

**Keynote Address to the
28th National Convention of the
Communist Party, USA**

July 1, 2005

Chicago, Illinois

By Sam Webb, National Chair

Table of Contents

INDEPENDENCE DAY	3
A WATERSHED EVENT	5
ON THE HOME FRONT	5
THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA	7
THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION	8
2004 ELECTIONS: NO MANDATE	8
PEOPLE FIGHT BACK	9
THE COMING ELECTIONS	10
SOCIAL SECURITY: THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES	11
NOT SURPRISING	11
STALLED ON A GLOBAL LEVEL	12
SHIFTING WORLD RELATIONSHIPS	13
A COMPLEX WORLD	15
SPUTTERING ENGINE	15
STRATEGIC POLICY	17
THE WORKING CLASS & THE CLASS STRUGGLE	19
NOT A NEW SITUATION	20
NEW CONDITIONS OF STRUGGLE	21
THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE CROSSHAIRS	22
THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM	23
NEW RACIST OFFENSIVE	24
RACISM AND 9/11	24
THE ROLE OF LEFT & LEFT-CENTER UNITY	26
THE PRE-CONVENTION DISCUSSION	28
SOME DIFFERENCES	29
BILL OF RIGHTS SOCIALISM	32
THE NATIONAL QUESTION	33
THE COMMUNIST PARTY	34
STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF THE PARTY	36
PARTY CLUBS	37
OUR PRESS	38
FINAL WORDS	40

INDEPENDENCE DAY

We gather on the eve of the day marking the revolution that founded our nation. U.S. communists take enormous pride in this great struggle that at once severed our colonial dependence on Britain and radically transformed the life of our country. Notwithstanding conventional wisdom, Marxism doesn't cast a scornful eye at our democratic heritage nor thumb its nose at earlier achievements of humankind.

Marx assiduously studied and drew insights from the works of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and other classical economists in writing his opus, *Das Capital*. Lenin expressed pride in the bourgeois democratic revolutionaries in mid-19th century Russia and characterized our revolution as "one of those great, really liberatory, really revolutionary wars of which there have so few compared to the vast number of wars of conquest." And our own Party has always embraced the best of our country's history and traditions. It was Comrade Hall who popularized the expression, "Bill of Rights" socialism, and Comrade Winston who drew on the political genius of Frederick Douglass in his marvelous book, *Strategy for a Black Agenda*.

Revolutions are never complete. Just as socialist revolutions bear the "birthmarks" of capitalism, bourgeois democratic revolutions likewise have their own birthmarks and leave unfinished democratic tasks for future generations to address.

In the case of the revolution that engulfed the thirteen fragile colonies, it too had its limitations: the abominable institution of slavery remained; political rights were limited to white male property holders; the new nation was formed on lands unlawfully and violently expropriated from Native American peoples; and the revolution unfolded in a nascent bourgeois society, which over time widened many of the inequalities that were embedded in colonial life.

Nonetheless, the American Revolution enlarged the boundaries of freedom and constituted a landmark in human history. For the first time sovereignty and consent rested, not with a king, not with an aristocratic order, not with a church, but with the people. Freedom was proclaimed a universal right of humankind. And many old modes of deference and hierarchy melted away.

1776 set the stage for the second American Revolution in 1865 and subsequent struggles to make freedom the inalienable right of every person, regardless of race, national origin, religion, gender, class status, or sexual orientation.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the greatest mass leader in our land in the 20th Century, was well aware of the limitations of our revolution. Yet he didn't

distance himself from it; rather, he heralded its achievements and ideals and challenged our nation to live up to them.

Standing in front of the Washington Monument in 1963, King, in his beautiful oratory, reminded Americans in the words of the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

On a smaller stage stood a now deceased and sorely missed African American comrade, Lee Cain, who migrated with tens of thousands of other Black people from the South in the early 1940s to Detroit and found his way into the auto industry and the Communist Party. For the next five decades, Lee threw himself into the struggles of his people and his class. And when the auto companies began laying off workers by the tens of thousands in the early 1980s, I remember him invoking on more than one occasion that same phrase from the Declaration of Independence, and always quickly adding, “but how can a person be happy when they don’t have a job?”

