doing what they are paid for; the problem is that the unions *aren't*. They are in trouble because the leadership has forgotten how to fight the bosses—or doesn't know how to, or just doesn't want to—and the membership lets them get away with it. The truth is that many union officials prefer to raid other unions and pump money into Democrat (and, occasionally, Republican) political campaigns rather than to organize the unorganized, say, in the banking industry. This will not change until the ranks rise up and put a stop to it. Whether there is one national labor umbrella group or two really doesn't matter as long as the unions inside them focus on electing bourgeois politicians and challenging each other over turf instead of confronting the bosses.

All the other social movements are suffering because the unions are in such a crisis. The movements of the 1960s and '70s—of women, people of color, sexual minorities, people with disabilities, and more—were forced to arise outside their natural home in the labor movement because the AFL-CIO was deeply racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and anti-communist. But the natural home of liberation struggles like these is in the class struggle; separated from that base, they become hopelessly lost and mere appendages and pressure groups within the Democratic Party.

One of the FSP's main tasks must be to radicalize the U.S. labor movement by: pressing for union democracy; ending the flow of money and personnel to candidates who will sell out working people; redirecting these funds to train union members as shop stewards and organizers; and teaching labor history. To accomplish this, we need to get more comrades into unions and more union members into the Party.

It is time to junk the defeatist notion that union jobs cannot be found in this economy. It is not true, and even if it were, our job is also to organize unions where none exist! There are comrades who have already done this, and more should give it a try. Experienced comrades can help those who don't know where to begin. Together, we can catalyze a labor resurgence.

For a multi-issue, anti-capitalist movement to end the occupation of Iraq

The movement calling to end the U.S. occupation of Iraq is divided between stop-the-bad-war liberals (who believe in Democrats) and ANSWER, a political machine launched by the Workers World Party and now led by the Party for Socialism and Liberation, a WWP split-off. Neither wing of the movement is interested in forming a united front and it is hard to tell which one is more sectarian when it comes to sharing the podium with homegrown, anti-imperialist, multi-issue revolutionaries such as Radical Women and the Party. Nonetheless, our members have organized street demonstrations, engaged in civil disobedience, put forward the slogan of "Support the Iraqi resistance," and been arrested. It is a shame that as the country begins to turn against the war, the movement itself seems unable to tap into the disgust with Bush and his great mountain of pre-war lies in order to mount the massive protests that could end the occupation.

In this situation, the Party's best avenue for intervention is to organize around an anti-capitalist perspective in the communities where we live and maintain Party headquar-

ters, with co-workers and union compatriots, and with students at colleges and high schools. Participation in campaigns against military recruiters is a high priority.

Through the *Freedom Socialist* newspaper and antiwar fliers, and by creating demonstration contingents that take up multi-issue demands, we can connect the occupation to the stark economic and political crises facing working people here and elsewhere. Linking the imperialist invasion of Iraq to attacks on immigrant rights, the beefing up of Homeland Security at the border, the destruction of civil liberties and the militarization of the police is also critical to expanding the antiwar movement to people of color communities.

The Party should also continue to push on a national and local level for united actions against the occupation and against organizational competition among antiwar coalitions. Most of all, it is crucial to fight the tendency toward domination of the movement by sell-out bourgeois politicians who are scurrying to get on the antiwar bandwagon for the November 2006 elections.



The Los Angeles branch of the FSP and its sister organization, Radical Women, in action at an antiwar protest, March 20, 2004.

Build the Party

All living organisms have a beginning, a middle, and an end. So do organizations. It is hard to say exactly where the Party is in its development except in the negative: we are no longer at the beginning.

But we know this: it is a law of politics and life that those who do not go forward will go backward. So sitting on 40 years' worth of collective laurels or mechanically reproducing what was done in an earlier period are sure paths to degeneration. On the other hand, we do not have to reinvent the wheel. Those who are looking for new horizons to conquer would be wise to study the history of the Party and the errors that others have made (and frequently learned from) if they do not want to repeat them.

Nothing happens without leadership, regardless of whether that leadership arises spontaneously or is an entrenched bureaucracy, whether it is secret or democratic. *What* happens is dependent upon program, the quality of the leadership, and the relationship between the ranks and those in positions of authority. This is true whether one is talking about revolutionary parties, unions, mass movements, occupied factories, or the Parent Teacher Association.

