



Union Misleaders Derail Strike Wave

French Workers Fight Off Government Assault



AFF

Mass demonstration in Paris, December 5. Strike wave of railway workers, public employees virtually shut down France.

Build a Revolutionary Party to Fight for a Workers Government!

JANUARY 1—French public service workers returned to work after a massive strike wave against a government assault on the country's social security system. The strikes electrified militant workers throughout Europe and the world. For three weeks, the country slowed to a crawl, as striking railwaymen were joined by workers in mass transit, the postal system, public utilities, schools and hospitals. Paris and other large cities were paralyzed. Contrary to the government's expectations, the labor actions were widely and even enthusiastically supported by the bulk of the population, who saw their basic social security net threatened by

Prime Minister Alain Juppé's "reforms."

Juppé was able to hardline it for weeks as the strike wave remained limited to public sector workers without spreading to heavy industry. However, a series of half a dozen one-day general strikes by public workers saw steadily growing mass mobilizations, culminating on December 12 when more than two million protesters flooded the streets. The mass anti-government mobilizations, which had been centered on Paris, took off virtually throughout the country. It was just at this point that the reformist leaders of the working class stepped in

(continued on page 8)

Open Letter to Toronto Anti-Racist Action

8 January 1996

Dear comrades,

In the three years since your group was founded, the Trotskyist League has participated in many ARA-initiated protests and demonstrations against fascist terror and racist police violence. Most recently your organization has joined with the TL and the Partisan Defense Committee in mobilizing protests demanding freedom for U.S. death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal.

That our organizations have been able to unite in action when our concrete goals coincide, while maintaining and arguing about our respective political strategies, is an expression of what we call the "united front." Aimed at bringing the broadest forces together in common action while maintaining complete organizational and political independence, the united front provides a test in action of contending political programs and strategies. This is vital to advancing political consciousness and clarity.

In mobilizing to free Jamal, in fighting to stop fascist terror, and in other struggles, the crux of our political differences has always been: who in this society has the power to do what needs to be done? As Marxists, we believe that the racially integrated working class is the only force which has the power to combat the many forms of oppression capitalism produces, and to carry out a revolution to put an end to them. You don't see it that way.

Last month, you approached us to join in an action against a meeting sponsored by "Citizens for Foreign Aid Reform" (CFAR), a fascist outfit headed by Paul Fromm. The CFAR meeting was to be held in a downtown restaurant popular with university students and leftists, in a neighborhood with a large immigrant population. Even on 48 hours notice, there was an opportunity to mobilize among youth, minorities and labor to stop CFAR's hate-mongers and race terrorists. In May 1993, on less than a day's notice, our comrades in Vancouver pulled out 60 people, including many unionists, to shut down a similar meeting sponsored by the white-supremacist Jud Cylorn and the fascist "Canadian League of Rights." The fact that four months previously we had mobilized significant union contingents determined to stop another Nazi provocation in the city was an important factor in this success.

However, you had decided in advance against any kind of open mobilization against the CFAR meeting. What you proposed to us instead was a semi-clandestine "direct action" against this "secret" fascist gathering. We declined to participate, and you went ahead.

What happened when you tried to confront CFAR? The restaurant owner naturally called the cops, who responded in three squad cars, sirens wailing, to quickly evict ARA supporters. You then held a small, spirited, public protest in the street. ARA members surely feel that the action was a success, since CFAR reportedly moved its meeting. But ask yourselves: What was really gained? And what was lost?

Your strategy didn't prevent state intervention. By operating in self-imposed isolation, you offered the fascists a chance to steal a victory, either on their own or with the help of the police. And by counterposing a handful of militants to the social forces that are capable of dealing the fascists a real defeat, you gave up an opportunity to enhance the self-confidence and class-consciousness of working people and the oppressed, which can come through struggles against the perpetrators of racist terror.

Comrades, your "direct action" strategy assumes that fighting fascists is the same thing as stopping fascism. But it's not. Fascism is the outgrowth of the whole system of capitalism, a system based on the exploitation of the many by the few. To preserve such an unequal equation, the tiny capitalist class maintains its rule "legally" through its cops, courts and prisons, and ideologically through racism, anti-gay and anti-woman bigotry. The fascists are the extreme terrorist expression of the attacks on minorities and immigrants that emanate from the halls of Parliament. In other words, the fight against fascism is a question of fighting to bring down the system which breeds it.

For now, the rulers keep their Nazi attack dogs in reserve, protecting them at every step. While the fascists remain small, they can and must be met with militant labor-centered protest whenever they try to raise their heads. But such necessary mobilizations can't be limited to spiking particular Nazi provocations. They have to be a bridge between the felt need for self-defense against fascist terror and the revolutionary

(continued on page 14)

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Ernest Mandel, 1923-1995

Wohlfarth: Who Is This Road Kill? .. 24

**Letter to the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action
For a Bolshevik Workers Party
in South Africa! .. 33**

**Declaration of Fraternal Relations
Between Lula Metelgaria (Brazil) and
the International Communist League .. 43**

**National Chauvinism Is Poison to Class Struggle
Independence for Quebec! .. 58**

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Italy: Fascist Cop Attack on Milano Youth Center

Less than one week before Christmas and two weeks before the resignation of the government of Lamberto Dini, the financial capital of Italy, Milano, was shaken by a dramatic police provocation. On December 19, an army of cops, many masked and in black uniforms, stormed the Leoncavallo youth center, smashing everything in sight as they laid waste to this center for semi-anarchist "*autonomi*." The next day, police in Rome brutally beat up Sardinian miners demonstrating outside parliament.

The ominous escalation of state repression was clearly intended as a warning to the entire left and workers movement. The authorities—from the Milano quaestor (chief of police) and mayor to the heads of the national Judicial Police and Carabinieri paramilitary police—claimed to know nothing. But Interior Minister Giovanni Coronas justified the cops wearing ski masks, saying that "they used them during the years of lead."

This was a sinister reference to the period in the late 1960s and '70s when fascists and various secret police forces worked hand in glove terrorizing Italy, with multiple attempted coups d'état and bloody massacres. Significantly, on December 2 a hundred thousand fascists of the National Alliance (AN) staged a march in Rome. At the same time, however, the Italian workers movement has been watching the French strikes with intense interest, and a one-day national strike has been threatened for early January.

Responding to the fascist police assault on Leoncavallo, our comrades of the Lega Trotskista d'Italia and the Comitato di Difesa Sociale e Proletaria (CODISPRO) immediately issued a leaflet (translated below) denouncing the atrocity. We also brought the attack to the attention of death row political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, whose cause has also been supported by Leoncavallo. A protest demonstration held in Milano on December 23 drew 20,000, mainly *autonomi* youth from around Italy, as well as workers from COBAS (Rank and

File Committees) in area factories and supporters of Rifondazione Comunista.

As the demonstrators reached San Vittore prison, where the youth arrested in the Leoncavallo raid are being held, many firecrackers and smoke bombs were thrown over the high walls of the fortress-like jail and loud explosions could be heard from the inside. The crowd shouted, "Free the comrades" and "Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal!" They cheered as burning paper and sheets were thrust out of prison cell windows in solidarity.

During the final rally, a comrade gave greetings from CODISPRO and the Partisan Defense Committee in the U.S. and read a message of support from Mumia Abu-Jamal, who denounced the cop attack as a "monstrosity," sending his "support to all five who were arrested, incarcerated, entombed, and also to the Leoncavallo center and hope that they can rebuild." Jamal compared this to the raids by the Philadelphia police on the Black Panther Party in the 1960s, noting that "they just didn't destroy the files, they stole the files" and used them in their war on the Panthers.