We should learn from the examples of Dr. King and Comrade Lee. Our desire to grow into a mass party and into a leading force for social progress and socialism will only happen if we fully appreciate and build on our democratic heritage as they did.

There is much to love about our country. Its multi-racial, multi-national character, sheer size and physical beauty, mosaic of cultures and its enormous economic, scientific, and artistic achievements are all worth celebrating.

A few minutes ago we sang Woody Guthrie’s classic, “This Land is Your Land.” Woody and other artists, such as Langston Hughes, Pete Seeger, Maya Angelou, Paul Robeson, Bruce Springsteen, Tupac Shakur, Lauryn Hill, Annie DiFranco, and Mos Def not only sing about the shortcomings of our country, but also of its beauty and unlimited possibilities.

We cannot allow the right wing to appropriate the symbols, language and images of our nation’s past and fasten them to their reactionary political project. It is sheer political folly to concede this ground to the right under the mistaken notion that nearly everything in our past is corrupted and compromised.

Despite the shortcomings of our society, there is still much to claim ownership of in our history; it is working-class people in the first place who have strong feelings of pride in the country they built.

The great Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitov once wrote:

“Communists are the irreconcilable opponents, in principle, of bourgeois nationalism in all of its forms. But we are not supporters of national nihilism, and should never act as such. The task of educating workers and all working people in the spirit of proletarian internationalism is one of the fundamental tasks of every Communist Party. But anyone who thinks that this permits him, or even compels him, to sneer at all national sentiments of the broad masses of working people is far from being a genuine Bolshevik, and has understood nothing of the teaching of Lenin on the national question.” (United Front Against War and Fascism)

A WATERSHED EVENT

Four years ago, and in another Midwest City, our Party assembled to take stock of where our nation was and to map out our plans. At the time we had no idea of what was to happen on our country’s soil only two months later when commercial jetliners were turned into missiles and crashed into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

As the dust and debris were settling, as families were gathering to grieve and console one another over the senseless loss of human life, and as an entire nation was trying to make sense out of this tragedy, at that same moment we were entering a period of great peril.

Lacking legitimacy because of a fraudulent election, but harboring grandiose political plans, the Bush administration went into overdrive to transform this tragic event into a pretext and cover for its long abiding ambition—World Empire.

The “war on terror” gave the White House a rationale with which to exploit people’s fears and insecurities, to intimidate any vocal opposition, and to win popular support, at least momentarily, for its project to reorder political and economic relations domestically and worldwide, in much the same way that anti-Sovietism and anti-Communism did during the Cold War.

ON THE HOME FRONT

On the domestic level, the Bush administration ramped up its assault on the whole panoply of people’s rights, reforms and entitlements, all of which were the handiwork of decades of hard struggles.

Economic and political reforms that were once thought to be sacred became dispensable. Everything that gave people some security was on the chopping block.

Job opportunities, pensions, public education, health care, civil rights, voting rights, reproductive rights, labor rights, welfare relief, gay rights, immigrant rights, child care, retirement security and much more became fair game for the butchers in the White House and Congress.

And this many-sided assault continues to this day.

The administration pushed through the anti-immigrant Real ID Act and steamrolled the appointment of extremist judges to the federal courts.

The Bush budget projects draconian cuts in social programs, while insisting on another \$100 billion for the Iraq occupation.

After last year's election the estate tax was repealed, and White House aides are twisting congressional arms to renew the Patriot Act.

Though the Bush people claim to be “compassionate conservatives,” they are far right political zealots with close ties to the most reactionary sections of transnational capital. Make no mistake about it; this administration and its counterparts in Congress don't comfortably fit within the parameters of the American political tradition. If anybody is un-American, they are. Their domestic agenda is the political equivalent of a neutron bomb in that it destroys people's living standards and rights while protecting—indeed filling to overflow—the bank accounts of the super rich.

Nearly forty years ago, President Lyndon Johnson announced with great fanfare the “War on Poverty”—a war that quickly became a casualty of the Vietnam War. If Bush were honest, he would announce his own domestic war—not on poverty, joblessness, collapsing pensions, segregated housing, the abysmal health care system, racism or sexism, not on any of these—but a war on the people.