In the Party, we have a tested program and a tested leadership, and in this we are fortunate. But there is room for greater interaction between the membership and the leadership. Just as with the unions, membership will get the leadership it deserves; if it demands little, it will get little. If it expects more, and helps to make that possible, it will get more.

Clara Fraser used to call the Party a “demonstration project.” That was a term used in the anti-poverty program when she worked there during the late 1960s. The Party was a demonstration project, Clara said, because everyone thought that what we did could not be done: founding a Bolshevik party with a female leadership, protesting white supremacists in Idaho, opening the white male trades to women and people of color, forming independent unions, as

feminists defending the Black Panthers, popularizing socialist feminism, demonstrating Revolutionary Integration in practice—the list goes on and on. And yet, Clara, Melba Windoffer, her colleague and co-founder of the Party, and Gloria Martin, Radical Women sparkplug and co-initiator, gave all of us the confidence that it could be done—and so we did it! And others copied us.

The Party is still a demonstration project. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we do have the guts to make the effort to find them. Where others say it can't be done, our approach is more experimental: "Let's give it a try and see what happens."

Here are a few places we could apply that philosophy.

More socialist feminist election campaigns

In Portland, in 2004, Jordana Sardo broke new ground when she ran for the Oregon state legislature from the 45th District. She and her supporters knocked on 4,800 doors and got 9 percent of the vote. Her frequently repeated call to do away with tax loopholes for big corporations struck the right chord, proving that an anti-capitalist message can get a good reception in the current political climate.

Linda Averill's 2005 campaign for Seattle City Council also proved the time is right for the Party to run candidates. Unions are finally prepared *to consider alternatives to the Democratic Party* even though they are not prepared to break with it. Incredible headway was made in Linda's campaign, which won endorsements from eight unions and 18 percent of the vote. Several battles waged at local labor council meetings over backing Linda mobilized rank-and-file dissidents and those who want to see a fundamental change in labor's current direction. Her candidacy was a gift to unionists who want to push the movement to become bolder; now the necessary step is to build on the campaign to form a radical labor caucus.

Linda's and Jordana's campaigns can be replicated in

other cities and regions. By using union muscle to generate support for socialist feminist candidates, the Party can succeed in encouraging labor militants to discuss new ideas—*the kind that put the sizzle back into class struggle.*

These campaigns are schools where comrades learn how to develop transitional demands that make sense to working people, break down sectarianism (their own and others'), and keep their heads when wooed or battered by unprincipled politicians or newspaper editors. They build revolutionary courage and show what can be accomplished with the Party's program and know-how.

Create a Leadership Training School

We live in a society where leadership is a deeply distrusted concept among "progressives," organization is thought to be a constraint on individuality, and experience is frequently denigrated. No wonder so little radical resistance is put up to the societal overlords, who, by the way, value leadership when it is in *their* service. (If you don't believe this, check out an episode or two of the TV show *The Apprentice*.)

To counteract the anti-leadership tendency and to reenergize more experienced comrades while teaching a new generation, the Party will launch a Leadership Training School. Each branch, in consultation with the Secretariat, will select worthy comrades who want to acquire new theoretical, political, and organizational skills and send them to school for a few weeks or a couple of months of concentrated education and training in all aspects of becoming an organizer. The details of how to select teachers and students and how to organize, fund and implement the school will be worked out later by the Political Committee.

Back to basics in Marxist education

Insurgents in Latin America are studying Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. Yet there are comrades in the Party who have never studied it or the history of the Russian

Conclusion

Revolution. This is not an individual problem; it is a collective problem. If the Party wants to make a contribution to the struggles in Latin America or elsewhere, it has to have cadres who study and understand the theories on which the Party is based. As Lenin writes, “Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.”⁶⁰

Study groups and classes on basic theory and history—dialectical materialism, *History of the Russian Revolution*, *Labor’s Giant Step*, *The Transitional Program*, and more—are needed. The Party’s first job is to educate our own cadres.

Support Radical Women

Radical Women sections in the U.S., Australia and El Salvador have made great strides since the last Party convention.