**Stop the Witchhunt! Defend Leoncavallo!
Free the Leoncavallo Five! Drop the Charges!
An Injury to One Is an Injury to All!**

MILANO, 19 December 1995: In a dawn raid recalling a Gestapo attack, some 200 police, including special forces from the Carabinieri and the Digos political police, destroyed the Leoncavallo social center. Using the judicial pretext of a search for "drugs" as a cover for political violence and repression, this army of cops sealed off via Watteau with dozens of armored cars and drug-sniffing dogs while a special squad of some 50 commandos, dressed in black shirts and ski masks, scaled the walls of Leoncavallo.

Beaten with iron clubs and chains, 18 people were rounded up in the courtyard and ordered, "Stomachs on the ground, bastards!" as their mouths were gagged shut and their hands cuffed behind their backs. Five youth, including two North Africans, were arrested: A. Begnamini (25), S. Fhadli (27), E. Caizzi (20) were seized on site. E. Daniele (24), and E.M. Nefati (23) were rounded up simultaneously at their own homes. *CODISPRO demands: Drop the charges! Release the Leoncavallo Five! No deportations!*

(continued on page 7)



De Bellis/Il Giorno

Milano, December 23: 20,000 protesters march against police attack on Leoncavallo.

Young Spartacus

Anti-Sex Witchhunt at Ryerson

Stop the Persecution of Gerald Hannon!

The Spartacus Youth Club condemns the outrageous anti-gay, anti-sex witchhunt of Gerald Hannon, an outspoken gay rights activist and popular instructor at Ryerson Polytechnical University. A respected journalist whose work has appeared in *Toronto Life*, *Saturday Night* and the *Globe and Mail*, Hannon is being hounded for his long-held, widely-known views in support of the right of men and boys to consensual sexual relations.

Hannon came under fire in early November when *Toronto Star* columnist Judy Steed attacked the head of Ryerson's journalism department for having Hannon on staff. Picking up Steed's claim that he used his position to "influence" his students, the frenzied media portrayed Hannon as a sinister deviant polluting tender young minds at the downtown Ryerson campus (which is sandwiched between a couple of Toronto's main sex strips). Not hesitating to trample on the academic freedom of its faculty, to say nothing of their privacy, the Ryerson administration launched an investigation into Hannon's lifestyle and beliefs. The Toronto cops revealed that they were investigating him as well.

The witchhunt climaxed when Hannon told a *Toronto Sun* reporter that he sometimes works as a prostitute. Ryerson suspended him from his job and issued a police-state order barring him from campus and prohibiting any contact with his students! But Hannon refuses to be bound and gagged. Upon his reinstatement—after a warning not to engage in "discourse" about his prostitution activities—Hannon told a press conference, "I cannot accept any restraint on my ability to talk on any topic" (*Globe and Mail*, 21 December).

The current persecution of Gerald Hannon continues a dirty state vendetta begun in 1977 when Hannon's article, "Men Loving Boys Loving Men," appeared in *Body Politic*, a prominent gay newspaper at the time. This article, which merely asserted that sexual relations between adults and youth are not inherently abusive, became the excuse for an orgy of anti-gay bigotry. From the cops' jackboot raids on the *Body Politic* offices, to repeated and unsuccessful efforts by the Crown prosecutors to secure convictions under "obscenity" laws, the most elementary civil rights were simply shredded in the service of a vicious and far-reaching witchhunt.

As we wrote at the time, "If *Body Politic* is suppressed, then the same thing can happen to any publication, especially those of left, labor or even liberal persuasion.... This outrageous violation of freedom of the press must be vigorously opposed by all those with a stake in the defense of democratic rights" (*SC* No. 23, February 1978). In the end, *Body Politic* managed to defeat the charges. But Hannon, the magazine and its publishers, Pink Triangle Press, endured six years of court battles which bankrupted many of the defendants.

Now Hannon is again being witchhunted for mentioning his 1977 article in a discussion with his journalism students. In a recent book on child abuse, *Our Little Secret*, Judy Steed cites "Men Loving Boys Loving Men" to denounce the "mindset"



SC photo

Gerald Hannon in 1979, during state vendetta against gay newspaper, *Body Politic*. Today, Hannon is again target of hypocritical "child abuse" furor.

of "pedophiles." Her smears of NAMBLA (the North American Man-Boy Love Association) in the same book are transparently homophobic. Even the feminists of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, who were ready to use Steed's book as a fundraiser, backed off when some NAC executive members protested over the book's anti-gay overtones. Steed's bigotry may be measured in her obscene equation of Hannon with the Nazi "publisher" Ernst Zundel. Hitler's Nazis ruthlessly exterminated homosexuals, and anti-gay violence is everywhere a hallmark of the skinhead psychos.

Toronto Sun columnist Heather Bird systematically tracked down Hannon's students to find even one who would denounce him. To their credit, most refused to do so. Indeed, they overwhelmingly supported Hannon, speaking highly of his talents as a teacher. And while the Ryerson Student Administrative Council outrageously endorsed his persecution, Hannon's union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, defends him. Even the *Globe and Mail* printed an editorial defending Hannon's freedom of speech, noting: "Mr. Hannon is a man of ethics...and sees no reason to hide his private identity. If his detractors are successful, hiding will be the only option left for those with controversial views."

The attack on Gerald Hannon is eerily reminiscent of the case of John De Cecco, a psychology professor at San Francisco State University. De Cecco's research in child sexuality was equated with advocacy of child molestation, and he too

(continued on page 6)

York Students Quash Anti-Jamal Provocation

On October 30, the Young Progressive Conservative Club at Toronto's York University staged a grotesque racist provocation, demanding the "legal" lynching of American black political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. They put a poster on their office window which read, "Protect Our Police Officers, Enforce Mumia Abu-Jamal's Death Sentence, Keep Cop Killers Off Our Streets."

The Tories' sick display outraged a large number of students at York—one of the most racially integrated campuses in Canada—who have come out in Jamal's defense. Within hours, anti-racist activists succeeded in getting this filth removed.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a courageous fighter for black freedom on death row in Pennsylvania, sentenced to die for a crime he did not commit, the killing of a Philadelphia policeman. Last year, a massive international campaign to save Mumia's life resulted in an indefinite stay of execution. But the fight to win his freedom continues.

The Spartacus Youth Club at York has been prominent in the campaign to save Jamal. While some Jamal supporters on campus chose to treat this as an issue of "hate propaganda"—implying a dangerous call for the campus administration to censor student clubs under its "code of conduct"—the SYC put forward its program of mobilization of students and workers in broad-based social protest, independent of the powers that be. We print below a letter by the York SYC, which was published in a slightly edited version by the university's *Excalibur* newspaper on November 8.

* * *

To the editor:

The poster by the Progressive Conservative Youth Club that called for death to Mumia Abu-Jamal was a vile and racist slander.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a prominent former Black Panther, renowned radical journalist and fighter for black liberation, framed by the Philly cops. The campaign by the state to kill him is part of the overall wave of right-wing attacks on blacks, labor and the poor in Clinton-Gingrich's America. In Canada, the police, Reform Party and other "law and order" maniacs are pushing for a return of the death penalty. The



Workers Vanguard

Mumia Abu-Jamal. Racist, pro-cop Young Tories demanded state execute this innocent man.

Ontario Tories, from their inhuman slashing of welfare to their police attacking protesters at the September 27 demonstration, are part and parcel of this racist capitalist onslaught. Not surprisingly, the Young Tories chose this particular time to slander Mumia.

As for looking to the administration and their "hate laws," we recognize that these laws are tools in the hand of the administration that could ultimately stifle any debate among students, and, as has been shown in the past, will be used more effectively against the left than against the right-wing.

Mumia continues his battle. After judge Albert Sabo turned down his appeal for a new trial in September, his attorneys have filed a "notice of appeal" to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Mumia's victory would be a blow against the present police-state stench that is taking over North America. We will continue to mobilize the power of mass social protest to free Mumia and to abolish the racist death penalty.