What Reagan began a quarter-century ago, Bush and his gang are continuing and with a vengeance that even the oldest veterans of our movement have not seen in their lifetimes.

And the administration's war plan is clear – give trillions in tax handouts to the wealthiest families and corporations, force the federal government deep into the red, and then scale back the welfare functions and institutions of the state while enlarging its militarist side, eliminate virtually all regulations impeding corporate exploitation of working people and nature, impose CAFTA and other trade agreements that will further erode the manufacturing base and ship union jobs elsewhere. Reverse the rights revolution and crack down on people's organizations, blur the lines between church and state, substitute crackpot speculation for science, cultivate hate and divisions among the American people, and throw mounds of cash at right-wing grassroots and fundamentalist religious organizations.

In short, Bush wants to restructure the state into a repressive, redistributive, and undisguised mechanism in the service of the wealthiest families and corporations.

Are we going to allow him to steal from the mouths of children in order to feed the leeches at Halliburton and the Pentagon? Are we going to allow Bush to tell Detroit, Gary, Youngstown, and Bridgeport, cities already reeling from plant closings and mass layoffs, to drop dead while the government builds ever more powerful weapons of mass destruction? Are we going to allow Bush to turn his back on the young men and women returning from Iraq, while he empties the federal treasury into the bank accounts of the wealthy, whose sons and daughters are safe from the horror of war?

While this war against the people is organized out of the White House, it is accompanied and reinforced by savage attacks at lower levels of government and in the collective bargaining arena.

Is anything more emblematic of the times in which we live than the decisions of United Airlines to terminate the pension plans of its workers, and General Motors's decision to lay off another 22,000 workers and its threat to scale back pension and health care benefits for its entire workforce?

THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

On an international level, the events of September 11 were turned into an opportunity to convert a unipolar decade into a unipolar century in which the U.S. would employ its awesome combination of military and financial power to sit atop the global pyramid of states and impose a set of political and economic arrangements to serve its interests.

Of course, previous administrations had imperialist designs too. What we have to appreciate is not so much the similarities of policy between the Bush administration and its predecessors, but the dissimilarities.

The accent of this administration is on unilateralism and the use of military power. It scoffs at the hesitancy of earlier administrations to employ such power.

At the same time, its attitude toward international law, treaties, and institutions is scornful. Diplomacy, multilateralism, and soft power are just so many restraints on the U.S.'s ability to project power and respond to new opportunities.

Thus, 9/11 was a magic moment that allowed the Bush administration to turn its wishes and ambitions into an operational plan.

First, Afghanistan was invaded. Iraq, with its geo-strategic location and vast reserves of oil, was the next target. Tensions crested on the Korean peninsula and in East Asia, as Bush made speeches threatening to attack North Korea.

International treaties were abrogated and the UN became the whipping boy of the ultra-right. A new nuclear policy, giving a green light to the use of such weapons in a range of military theaters, was announced with no public discussion. The go-ahead was given to the Sharon government to use even greater force and pressure against the Palestinian people. Overt and covert actions against Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia and other countries in Latin America were intensified. And promised aid to Africa never arrived.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

In the early going after 9/11, the Bush administration had the initiative.

But it wasn't as easy as they had hoped. At first hesitantly and quietly, a few voices of dissent began to be heard. As time passed, other voices expressed dismay and then anger with Bush's policies. And as more time passed, the number of dissident voices grew still greater, culminating in the millions who took part in the massive peace actions before and during the invasion of Iraq.

These actions in cities across the country—not to mention the actions at a global level where from the very start hundreds of millions vehemently opposed Bush policies—punctured the bubble of legitimacy and fear that had muted dissent to the so-called “war on terror.”

These millions of protestors gave courage to the labor and people's movement to resume their opposition to Bush's policies, thus signaling that his honeymoon was over.

2004 ELECTIONS: NO MANDATE

At no time was this more evident than last fall when a broad labor-led coalition battled Bush and the fraction of the ruling class he represents to nearly a standstill. And though we came up a little short on Election Day, so did Bush. While he won by a sliver, he was denied a popular mandate for his reactionary policies.