The RW branch organizers’ meeting in San Francisco in November 2003 kick-started a process of delineating responsibilities and functions at a branch level between Radical Women and local FSP chapters in the U.S. and Australia. After a few false starts, this resulted in more clarity about the differences between the two organizations and a more consciously collaborative relationship between FSP and RW organizers.

Additionally, Mujeres Radicales Cuzcatlecas benefited from the trip Moisés Montoya and this writer made in February 2005 to work with them and the Escuela Obrera y Campesina. Since then, there has been greater collaboration all round, and Mujeres Radicales has invited the Party and RW to send another delegation in 2006.

The Party welcomes and supports these developments and wants to do all it can to facilitate the ongoing growth of Radical Women. We recognize that as RW grows, so will the Party. RW is a unique and important training ground for women revolutionaries for which there is no substitute.

Is socialist revolution in the Americas wishful thinking? Leon Trotsky did not think so, and neither does the FSP. In his article, “If America Should Go Communist” (by “America” he means the U.S.), Trotsky writes:

Should America go communist as a result of the difficulties and problems that your capitalist social order is unable to solve, it will discover that communism, far from being an intolerable bureaucratic tyranny and individual regimentation, will be the means of greater individual liberty and shared abundance.

At present, most Americans regard communism solely in the light of the experience of the Soviet Union. ...Actually American soviets will be as different from Russian soviets as the United States...differs from the Russian Empire of Czar Nicholas II. Yet communism can come in America only through revolution, just as independence and democracy came in America...

Within a few weeks or months of the establishment of the American soviets, Pan-Americanism would be a political reality.

The governments of Central and South America would be pulled into your federation like iron filings to a magnet. So would Canada. The popular movements in these countries would be so strong that they would force this great unifying process within a short period and at insignificant costs. ...The Western Hemisphere [would

be] transformed into the Soviet United States of North, Central and South America.⁶¹

Trotsky's vision is not a chimera, but a necessity. The exploited and oppressed in the southern part of our hemisphere—beset by corrupt governments, School of the Americas trainees and U.S. mercenaries, the WTO and IMF, and CIA-connected U.S. ambassadors—cannot solve their problems alone, because the evils they endure and rebel against have roots to the north. Similarly, U.S. workers cannot solve *our* problems alone because of the global nature of capitalism and its market. Our fates are intertwined, just as the peoples of North, South and Central America and the Caribbean are intertwined even within the borders of the United States. On a social scale, just as on an ecological scale, there are no national solutions to our problems. We will either find them together or we will suffer separately.

The Party is optimistic about the future, and for good reason. We have confidence in the capacity of the U.S. working class to make great leaps in consciousness and to move into action quickly and decisively once it has made up its mind. The anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle in 1999 and the immigrant marches of 2006 are not anomalies. Rather, they are the wave of the future and a reminder of the past, when sit-down strikes and massive organizing drives unionized much of the U.S. working class in a few short years during the 1930s. It was workers on the very bottom rung—women, immigrants and African Americans—who provided the spark for that wildfire. And they will again. The Party's job is to prepare for this upsurge by strengthening the revolutionary wing of the workingclass movement in our hemisphere.

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About the author

Guerry Hoddersen, International Secretary of the U.S. Freedom Socialist Party, plays a key role in developing relationships with feminists and revolutionaries to the south. She has traveled and spoken often in Central America, assuring surprised listeners that there are indeed socialists who organize in the USA. She will exercise her right to protest anywhere: at the 2005 World Social Forum in Brazil, she defended the right of Iraqis to resist U.S. occupation—from a rally platform atop a huge transport truck.

What is the FSP?

The Freedom Socialist Party is a revolutionary, socialist feminist organization, dedicated to the replacement of capitalist rule by a genuine workers' democracy that will guarantee full economic, social, political, and legal equality to women, people of color, queers, and all who are exploited, oppressed, and repelled by the profit system and its offshoot—imperialism.

For revolutionary internationalism

The working class is international and bound by global abuse. It must liberate itself through socialism. We support revolution on all fronts and seek to transform it into world socialism, which alone can defeat capitalism.

We stress that global democratic struggles — for national liberation, for race and sex liberation — are inseparably bound up with workers' struggles in every country, and can ultimately achieve victory only in conjunction with international socialist revolution.