—Joe Silvaggio

For the York Spartacus Youth Club

Trotskyist League/Spartacus Youth Club Events

Toronto TL Forum:

Union Misleaders Derail Strike Wave

France: Workers Fight Off Government Assault

Saturday, 3 February, 7:30 p.m.
St. Paul's Centre, 427 Bloor W.
(just west of Spadina subway)

Toronto SYC Class Series:

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1. For Black Workers Power in South Africa
2. U.S./Canada/NATO Out of the Balkans!
3. The Family and Women's Oppression
4. Party and State: Anarchism vs. Marxism

Alternate Mondays, 7:00 p.m., starting 12 Feb.

For more information call: (416) 593-4138

Vancouver TL Forum:

Union Misleaders Derail Strike Wave

France: Workers Fight Off Government Assault

Friday, 16 February, 7:30 p.m.

Vancouver SYC Class Series:

The Struggle for World Socialist Revolution

1. Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism
2. The Communist International of Lenin and Trotsky
3. The Revolution Betrayed—The Syphilis of Stalinism
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Alternate Thursdays, 7:30 p.m., starting 18 Jan.
(except 15 Feb.)

All events at Britannia Community Centre, Room L4,
1661 Napier (off Commercial Drive)

For more information call: (604) 687-0353

Gerald Hannon...

(continued from page 4)

became the focus of a witchhunt fomented by the media and assorted "incest survivors." In a leaflet written in De Cecco's defense the Spartacus Youth Club at SF State wrote:

"We in the SYC oppose attempts to fit human sexuality into legislated or decreed 'norms.' The guiding principle of sexual relations should be that of effective consent, nothing more than mutual agreement and understanding. Determining effective consent is always tricky, particularly when young people are involved with older ones; but such relationships must be viewed individually and not as *prima-facie* evidence of abuse or coercion. We are unalterably opposed to intervention by the racist, anti-woman, reactionary state."

—Reprinted in *Women and Revolution* No. 43,
Winter 1993-Spring 1994

Playing on the anger evoked by the truly horrible crime of sexual violence against children, the racist and reactionary ruling class has made the issue of child abuse a political football. In Martensville, Saskatchewan, police cooked up lurid charges against two daycare operators and their family. The frame-up blew apart, but the cops still outrageously secured one conviction out of the hundreds of baseless charges. In London, Ontario the police have carried out a sweeping anti-gay dragnet, arresting more than 20 men and youth for alleged "child pornography." And NAMBLA members continue to suffer brutal state persecution for their advocacy of the right of consenting men and youths to have sex.

What's going on here is a full-scale state crackdown on sexuality that has nothing to do with protecting children and everything to do with shoring up the reactionary institution of the family. The family, with the ownership and inheritance of private property at its heart, is the main source of oppression and violence against women and children. Hysteria over day-

care centers—for example, the many frame-ups of childcare providers on spectacularly demented charges of "satanic ritual abuse"—aim to scare working women back into the home "where they belong."

Along with organized religion, the family is a key enforcer of bourgeois "morality," which chains the population to the oppressive capitalist system. The aim is to mold, through fear and persecution if necessary, a compliant population that will blindly submit to the imperialists' domestic repression and foreign wars.

The terrifying, arbitrary sexual McCarthyism stalking this society is meant as a warning to those who would oppose the bourgeois order—and it's a warning backed up by the full force of the state's repressive powers. Canada Customs obsessively scrutinizes, seizes and destroys literature coming into the country. The Little Sisters bookstore in Vancouver has been the target of Customs seizures for years. In Toronto, artist Eli Langer and the Mercer Union gallery were hit with obscenity charges. Langer's work was seized and put on trial by the state, which wanted to destroy it. (Langer, Mercer Union and the offending pictures were acquitted.) Like the Gestapo in Nazi Germany rooting out "degenerate art," the Toronto cops now haunt gay art events looking for "kiddie porn."

When the bourgeoisie says "save our children," we're supposed to snap to attention. In typical witchhunt fashion, to dispute or question the state's "child abuse" hysteria is taken to be proof that you too are a danger to children. In B.C., the ruling NDP has given this chilling Catch-22 a police-state efficiency, enacting a law under which one-sixth of the province's adult population will be subjected to criminal records checks, supposedly to help "prevent the physical and sexual abuse of children." A whole new government spy agency will work with the RCMP to judge who is "fit" to work with children (defined as anyone under the age of 19!). Refusing to submit to a background check is presumed to be a sign of guilt.

Going after a man like Gerald Hannon is transparently vindictive and hypocritical. The capitalists' hue and cry over his views and activities is a stunning indictment of their own perverted and consummately violent "moral values." Violence against children and the oppression of women are part of the fabric of this society. It is the capitalist rulers who constitute a "clear and present danger" to children. In Ontario, the Harris government is ripping up daycare, slashing welfare to the bone, eliminating public housing and throwing tens of thousands out of work. In Toronto, fully one-third of all children are dependent on welfare!

The capitalists' righteous outcries about "child abuse" cannot mask the reality that this society does unimaginable harm to youth with its enforced inequality, poverty and deep cuts in everything from health care to education. Far from opposing violence against women and children, the ruling class is its great perpetrator, at home and abroad. The economic sanctions imposed on Iraq after the Gulf War, fully supported by the Canadian imperialists, have killed 500,000 children through starvation and disease.

Our defense of Gerald Hannon, and NAMBLA as well, is part of our fight to forge a revolutionary vanguard party that will be a tribune of the people, fighting all manifestations of oppression under capitalism. The inequalities and pathologies of this society will be finally addressed when the multiracial working class rises up and sweeps away the rotting and repressive capitalist order in a workers revolution. ■

SPARTACIST CANADA

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SC107

Protest Imperialist Occupation of Bosnia!

The first NATO contingents are descending on Bosnia. Ottawa is sending 1,000 troops as part of the NATO invasion force. We say: U.S., Canadian, all imperialist troops, get out of Bosnia now!

In December, our comrades of the Spartacist League/U.S. held demonstrations demanding "U.S./NATO Get Your Bloody Hands Off the Balkans!" These were the first organized protests in North America against the NATO expeditionary force. At a December 5 New York City protest SL/U.S. spokesman Len Meyers pointed to other recent imperialist interventions in the name of "peace," "democracy" or "humanitarianism." These included the colonialist invasions of Somalia and Haiti, the 1991 "Desert Slaughter" against Iraq and the continuing starvation embargo of that country. Canada's racist rulers participated wholeheartedly in every one of these imperialist war crimes.

The bloody nationalist civil wars which destroyed the Yugoslav deformed workers state were fomented by the imperialist overlords. Meyers underscored the urgency of the struggle for revolutionary leadership: "The International



Workers Vanguard

New York, December 5: SL/U.S. denounces U.S./NATO invasion of Balkans.

Communist League fights to reforge the Fourth International of Leon Trotsky. This is the fight for workers revolution around the planet, to put an end, once and for all, to racist terror, to imperialist war, to imperialist exploitation. Join us in that fight! ■

Italy...

(continued from page 3)

After weeks of fascist provocations against Leoncavallo by the Northern League *squadrists* in the "Greco neighborhood committee," the *squadrists di stato* [state-organized terror squads] moved in to destroy the social center. The notorious overlap between the fascists and the Carabinieri and special forces was confirmed in this *blitzkrieg* attack. *Il Manifesto* (20 December) reports that the walls of Leoncavallo were defaced with swastikas. The center's library was destroyed by police who urinated on the books, destroyed videocassettes, smashed computers. A Star of David was painted over a mural of an Indian woman—the message seems to be that leftists and immigrants in Italy are promised the same deadly terror the Nazis used against the Jews.