Nevertheless, sitting at the main levers of political power, surrounded by a cowardly mainstream media, and enjoying the support of a right-wing grassroots constituency, this administration fervently believed that it could ignore popular sentiments and plow ahead with its reactionary policies.

How wrong they were.

Tensions and divisions in the Republican Party have surfaced on a range of issues, including the budget, immigration, and the filibuster rule. The attempt to gain political advantage from the tragic death of Terry Schiavo turned into a public relations disaster

for the Republican Party. The accusations of ethical and legal impropriety against Tom DeLay have also tarnished the GOP's image.

Adding further to Bush's woes is that Democrats and Republicans alike have called for the closing of the prison at Guantanamo.

The bipartisan McCain-Kennedy Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act of 2005 that is on the Congressional floor is not to the liking of many Republicans. It is not to our liking entirely either, but for different reasons.

Moderate Republicans in league with Democrats are challenging the administration's policies toward stem cell research and global warming.

And ranking Republican members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have been unenthusiastic about the nomination of John Bolton for U.S. ambassador to the UN.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the aisle, the Democrats have begun—though tentatively, inconsistently, and too quietly—to act as an opposition party. Fifty-one members of the House of Representatives signed Representative Conyers' request for a special council to investigate torture and possible violations of the War Crimes Act. Another ninety-one attached their names to a letter demanding answers on the Downing Street memo that caught both Bush and Blair with their pants down and 128 members voted for the amendment of Representative Woolsey asking for an immediate plan to withdraw from Iraq. The legislative fight for the Employee Free Choice Act is also gaining support in the Congress.

We should urge our Congressional representatives—Democrats and Republicans—to add their signatures to these important initiatives.

At the same time, on the bankruptcy bill, the estate tax, military appropriations, and the filibuster rule, the Democratic leadership showed little stomach for taking on Bush.

PEOPLE FIGHT BACK

Beyond our nation's capital, the mood is more militant and Bush's poll numbers are headed south. The period of regrouping of the all-people's coalition that normally follows an election is coming to a close and activity is picking up, especially at the local and state level.

Demonstrations, mass lobbying, petition drives, and town hall meetings have shattered the calm in state capitals and municipalities. Even the "Terminator," Arnold Schwarzenegger (or should I say especially the Terminator?) has been roughed up by nurses, firefighters, state workers, pensioners and the rest of the unruly California crowd.

Indeed, it happened so fast that Arnold probably wonders if he ever had a political honeymoon; and it looks like his divorce papers from California voters will arrive at the polls next fall. And the grounds: cruel and unusual budget cuts and aggravated assault on the working people of the Golden State.

Meanwhile, as all this was going on statewide, Los Angelinos were making history. In a landslide, voters elected Antonio Villaraigosa as the first Mexican American mayor in more than a century. His victory is of enormous significance and vividly demonstrates the new role of the Mexican American people in our nation's politics, the necessity of multiracial unity, the growing power of labor, and the desire for progressive politics among the electorate in California and elsewhere.

And this bubbling upsurge doesn't stop here. Organizations and campaigns addressing everything from funding for the cities to the abolition of nuclear weapons to global warming are on the move.

Ohio, Michigan and Arizona will have on their ballots this fall referenda to raise the minimum wage.

Meanwhile a much more ambitious campaign against Wal-Mart is being put in place by the AFL-CIO. We should join this fight in every city and state.

National gatherings, such as the Take Back America conference and the conventions of the Steelworkers Union and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, also reflected the growing mood of militancy.

A national demonstration led by Jesse Jackson's Rainbow/PUSH Coalition is scheduled for August in Atlanta to demand the renewal of the Voting Rights Act.

And September 24-26, United for Peace and Justice is sponsoring a major peace demonstration in Washington, DC that will demand an end to the occupation of Iraq.

THE COMING ELECTIONS

Each of these struggles—and we have to be in all of them—will converge with the 2005 and 2006 elections. In a few months, governors in New Jersey and Virginia and mayors and council people in many cities, including New York, will be elected. While the progressive movement has yet to rally around a single candidate in the Big Apple, it hopefully will, with the result being the defeat of New York's billionaire mayor, Michael Bloomberg, and a victory for the beleaguered but proud residents of our country's largest city. As in L.A., the unity of labor with the African American and Latino peoples is of decisive importance.