For union democracy

The working class has the

strategic power, numbers, need, and opportunity to effect a socialist transformation of society. But first the trade unions must be freed from the stranglehold of the class-collaborationist bureaucrats and from dependence on the political parties of big business. Internal union democracy, class struggle principles, independent political action in the form of an anti-capitalist Labor Party, and an end to internal racism, sexism, and heterosexism are on the order of the day.

For racial/national freedom

The struggles of oppressed minorities and immigrants against

bigotry and intensified exploitation objectively challenge the basic core of the capitalist system. The resistance of people of color and immigrants, who suffer a dual oppression, spurs all other sectors of the working class to advanced political consciousness and militancy.

We stand for immediate and unconditional economic, political, and social equality for Blacks, Chicanos, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Puerto Ricans, and endorse the demand for self-determination by oppressed and indigenous nations the world over. We advocate the collaboration of organizations of people of color with the revolutionary movement as the most realistic and historically validated alternative to the dead ends of separatism or reformist integration. The revolution depends upon massive involvement and leadership by people of color.

For women's liberation

We organize for the total

emancipation of women on every level of life. The multiple afflictions of women — as an oppressed sex, workers, people of color, lesbians — propel them into militancy within every social movement, thereby laying the basis for unifying all the mass movements. Women, particularly workingclass women of color, are playing an increasingly vanguard role, thanks to the rise of the autonomous women's movement and women's caucuses within unions and all political parties.

For lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender equality

The revolt of sexual minorities against repression and sex-role stereotyping is a key ingredient of the fight for women's equality and is equally revolutionary. Revolutionary socialism is the logical road for lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender people who stand apart from the bourgeois nuclear family and who wish to end the long, bloody centuries of persecution and terror. Because of their special oppression, lesbians are a particularly militant

component of all social movements.

For universal human rights

Among the most hapless and vulnerable victims of capitalism are children, elders, the disabled, and prisoners — anyone who is not a profitable worker. We demand a world where all people have the inalienable right to security, care, love, and unhampered opportunity and growth.

For environmental sanity

The world's natural riches must be used and safeguarded by the people, not by the corporations that exhaust resources for profit and destroy worker safety and health. Nuclear energy threatens to maim or annihilate future generations. Technology must be used wisely

and humanely to preserve the earth and its creatures.

For a mass workingclass party

History has proven that only a thoroughly democratic and centralized vanguard party can lead the proletariat and its many allies to power. The FSP, a product of the living tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, aspires to become a mass organization capable of providing direction for the coming revolution.

Through independent growth, revolutionary regroupment, and other forms of fusion, we are confident of our eventual merger with the dynamic masses who will sweep every obstacle out of their path and ascend to the socialist future. If you like what we stand for, join us!

Contact the FSP for more information:

U.S. National Office: 4710 University Way NE, Suite 100,
Seattle, WA 98105 • Phone: (206)985-4621
Fax: (206)985-8965 • E-mail: fspnatl@igc.org

Australian National Office: P.O. Box 266,
West Brunswick, VIC 3055 • Phone/fax: (3)9388-0062
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Visit www.socialism.com to locate the branch nearest you.

introducing Radical women

This trailblazing socialist feminist organization is the revolutionary wing of the women's movement and a strong feminist voice within the Left. Immersed in the daily fight against racism, sexism, homophobia, and labor exploitation, Radical Women views women's leadership as decisive to global change. If you share these interests, become a member! Everyone has something to learn, teach, and contribute in Radical Women!

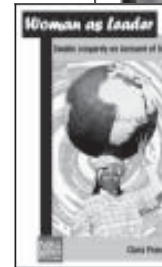
Contact the Radical Women National Office for information about the branch nearest you or to form a branch in your city.

National Radical Women — New Valencia Hall
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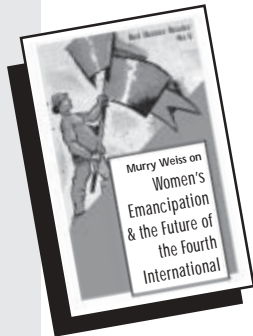


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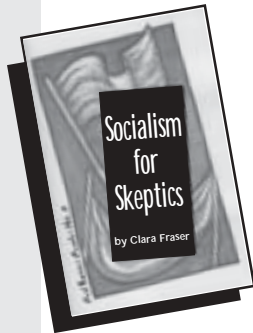
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