The brutal attack on Leoncavallo is an ominous development recalling the government's "strategy of tension" of the '70s, when state-sanctioned and sponsored fascist activity, like the Bologna train bombing, became the pretext for a violent witchhunt against the left. In targeting Leoncavallo, the state thinks they've picked an isolated and vulnerable population that no one will defend. If today they come for Leoncavallo, who will they come for tomorrow? As in the '20s, the ultimate target of this terror and repression is the combative Italian working class, as is demonstrated by the brutal beating of the Sulcis miners which the police carried out on 20 December in front of parliament in Rome. It is imperative that the powerful union movement and workers organizations be mobilized in defense of Leoncavallo and all victims of racist capitalist repression.

The backdrop to the attack on Leoncavallo is the government's war on immigrants (also conducted behind the smokescreen of a "war on drugs") and rising fascist attacks. Moreover, this attack comes on the heels of the militant strike wave in France which found a strong echo in Italy, and frightened the capitalist rulers across Europe. Increasingly, the bourgeoisie is moving to establish a "strong state" to shore up their unjust system of capitalist exploitation, and ram through the attacks on the working class, women, youth and oppressed minorities.

CODISPRO, a non-sectarian legal and social defense organization in accordance with the political views of the Lega Trotskista d'Italia, calls on all working-class organizations, the left, and all defenders of democratic rights to mobilize in defense of Leoncavallo. In the weeks preceding the attack on Leoncavallo, we urged a united-front defense of the center against the Northern League and fascist AN gangs.

This summer CODISPRO and Leoncavallo jointly sponsored a united-front protest in Milano in defense of the eloquent black journalist, former Black Panther and MOVE supporter, Mumia Abu-Jamal, who sits on death row and faces execution in America for the "crime" of his political views as a spokesman for the oppressed. Just as Mumia Abu-Jamal is a name and a cause that has stirred millions around the world, so too must the name Leoncavallo now rouse vigorous protest and exposure of capitalist state terror and political repression.

An injury to one is an injury to all! All out on Saturday, December 23 to defend Leoncavallo!

—Comitato di Difesa Sociale e Proletaria
20 December 1995

French Workers...

(continued from page 1)

to put out the fires of class struggle.

Seeking to stop a dangerous escalation, the government tried "salami tactics," offering to piece off the railway workers, the hard core of the strike movement. At the same time, Juppé vowed to maintain the centerpiece of his anti-working-class "reforms": plans to gut public health care. With events escalating toward a frontal clash, posing an all-out workers mobilization which could easily have escaped their control, the union tops signed on to the bourgeoisie's policy of "divide and rule." In exchange for the government dropping its planned cuts of pensions and jobs of rail workers, the strikes would be brought to an end.

Echoing the famous statement by French Stalinist leader Maurice Thorez in the 1936 general strike, the CGC managers "union" declared, "It's necessary to know how to end a strike." The reformists certainly know how. Both *L'Humanité*, daily paper of the French Communist Party (PCF), and the social-democratic *Libération* ran front-page photos showing jubilant railway workers waving red flags on the train taking them back to work. Louis Viannet, head of the PCF-led CGT union federation, cynically hailed the "rail workers' victory in imposing their sectoral demands." Nicole Notat, leader of the social-democratic CFDT federation, who had opposed the strikes from the start, declared that the workers "have fought and won." The Saturday, December 16 "day of action" was intended to declare victory...and send the strikers home. Yet no sooner had the workers started returning to work than parliament approved legislation empowering Juppé to impose new taxes by decree, so that his 0.5 percent income tax hike could take effect January 1.

The strike movement was so powerful that there are still pockets of determined strikers: Marseilles remains paralyzed by a shutdown of railway and public transportation, now in its fifth week, while isolated walkouts continue to occur in the public sector. Last week, the government sent one hundred CRS riot cops against workers occupying the postal sorting

center in Caen. The strikers were not defeated; there is widespread bitterness among militant workers, who talk of going back on strike against the government's attacks. While giving in to the rail unions made it possible to split the strike movement, it also highlighted the government's weakness and could embolden other sectors. A wage freeze for all 5.5 million public workers scheduled to take effect in January could provoke a new outbreak of protest. But you can't turn struggles on and off like a faucet. The key question was and remains that of leadership.

From the beginning of the strikes, the union tops (along with the leaders of the Socialist and Communist parties) and the ranks of the strikers have had two completely different motivations. In this battle, the reformist bureaucrats were in effect in a temporary *bloc* with the workers for their own ends. The workers were fed up after 13 years of anti-working-class austerity, of attacks on wages and mounting unemployment (now over 12 percent) under Socialist president Mitterrand. Then came the "reforms" of the conservative Chirac/Juppé government, a sweeping attack on the standard of living they had achieved over the last several decades. But while the workers were fighting in their own class interests against a concerted ruling-class assault, the reformist leaderships were fighting to retain their role as class collaborators to control and sell out the working class.

The trade-union bureaucracy appeared uncharacteristically contentious in the course of this strike, because the "reforms" struck at its underpinnings. This included the social-democratic Force Ouvrière (FO) federation, long a mainstay of Cold War anti-Communism, which is concentrated among public employees. The labor leaders are heavily integrated into the state administration through a myriad of class-collaborationist bodies which help administer the huge French social service system that combines health benefits, unemployment benefits, pensions, etc. The bureaucrats got their own privileges from these gains, which allowed the unions to have hundreds of paid functionaries. This is the payoff for the reformists' social and political role in keeping France safe for capitalist exploitation at home and colonialism abroad. And now the material base for their role as *interlocuteurs privilégiés* with the bourgeoisie and its state was under attack.

LIGUE TROTSKYSTE DE FRANCE
tendance spartaciste internationale 15 F

MAI 68

REVOLUTION SABOTEE

Ligue Trotskyiste intervened in strike wave pointing to lessons of May 68: revolutionary leadership is key.

LE BOLCHEVIK 4

Supplément spécial

A bas Vigipirate ! Unité des « immigrés », des femmes et de la jeunesse derrière la puissance sociale de la classe ouvrière !

Pour une nouvelle direction, une direction révolutionnaire !

Une perspective de force est engagée. Un cœur. Un gouvernement d'union...
 La question cruciale aujourd'hui, c'est la question de la direction. La direction de la CGT...
 Pour un gouvernement ouvrier qui balaise tout le système capitaliste pourri !

The French strike wave was the first major class battle in the "New World Order," which Washington triumphantly proclaimed with the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union. The restoration of capitalism in East Europe and the former USSR has led to a worldwide assault on workers' living standards and organizations by the emboldened exploiters. Across West Europe, governments have declared that social services must be drastically slashed to conform to the 1992 Maastricht treaty for European integration. The German bourgeoisie has put enormous pressure on Paris to reduce the budget deficit as a precondition to creating a common European currency. Europe's capitalist rulers today are seeking to end the assaults on the working class carried out by Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s. They want to increase their "competitiveness" in a climate



Pelissier/Reuters

Coal miners from Gardanne region join students in Marseilles protesting government cutbacks.

of fierce interimperialist economic rivalry, as the dominant powers (U.S., Germany and Japan) consolidate their spheres of influence.

The massive strike wave in France sent shock waves throughout Europe and the world. The *Wall Street Journal* (22 December 1995) declared that the assault on social welfare programs was a "time bomb" and warned that the strikes in France could be "a foretaste of things to come elsewhere in Europe." Already on December 13, there was a 60,000-strong mobilization in Brussels against sweeping budget cuts ordered by the Belgian government.

In Canada, the impact of the French workers' struggle reverberated strongly among the 20,000 workers who rallied in defense of jobs and social programs in the London, Ont. one-day general strike on December 11. Even the *New York Times* (24 December 1995) showed signs of nervousness, fearing that "American unions will begin using aggressive tactics," while excluding a "replay of the events in France" because "American workers do not share France's tradition of general strikes and mass unrest," citing the 1789 revolution, the 1871 Paris Commune and the 1968 worker-student uprising. The new AFL-CIO chief, John Sweeney, declared he was "impressed" with how the workers' strikes shut down France, but quickly added, "I hope it never comes to that here in America."