Taking back Congress in 2006 may seem like a Herculean task, but it is doable, and a favorable outcome would turn Bush into a lame duck, as well as create new space for legislative victories.

It would also give a big boost to the movement to defeat the extreme right in 2008.

State elections next year take on major importance as well. Given the pushing down of new responsibilities onto the states by the Bush administration and given their exploding fiscal crises, the outcome of these elections will have a major impact on the quality of life for tens of millions of people. We should find ways to participate in them.

SOCIAL SECURITY: THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES

More than anything else, the fight to prevent the privatization of Social Security has commanded the attention of millions across the length and breadth of the country. Scores of town hall meetings, visits to Congress people, petition drives and demonstrations against Bush's signature legislative initiative have been organized in only a few months.

On every stop of Bush's tour to promote privatization, protesters have angrily greeted him. And it seems that the more he travels, the less support his program commands as people—including young people—realize that this is no more than a gift to Wall Street at their expense.

As a result of the growing opposition, some Congressional Republicans are cutting their losses and defecting from the President. And this will only increase, as we get closer to 2006. Meanwhile the Democrats so far are holding firm.

However, it would be a huge mistake to become complacent. There is too much at stake for the extreme right to throw in the towel so soon.

The next phase of the campaign will include a special mobilization for August 14, the 70th Anniversary of the signing of the Social Security Act.

We Communists feel very strongly about Social Security, a program whose roots we helped plant in the fight for workers' rights and lives. We say to the right-wingers: Hands-off Social Security!

NOT SURPRISING

That Bush has encountered unexpected and widespread resistance to this privatization plan is not so surprising. In recent years a new structure of feeling has emerged. At its core is a sense of insecurity regarding the future.

This is traceable to the truly profound changes that have occurred in the economy, politics and culture of late capitalism. Taken together, these changes have eroded traditional patterns of community and work, challenged accepted values, speeded up the pace of change, compressed distance, intensified economic anxieties to young and old alike, induced a deep sense of mass powerlessness, and overloaded our capacity to process new information.

Consequently, millions of people feel adrift and are searching for some stability and meaning in their lives.

Bush's plan to privatize Social Security only adds to this. Why would anyone, except for the wealthy, want to eliminate one of the few forms of social insurance that brings them a measure of security in a world that feels so insecure and so out of control? The polls, the mass anger, the opposition of nearly every major democratic organization, and the unity of the Democrats tell us they don't.

This turn of events constitutes a major setback for the Bush administration. For it believed that the elimination in one fell swoop of the main underpinning of the welfare state would set in motion the political forces to dissolve every entitlement program won in the 20th century, open up a vast new field of capital accumulation for finance capital, and realign the political balance of power decisively and permanently in favor of political reaction.

But their plans so far have been foiled and they are, excuse my language, "pissed."

STALLED ON A GLOBAL LEVEL

On an international level the Bush administration is flying into strong headwinds as well.

In Latin America, neoliberalism is in retreat and new social forces are winning political power and pushing their countries on a different developmental path. The Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela continues to deepen, despite the best efforts of its former ruling elite, in league with the White House, to overthrow the government of Hugo Chavez.

Ecuador, with its large indigenous population is the newest country that is throwing off the shackles of the past, as is Bolivia. Mexico seems poised to elect a new president who sits on the left of the political spectrum.

And Cuba continues the process of socialist construction despite being targeted by the Bush administration, and is a beacon of hope and heroism to the people of the world.

It goes without saying that we have to do more to convince the American people that our policies toward Cuba need to be radically changed. Our government can begin by lifting the travel ban, by extraditing Luis Posada Carriles to Venezuela to stand trial for the bombing of an airliner that killed 73 passengers, and by freeing the Cuban 5. Will this

Convention resolve to send a communication to Congress to demand the extradition of this terrorist and the immediate release of the five Cuban anti-terrorists? Will we resolve to do more to end the blockade and establish neighborly relations with the people of Cuba?