While the French strikes began as a defensive struggle by particular sectors, they quickly took on the character of a broad social struggle. But the reformists' political stranglehold kept them from taking on, for example, the government's "Vigipirate" police dragnet aimed at "immigrants," which in France includes many youth of North African and black African descent born in the country. Mobilizing the workers against the racist cop terror would have had a huge impact in spreading the strike to the private sector—where immigrant workers are a key component of heavy industry—as well as inspiring support from the seething suburban ghettos. Nor did

the reformists raise a peep against France's participation in the NATO occupation of the former Yugoslavia, which was sealed in a ceremony in strikebound Paris on December 14. A revolutionary leadership would have seized upon the tremendous opportunity for working-class action against this imperialist expedition: as it was, the rail strike disrupted shipment of war matériel.

As the mobilizations reached their highest point, there was a chorus coming from bourgeois politicians, the media and CFDT leader Notat howling about the "politicization" of the strikes. The strike movement had reached the point where its scope had to be extended to the overwhelmingly non-unionized private sector and to directly challenge the *state power*. That is why the reformist working-class leaders hurriedly stepped in to bring the movement to a close. The Ligue Trotskyiste de France, section of the International Communist League, defined the crucial task: to build an authoritative

revolutionary leadership rooted in the working class—a party like the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky capable of transforming defensive struggles into a conscious assault on the bourgeois order. As the LTF declared in the leaflet printed on page 11:

"For some time now, the situation has been moving toward a total general strike, which would pose the question of who will be the master in this country.... What is posed in this historic strike is workers rule of society. What is posed is the struggle for a workers government, for the overthrow of the capitalist system which is destined to perish and not to be reformed."

Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution

The question of leadership was thrown into sharp relief in this strike. Daily general assemblies in virtually every striking workplace, often with hundreds of workers participating, voted on whether to continue the strike. Debates over how to go forward were intently followed. At the same time, these assemblies were kept separate from each other, the better to maintain the bureaucrats' control over the strikers.

In a number of cities, 24-hour organizing centers of the strike were spontaneously created—the Gare du Nord railway station in Paris, the central squares in Toulouse and Bordeaux. Strikers organized flying pickets, such as the postal workers of the PLM sorting center who brought out the workers at the Central Receipts office of Paris-XII. The rail strikers at Gare du Nord sent delegations to neighboring hospitals and postal sorting centers, and even tried to bring out a Citroën plant. Describing young strike militants at the postal sorting center of Saint-Lazare in Paris, *Libération* (9-10 December 1995) commented: "After nine days of voting on the strike every morning in a general assembly, they have the sense of participating in a real 'workers democracy.' They seem more like Communards than strikers."

(continued on page 10)

French Workers...

(continued from page 9)

Strikers returned to work bitter and furious at the trade-union bureaucrats for their sellout. In Rouen, where the December 16 demonstration was the largest in that city's history, demonstrating strikers ejected the CGT and FO leaders from the demonstration, just as Paris workers had done earlier to the CFDT's Notat. A railway worker at the Sotteville yards bitterly declared, "There is a fundamental difference between those who want to fight and those who are content to negotiate" (*Info Matin*, 19 December 1995).

Even as the government was granting them concessions, the great majority of railway strikers voted to continue the strike, which began to show signs of spreading to the private sector. This is the context in which the LTF published its leaflet of December 14. Our forces are small, but it is necessary to state what is, and what is to be done. Calling for a new, revolutionary party, the leaflet focused on the urgent need for *elected strike committees*, for *mass pickets* to extend the strike to the private sector, and *worker-immigrant defense guards* to protect against scabs, cops and racist attacks. As Trotsky declared in the Transitional Program (1938), the founding document of the Fourth International:

"Strike pickets are the basic nuclei of the proletarian army. This is our point of departure. In connection with every strike and street demonstration, it is imperative to propagate the necessity of creating *workers' groups for self-defense*. It is necessary to write this slogan into the program of the revolutionary wing of the trade unions."

In present-day France, such demands were key to the fight for a victorious outcome of the strike movement.

The importance of strike pickets and self-defense squads was driven home as cops were sent against student demos in Paris, Montpellier, Saint-Etienne and Nantes. To smash the railway and public transportation strikes, the government organized scabs and even threatened to use the army. And in the middle of the bureaucrats' open strikebreaking, the government sent the same "security" force that terrorizes the "immigrant" population against strikers, for example at the Porte Maillot metro station.

Another key question in bringing out the private sector is the fight against unemployment. With *under 10 percent* of the French workforce unionized, and most of that concentrated in the public sector, in whole sectors of private employment unions are extremely weak or non-existent. And with joblessness in double digits, hitting "immigrant" youth particularly hard (over 25 percent), the hesitancy among private sector workers to join the strike was rooted in their vulnerability to reprisals, lacking protection against layoffs or firing. To overcome this, a class-struggle leadership would go beyond the initial narrowly sectoral and defensive demands of the strike to raise a program capable of uniting the working class as a whole. Thus we call for a *sliding scale of wages and hours*, in order to distribute the available work among all workers. For a revolutionary leadership, the fight for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay would be a key component in the necessarily convulsive battle to organize the private sector.

Mobilizing the private sector in the strikes also required a



Reuters

Only airport workers battle cops, Paris, December 7.

determined fight against the racist anti-immigrant terror which was carried out for 14 years under the "socialist" Mitterrand and has now been greatly stepped up by Chirac. The current "Vigipirate" police/army dragnet has led to more than 3 million identity checks, and thousands of deportations. Yet the union leaderships have not only done nothing to fight the racist crusade of the right-wing government, they even sought to mobilize support for the government's "anti-terrorist" crackdown.

While the trade-union bureaucrats bemoan the fact that the strikes did not spread to the private sector, they actually did everything in their power to *prevent* it. At the key Renault auto plant in Flins, the CGT put out a leaflet warning that a strike would be "premature." Such strikebreaking tactics are hardly new for the reformists. When Flins workers spear-headed strikes during last spring's presidential campaign, the union bureaucrats did nothing to mobilize in their support, while the bosses taunted the strikers for being led by North Africans. And in 1983, Flins workers were the first to strike against Mitterrand's austerity; the "socialists" in government called them "fundamentalists" who were supposedly manipulated from abroad.

Factory committees, worker-immigrant defense guards, a sliding scale of wages and hours: these are examples of *transitional demands*, which are meant to bridge the gap between the strikers' defensive struggles and the revolutionary fight for power. The Third Congress of the Communist International, which first formulated such a transitional program as a counter to the reformist minimum program of the social democracy, called on Communists to "extend and intensify every defensive struggle, transforming it into an attack on capitalist society" ("Theses on Tactics," July 1921).

Key Is Revolutionary Leadership

In their opportunist prostration before the government, the reformist bureaucrats were mimicked by the "far left," which ignominiously capitulated to and even joined Chirac's racist terror campaign. Last fall, as the government was brandishing the "terrorist menace," *Lutte Ouvrière* (20 October 1995)

(continued on page 12)

To Defend and Extend the Strike: Elect Recallable Strike Committees!

The following leaflet was issued by the Ligue trotskyste de France, French section of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), on 14 December 1995.

Down with Vigipirate! Auto Must Go on Strike!

For a New, Revolutionary Party! The Working Class Must Fight for Power!

December 12 saw a mobilization which was unequalled since strikes exploded throughout the country. However, that same evening [Prime Minister] Juppé announced that he would not budge on his reforms. This shows the government's fierce determination not to give in. The union leaderships are preparing to break the strike because they know that if the strikes continue the question of power will be posed and they don't want to have anything to do with that. The strikers' general assemblies reflect the growing division between the base, determined but suspicious, and the union leaderships who are maneuvering to break the strike. It is still possible to prevent this: to extend the strike, the strikers' general assemblies must elect strike committees, recallable at any time—committees where trade union organizations and anyone else can put themselves forward on the basis of their program.

During the December 12 demonstration in Paris, a contingent chanted "Juppé out, we have the power." In Bordeaux, the demonstrators chanted "No hesitation, revolution." Yes, we have the power, but the power needs to be generalized and organized and to have a revolutionary leadership. But from

the beginning of this social crisis, what has been sorely lacking is a multiethnic revolutionary party which rallies all the oppressed in common struggle against this rotten system.

Chirac-Juppé have been able to hang on because the strike has been limited to the public sector and not extended to the bastions of heavy industry, particularly in the private sector. Today it is urgently necessary for strike committees to extend the strike to these sectors. For some time now, the situation has been moving toward a total general strike, which would pose the question of who will be the master in this country. So the question is: Who will this be? No to a second Juppé; no to the Socialist Party (PS), which can pride itself on having carried out a policy of social decline during its 14 years in power, thanks to the good graces of the Communist Party (PCF). What is posed in this historic strike is workers rule of society. What is posed is the struggle for a workers government, for the overthrow of the capitalist system which is destined to perish and not to be reformed.

Juppé and his government want to divide and rule, proposing mediators for public transportation, the railways and the post office. The strikers in their general assemblies are refusing any thought of negotiation because they know that the government wants to break their strike. But what are the union leaderships doing? Far from pursuing a determined struggle, they equivocate, preparing to break the movement.

Elected and recallable strike committees would make it possible to rally all unionized and non-unionized workers and to make the link with other embattled sectors. They must organize mass pickets in front of every plant because *picket lines mean don't cross*. The class line is drawn between strikers and non-strikers. Strike committees could engender factory committees and take the initiative to become a rallying point for representatives of women, youth, the North African community and others. Workers could begin to organize a

(continued on page 12)



Striking rail workers in Lille in the forefront of mass strike wave.

LTF Leaflet...

(continued from page 11)

new society based on their own state power.

As we can see, the working-class leaders' refusal to fight against racist terror is an obstacle to the necessary extension of the struggle to the private and mainly industrial sector, with its strong, combative component of workers from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. *Full citizenship rights for all those who are here! Down with Vigipirate!*

Public sector workers have been heavily mobilized since November 24. They must be in the front ranks of the fight against racist segregation. They must demand the abolition of Article 1 of the public service [regulations] which bans any person who is not of French nationality from working in the public service. *Down with apartheid in the public service! To fight unemployment, we demand that available work be divided among all workers, with no loss in pay!* If the gigantic demonstrations of recent days had had central slogans and banners against racist terror and against Vigipirate, the government would have thought twice before continuing to terrorize our brothers of "immigrant" origin. *French troops: Get your bloody hands off the suburbs, the colonies and the Balkans!* We need a campaign to unionize the private sector. We need the unity of all the workers from one workplace in one trade union with full internal democracy, in order to overcome the political divisions which serve as a pretext for one union to break the strike of another.

The government sends its cops against strikers; it sends its cops and its army against the population of the ex-colonies as part of the Vigipirate plan. This same government, on December 14 in Paris, met with the other general staffs in order to organize a new imperialist bloodbath in the Balkans. *The main enemy is at home!* The Jeunesse Spartaciste and the Ligue Trotskyiste have initiated united-front rallies against the coming massacres.

Trade-union struggle is not enough; the struggle for reforms is not enough. The most conscious strikers know that these same unions acted like doormats during the Mitterrand era.

As for the "far left"—whether it's the LCR (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire), LO (Lutte Ouvrière), PT (Parti des Travailleurs), or the GR-JCR (Gauche Révolutionnaire/Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaire)—they all confine themselves, at most, to calling for an unlimited general strike to get rid of Juppé, which at best amounts to calling for a

ministerial reshuffle or a new popular-front government. Last year in Italy general strikes drove out Berlusconi, ending up with Dini who imposed the same "reforms." The group Pouvoir Ouvrier put forward as a model the "union" of the CIA and the Pope, Solidarność. The latter came to power with the capitalist counterrevolution in Poland which brought poverty to the workers and, among other things, the banning of abortion. By supporting Solidarność at the beginning of the 1980s, the entire "far left" signed on to the imperialists' campaign against the degenerated workers state in the Soviet Union, whose destruction permitted the bourgeoisies to brutally attack the social gains of the working class.

If Juppé doesn't want to change anything, it is because the stakes go beyond the borders of France. In fact, the European bourgeoisies have their eyes glued to France as they fear for their own power. If the strikes continue, construction of their Europe is put in question. If in France we have a hard right wing, this must be put in the international context of the "New World Order" in which interimperialist rivalries are intensifying. But in Italy the CGIL and CISL public sector unions are threatening to strike. In Germany, the head of the rail workers union doesn't rule out the possibility of "spontaneous action by rail workers." In Belgium 60,000 people demonstrated in Brussels on December 13 against the Dehaene government's austerity plans.

In this historic strike, through a process of political battles against the working-class misleaders and fake revolutionaries, we're looking to build a Bolshevik party and win the most advanced workers and youth to a revolutionary program. Join us!

- For elected and recallable strike committees!
- Picket lines mean don't cross!
- Extend the strike throughout all industry!
- Down with Vigipirate!
- French troops: Get your bloody hands off the suburbs, the colonies and the Balkans!
- French imperialism = economic diktats against workers, military diktats in the Balkans! Overthrow the capitalist system!
- For worker/immigrant mobilizations to smash the fascists!
- For a revolutionary, multiethnic internationalist workers party!
- For socialist revolution! For a workers government that sweeps away the rotten capitalist system! ■

French Workers...

(continued from page 10)

wrote:

"If one really wanted to help the North African population to dissociate itself from the terrorists and to defend itself from them, if one wanted to aid the population of the poor districts where they are perhaps recruited, it would be necessary to show this population that they have nothing to fear from the Vigipirate plan."

Reacting against such vile chauvinism, some anti-racist youth have begun identifying themselves as anarchists, a current which had largely become moribund in France. For example, at Saint-Denis university outside Paris, where anarchists were in the leadership, students put out a leaflet during the strike movement attacking the government's racist anti-

immigrant mobilization. Disgusted by the betrayals of the reformists, the anarchists reject political parties altogether in favor of spontaneous action. Yet the strike wave showed the limits of spontaneous working-class militancy, which was enormous but was unable to overcome the stranglehold of the bureaucrats who were the central obstacle to extending the strikes and transforming the defensive struggle into a fight against the capitalist system.

In contrast to the opportunist "far left," the Ligue Trotskyiste has highlighted the struggle against the racist anti-immigrant attacks. The LTF's special supplement to *Le Bolchévique* was headlined, "Smash Vigipirate! Unite 'Immigrants,' Women, Youth Behind the Power of the Working Class! For a New, Revolutionary Leadership!" (reprinted in *Workers Vanguard* No. 635, 15 December 1995). This supplement was also translated into Arabic for distribution

among workers and youth of North African origin.

A key role was played in the strike wave by "far left" organizations, *who acted as the "left" face of the union bureaucracy*. Their call for an "unlimited general strike" was simply a formula for pressuring the trade-union bureaucrats. The fact that these former "68ers" now have their perspective locked on the bureaucracy reflects a social fact: *they are part of it*. This is a key reason why, in contrast to the 1986 rail walkout, there were no *coordinations* (strike coordinating committees) this time. Those who were shop delegates then have become local presidents and national leaders. Thus the Parti des Travailleurs (PT) of Pierre Lambert is deeply entrenched at all levels of Force Ouvrière, where a PT supporter, Claude Jenet, is national organization secretary and a close ally of FO chief Blondel.