SHIFTING WORLD RELATIONSHIPS

The states of Europe, notwithstanding their own internal differences over European integration, are at loggerheads with the U.S. government over issues that won't go away.

The situation in Afghanistan is far from stabilized. The election results in India were not to the liking of the Bush administration, and it has not been able to enlist the Chinese and South Korean governments to join its efforts to isolate North Korea. The White House looks upon the emerging regional groupings in Africa and Latin America warily. Socialist Vietnam continues to register successes in socialist construction.

As for China, it is building socialism in its own way and evolving into a powerful country and state. While some on the left question its socio-economic character and trajectory, China is undeniably the only state power that poses a threat to U.S. hegemonic ambitions in the foreseeable future, which explains the increasingly hostile attitude of the Bush administration.

In the Middle East, the Palestinian movement refuses to bargain away its national rights, Iran refuses to buckle to the dictates of Washington. Lebanon is very unstable. Syria refuses to knuckle under. The ruling elites of Saudi Arabia and Egypt are feeling new challenges.

And the occupation of Iraq is turning into a quagmire for the administration. As the bloodshed continues and as the costs grow, the American people are becoming increasingly disenchanted with Bush's war.

Even some soldiers' families have joined the opposition and, despite the best efforts of the military to recruit young men and women, fewer and fewer are willing to become cannon fodder.

No matter where you look, save the White House and Pentagon, you will find little enthusiasm for this war. In Bush's own party few cheerleaders are found and this will only grow, as the midterm elections get closer. The time is now for progressive leaders of the Democratic Party, labor, and other people's organizations to speak out against the war and for setting a date for withdrawal. Bush's speech June 28 speech was an attempt to hold back the exploding disillusionment with the war and justify a long-term presence in Iraq, but he won't be successful.

A few weeks ago a bipartisan bill was introduced that sets October 2006 as a withdrawal date of U.S. forces from Iraq. While we would agree that the date should be earlier, it is

imperative that the peace movement presses hard the Bush administration and Congress to set a date for withdrawal.

Such a demand will undoubtedly strike a responsive chord among the American people. During the Vietnam War the demand of the more realistic and responsible sections of the peace movement was “Negotiate Now.” In today’s circumstances the demand that will give millions a voice in the struggle for peace is “Set the Date Now.”

Setting a date for withdrawal of U.S. troops and then their actual withdrawal would be a strategic defeat for the Bush administration, not only in Iraq, but everywhere. It would create a better climate to settle other issues in the Middle East, beginning with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It would also help to corral the interventionist plans of the Bush administration. And it would underscore the importance of political and diplomatic solutions to outstanding international issues, such as the blockade of Cuba, the status of the Korean peninsula, Taiwan, Palestinian-Israeli conflict, etc.

For those who are not yet convinced of the wisdom of withdrawing from Iraq, we need to press on four points. First, we have to make the argument that an end to the occupation will change the political dynamics in Iraq in a positive way. Second, we have to expose the domestic costs of war and how it impacts the lives of working-class and racially oppressed communities. Third, we have to declaim that this war is not about democracy or combating terrorism; in fact, it is easy to make a case that a protracted occupation encourages terrorists and makes our country less safe from attack.

Finally, we have to say once again that this is an imperialist war for control of oil and the securing of a geo-strategic advantage in that region of the world.

In all likelihood, people will respond to these arguments, including leaders of labor and other democratic movements who up to now have underestimated the antiwar feeling among their members. More and more they will identify with the antiwar movement, but through their own institutional forms.

As for the internal situation in Iraq, the Iraqi people are struggling to regain some normalcy in their lives and set their country on a democratic, non-sectarian, independent path. But the obstacles are immense, beginning with the U.S. occupation and an armed insurgency that is primarily the handiwork of former supporters of Saddam Hussein and Islamic extremists.

I want to take this opportunity to express our warm solidarity with the representative of the Iraqi Communist Party. We appreciate the complexity of your struggle and will do everything that we can to assist you.

What should we conclude about this fluid and contentious world situation? Simply put, the unilateral pursuit of empire is a difficult project. While the U.S. military possesses truly awesome power that gives it the wherewithal to impose its dictates on subordinate

states and regions, it is also true that even U.S. imperialism runs up against limits and obstacles to the exercise of that power.