The opening for the "far left" was conditioned by the relative decline of the ex-Stalinist PCF, its influence sharply cut by its groveling support to Mitterrand and by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The PCF was largely invisible during the strikes, hardly surprising as Communist leader Robert Hue's policy of "constructive opposition" really means offering the hand of friendship to Chirac. So at the key moment, it fell to the "far left" to drive the sellout down the throats of the workers. Thus, the SUD trade union in the Paris CCP (postal check center), which is led by Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) supporters, intervened in the general assemblies to tell workers to "keep up the pressure until Saturday" (December 16, the bureaucrats' "final" demonstration) and that then it will be necessary to "look for other forms of action."

This growing together with the reformists goes back years. The "far left" signed up as extra-parliamentary auxiliaries of the Mitterrand government in the early 1980s. They marched shoulder to shoulder with the Cold War social democrats in solidarity with Polish Solidarność. And now they "know how to end strikes."

In contrast to the fake-Trotskyists (LO/PT/LCR) the Ligue Trotskyiste fights for the forging of a new, revolutionary workers party. As the LTF declared in its December 4 supplement: "The reformists and class collaborators of the PCF and PS and their centrist tails offer only illusory reforms. They are all incapable of leading the working class in the current struggles and in the struggle to end the system of wage slavery once and for all."

To really fight to win required taking control of the strike out of the hands of the venal bureaucrats. It meant going beyond the admirable local initiative of individual workplaces to create organized forms embodying the struggle: elected strike committees to unite all the unionists, now split into different unions along party lines, and non-union workers, some of whom were exemplary strike militants; mass picket lines to spread the strike and defend the strikers; and national coordinating committees, linking the capital with the heavily mobilized provincial cities, whose marches drew contingents from industry.

The strike movement had to go beyond simple trade unionism, on a program to unite the entire working class and draw along the pensioners, the youth, the immigrants, against whom the ominous militarization of French society is being waged. These immediate tasks cry out for revolutionary leadership and a Leninist party: to push the proletariat's struggles forward instead of subordinating them to the constraints of the capitalist system; to expose the pro-capitalist misleaders in



AP

Marseilles strikers continued to shut down transit after trade-union tops scuttled walkouts elsewhere in France.

their deeds; to reach out to struggling working people in other lands as the bourgeoisies drum up racism and trade war.

The fight against the government's attacks on social services is far from over. The French ruling class is gambling on the demoralizing effect of the strike movement being called off when millions thought they were winning. The government is counting on the misleaders, old and new, to keep a lid on the working class. The "left" leaders are more than willing, but nobody has the stranglehold that the PCF used to have on the most militant sectors.

While the French working class had sufficient defensive capacity to temporarily repel the Maastricht-driven attacks of the bourgeoisie, without a forward revolutionary strategy, embodied in the revolutionary Marxist program and a Leninist vanguard party, they can only succeed in frustrating the bourgeoisie, not conquering it. The capitalists will return to the offensive, perhaps in league with the fascists, if the reformists can no longer play their former role, and the working class remains intractable. In terms of class struggle in Europe, this is the opening act in this new historic period.

In the new world *disorder*, the capitalist onslaught against the working class will not abate—nor will the resistance against it, in the form of demonstrations, strikes, etc. It is in the crucible of such class struggles that an internationalist workers party will be built, a party like the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky, forged on a program to lead the working class and all the oppressed in the fight for socialist revolution. This is the crucial lesson of the French strikes.

—Adapted from Workers Vanguard No. 636, 5 January

Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste	
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ARA...

(continued from page 2)

understanding of the need to bring down the whole system of capitalist exploitation.

When faced with an upsurge of class struggle that can't be dealt with through the usual combination of parliamentary "democracy" and state repression, the ruling class will fund the fascists, arm them, and use them to try to physically annihilate the workers' organizations and commit genocide against the oppressed. That's what happened in Germany in the '30s, when the capitalists decided to unleash their psychotic thugs for real. And under those circumstances, there'll be no question of shouting them down in a diner.

Only the working class has the social power to confront the vast capitalist arsenal of repression which today shields the fascists, and which can be placed at their disposal tomorrow. The working class has its hands on all the economic levers that make society run. The working class is integrated. All oppressed sectors of this society are represented within it—racial minorities, women, gays, youth. So the working class can't free itself without freeing society at large from all exploitation and oppression. Or as Marx put it, in the working class, capitalism has created its own gravedigger. When you turn your back on that power, or see the workers as just another "sector" of the oppressed, you have no chance of leading successful struggle against capitalism.

All that social power is just potential, though, without a leadership to aim it at the right target. Obviously, the bunch who run the unions today want nothing to do with a revolutionary fight against the racist system. After all, they support capitalism. That's why a revolutionary workers party like the Russian Bolsheviks—a party that can unite all the struggles of the oppressed—is the heart and soul of what we fight for.

ARA was founded by youth who sought to reject the suicidal liberal/social-democratic reliance on the racist cops, courts and governments to deal with the fascist threat. But

your strategy of militant "direct action" starts from conscious rejection of the idea of workers revolution—if not its desirability, at least its practicality. So ARA tries to beat the Nazis down, but has no perspective for draining the capitalist swamp that endlessly spawns them. You reduce social struggle to a moral issue: individual militants must "do the right thing." This is really liberalism turned inside out, and it seems to us a pretty elitist conception of anti-fascist struggle, too.

Semi-clandestine small-group actions, such as the one you carried out in December against CFAR, do not advance the struggle against fascism even when they manage to inflict some damage, because the real issue is state power: who's got it and who has to take it. Workers and minorities have to be drawn into opposition to the whole capitalist economic system that lies at the root of their oppression. Your strategy teaches the oppressed *nothing* about their potential fighting strength against their mortal enemies, because they aren't called upon to struggle. They aren't even told what's happening!

The TL fights for labor/minority mobilizations to smash fascist terror not just because we think this is a better "tactic." While seeking to defeat particular fascist provocations, which is a life or death issue for the oppressed, such labor/minority mobilizations are part of the necessary political fight to bring the working class to anti-capitalist consciousness. It is in the course of such struggles that the racial and other divisions which cripple the fight against exploitation and oppression will break down. Such mobilizations are part of our effort to forge the kind of revolutionary workers party the oppressed need to weld their struggles together and *take the power*.

That's not just a nice idea, it's the whole ball of wax. If you want to smash fascism, then you have to fight for socialist revolution. Because the alternative is awful to think about.

Fraternally,

John Masters

For the Trotskyist League/Ligue trotskyste

Ontario...

(continued from page 16)

union in 1981. Similarly, Margaret Thatcher mobilized the full power of the capitalist state to defeat the strategically powerful British miners union in 1984-85.

The labor battles in France dramatically demonstrated the power of the working class. But recognizing that social power is only the beginning of wisdom. *Unleashing* working-class power and moving on to victory requires a leadership with a program to take on and overthrow the entire system of unemployment, poverty and racism. That means a party of revolutionary action, not an NDP-style combine of union bureaucrats and parliamentary sellouts who keep the working class tied to the capitalist order. What's needed is a revolutionary workers party which opposes every manifestation of oppression—national chauvinism, racism, anti-woman and anti-gay bigotry—in order to rally all the victims of capitalism to the fight for a workers government.

From the federal Liberals and Ontario Tories to the still-extant New Democrat regimes in B.C. and Saskatchewan, governments at every level are in a budget-slashing, job-killing frenzy. UI has been gutted to the point where fewer

than half of unemployed workers are even eligible for the sharply reduced benefits. Everybody gets nailed for GST on top of PST on top of gas taxes on top of liquor taxes, and then the bloated banks charge you a buck to write the check. Meanwhile, corporate tax levels are now lower than in any other large industrial power. No wonder big-business profits soared 21 percent last year!

In Ontario, Harris and his country-club chums have gouged more than 20 percent from welfare payments and enacted the most draconian anti-labor legislation in 50 years. They're hacking billions more from medicare and closing dozens of hospitals, while eliminating crucial social services like day-care and public housing. Hard pressed by this relentless attack, working people and the poor are looking for a strategy to stop the Tory juggernaut.

The kind of class struggle it's going to take to turn back this offensive clearly won't be led by the likes of OFL president Gord Wilson, a right-wing NDP stalwart. But the blowhard "lefts" like CUPE Ontario president Sid Ryan and the CAW's Buzz Hargrove are just as determined as Wilson to stave off a showdown between labor and capital. Two years ago, Ryan mouthed off about a general strike against the NDP's Social Contract...and then did nothing. Now he tells the ranks that



Andrew Stawicki/Toronto Star

Mass labor action can defeat the attacks of Mike Harris and his right-wing Tory yahoos.

"we have decided to get back in behind the NDP, we're going to rebuild our party" (*Toronto Star*, 23 November). Hargrove's response to the Tories' union-busting labor legislation was to pen joint protest letters with the bosses at Chrysler, McDonnell Douglas and elsewhere, claiming that the former NDP labor law was good for corporate profits!

Social Crisis and the Left

On the huge parades through the streets of London on December 11, strikers eagerly bought copies of *Workers Vanguard* for its coverage of the French strike wave. Hundreds carried signs calling for a general strike to stop the Tory attacks in Ontario.

This call has been taken up by a number of self-proclaimed socialist organizations, who intend it as a pressure tactic on the labor bureaucracy. But a general strike poses the question, *which class shall rule* in society. And that in turn poses point blank the question of working-class leadership. As the revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky wrote during the tumultuous class battles in Europe during the 1930s, the general strike is "the necessary means for casting off the treachery of the leadership and for creating within the working class itself the preliminary conditions for a victorious uprising."

Yet today groups like Labour Militant and the International Socialists (I.S.) tail after and defer to the existing treacherous leadership. For example, John Clarke, organizer of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, writes in *Labour Militant* (November-January 1995/6): "The leaders of the Ontario Federation of Labour...must propose a plan of action which allows all of Harris' potential enemies to participate in a massive mobilization to drive the employers' agenda into retreat." But the OFL tops have made crystal clear that their "plan of action" begins and ends with reviving the NDP! And the I.S. writes, in a leaflet distributed in London on December 11: "If we can keep the pressure up on our top leaders, we can use London as a stepping stone for a province-wide shutdown that will last until the Tories surrender."

These pretend-socialists do not see beyond the bounds of

the existing capitalist system. Consequently, they cannot see beyond the present working-class leadership. In their leaflets and newspaper articles on the current struggle, they ask the oppressed to make do with the "leaders" they've got. At most they encourage the labor bureaucracy to adopt more militant tactics on the economic level, while surrendering "politics" to the right-wing social democrats of the NDP.

Mass working-class action can defeat the Tories. The burning question is: then what? The I.S.'s answer is clear: they denounce the heated debate over whether labor should support the NDP as a "petty dispute"...and then pledge to help elect the New Democrats in 1999! Labour Militant, noting that "Governments can be brought down by united working class action," writes:

"In the early 90s in Britain, mass resistance to Thatcher's Poll Tax forced her to resign. Last year, huge rallies and work stoppages by Italian workers forced out the Government of Silvio Berlusconi. In British Columbia in the early 80s, the powerful 'operation Solidarity movement,' uniting unions and social movements, brought the Social Credit government to the very brink of defeat and forced concessions from them. Only the betrayals of the labour leadership saved the Socreds from destruction."

—*Labour Militant*, August-September 1995

The key lesson of these ferocious social battles is nowhere mentioned in this reformist hymn: despite the militancy, for working people and the oppressed, nothing fundamental changed. Thatcher was replaced by another Tory, John Major. The Italian bourgeoisie, having installed the extreme right-wing Berlusconi cabinet to streamline the government and discipline the workers, then let Berlusconi be swept away. He was replaced by the Dini government, installed with the votes of the reformist left, to legislate the cutbacks that Berlusconi and his fascist allies had failed to impose.

As for B.C., the struggle against the union-busting Socreds was betrayed—betrayed by the same social-democratic union bureaucracy to whom Labour Militant, the I.S. et al. now appeal to lead the fight in Ontario! As the Socreds finally disintegrated into their own cesspool of corruption, the B.C. Federation of Labour tops suppressed labor struggle so as not to hurt the NDP's election chances. In office, Mike Harcourt's NDP has led the Anglo-chauvinist charge against Quebec's right to independence, sent the RCMP and army against Native protesters at Gustafsen Lake, and imposed workfare and an (illegal) residency requirement for welfare recipients. And the B.C. Fed bureaucrats continue to back them all the way.

To defeat the capitalist attacks spearheaded by the Harris Tories in Ontario will take militant labor action. But economic militancy, energy and resolve are not enough. It is necessary to wage a political struggle against the pro-capitalist misleaders of the working class.

Welding together labor's fight with the struggles of all the oppressed is impossible on the basis of simple economic demands. We need a party to speak as the tribune for all—in defense of the national rights of the Québécois, in defense of immigrants denied citizenship rights, of women who can't get abortions even if there is a hospital, of Native peoples who have never had hospitals at all. We need a revolutionary workers party to lead the coming defensive struggles, and transform them into a general offensive against the whole wage-labor system of capitalist exploitation which lies at the heart of all oppression. This is the fight for *socialist revolution*, and that is what the Trotskyist League stands for. ■

For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

Ontario: Mass Protests Against Tory Attacks

On December 11 in London, Ontario, 20,000 workers staged the largest protest to date against the austerity onslaught of Mike Harris' provincial Tory government. Braving -25 degree temperatures, unionists threw up picket lines outside factories and office buildings throughout the city and surrounding area in an "illegal" one-day general strike.

Strikers shut down all four auto plants, defying anti-picketing court injunctions at Ford Talbotville. Most food processing plants were shut tight. Local transit and postal service ground to a halt. Striking teachers forced cancellation of classes at many schools, while government offices had to shut their doors or severely cut back for the day. Buses brought thousands of protesters from Toronto, Hamilton, Windsor and as far away as Thunder Bay and Ottawa.

This strike gave a taste of labor's potential to be mobilized in defense of the unions, and the social services on which millions depend, against the sweeping attacks of the Tory regime. But such a mobilization is not what the Ontario Federation of Labour union bureaucrats have in mind. The labor tops want to blow off some steam through one-day local actions, while seeking to manipulate the widespread anger against the Tories to revive their "political arm," the widely discredited NDP.

The anti-Harris "action plan" adopted at the mid-November OFL convention explicitly calls to restore labor's frayed ties with the provincial New Democrats, who until very recently led the anti-working-class offensive from the Ontario government benches. Through its union-busting Social Contract and its deep cuts in social spending, Bob Rae's NDP government paved the way directly for the Tories.

The seamless escalation of capitalist attacks from Rae to Harris illustrates the fundamental reality faced by militants who want to stop the Tory offensive. The problem isn't one



Bill Sanford/Canada Wide

December 11: Unions shut down London, Ontario, in one-day general strike.

particular reactionary government, nor is it a matter of a single province or country. The entire global capitalist system is based on lining the pockets of the corporate rich at the expense of the vast majority.

The capitalists' attacks have dramatically increased with the destruction of the Soviet Union, which has unleashed a worldwide assault on the living standards and organizations of the working class, while heightening economic competition among the imperialist powers. In Canada as elsewhere, the capitalist rulers are driving down real wages and the "overhead costs" of social programs, in order to compete internationally in growing imperialist trade war.

The London strike took place in the midst of the explosive working-class struggle in France against the government's assault on the social service system. From Paris to Toronto and beyond, the capitalist rulers are out to inflict a decisive blow against the unions, thereby laying the basis for a broader assault on workers and the poor. Ronald Reagan did this in the U.S. with his destruction of the PATCO air traffic controllers

(continued on page 14)