A COMPLEX WORLD

More so than we initially appreciated, the notion of a single superpower effortlessly dominating world politics on the strength of its military power doesn't accord with actual events nor fully capture the complexity of power relations in the contemporary world.

Power is located at the military level to be sure, but it also has to be reinforced by dynamism at the economic level and coupled to some measure of consent from other states.

If you don't believe me, take a quick look at the sorry condition of the Russian state. It possesses military might and harbors global aspirations, but it has become a second-rate power.

In contrast, the U.S. possesses impressive military muscle and immense economic might, but it is no longer the most dynamic center of capital accumulation and its standing in the international community has tanked over the past few years, as its former Cold War allies pursue a more independent course on a range of issues, such as arms control, global warming, aid to developing countries, international law, trade agreements, and so forth.

Some political theorists even say that the world is in the first stages of a transition from one hegemonic power (the United States) to another one (a regional grouping in East Asia at the center of which is China). Such a transition, say these same theorists, will cause crises and chaos in the world system in the 21st century.

SPUTTERING ENGINE

So Bush has no mandate, his walk has lost its swagger, his political bloc is fraying; the movement that opposed him in 2004 is regrouping, and the international situation isn't Bush-friendly.

All of which creates new opportunities for the all-people's coalition. So what is to be done? I will attempt to answer that question.

An immediate task is to continue the regrouping of the core constituencies of the all-people's coalition, namely the working class, the nationally and racially oppressed, women and youth. These are the power bases to organize majorities on issues like Social Security, ending the occupation, judicial nominations, the Patriot Act, CAFTA, the Free Choice Act, Wal-Mart, reproductive rights, gay rights, and electoral victories in 2005 and 2006.

Up until now, these forces have operated largely along parallel lines. And as impressive as this has been, it is fair to argue that without organizational forms that unite and structure the democratic movements, the transition from the politics of protest to the politics of power, from a defensive posture to an offensive one, will be much more difficult.

We and the larger left have a role to play in this regard, not so much at the national level, but at the local and state level where we have extensive contacts, good relations with labor and other democratic forces, and occupy some leadership positions.

At this stage such formations will more likely gain organizational coherence around one or another issue. Social Security comes to mind immediately and as we get closer to 2006, the elections will be another site.

Hopefully more organized coalitions at the local and state level that bring together the key social forces and articulate a broadly constituted political program will come out of these experiences.

Already, various forces have offered some proposals along these lines. Among progressives, a program of economic populism is advocated, which some argue was missing from and explains the defeat of John Kerry last year. Without such a program, they argue, the peeling away of working-class voters by Republicans or their exit from politics will continue. While economic issues have to figure prominently in any program, they are not enough by themselves. Issues of equality, war and peace, etc., have to find a place too.

On the other hand, these proposals coming from a left perspective have their own blank spots as well. They almost suggest that a movement has to be invented, somehow forgetting the powerful challenges to Bush's policies over the past two years that culminated in a near victory in last year's election. Nor do they appreciate that the labor movement has to be on the ground floor of any movement that hopes to successfully contest the right wing over political power.

Interestingly none of the proposals write off the Democrats. While most have no illusions that the Democratic Party will consistently offer a spirited opposition to the Bush agenda nor transform itself into a people's party, they don't believe that a complete break with the Democrats at this moment will get anyone a flea hop closer to a more just society.

We would agree with this assessment, although we would add that progressives and left-thinking people should give their full support to expressions of political independence at every level, beginning with labor's political action forms and state formations like the Working Families Party.

In doing so, we lay the ground for the formation of an all-people's anti-corporate party whose task would be to curb monopoly power as a whole.

Of course, we will get a better hearing for our views if we are participants, activists, doers, and problem-solvers. The advice of Monday morning quarterbacks who are far from the heat and pressures of the battle isn't welcome, especially among movement veterans who know the difference between wisdom and abstract pontificating, between a lot of heat and not much light.

STRATEGIC POLICY

Our Party's strategic policy has served us well. It has positioned us in the midst of the class struggle, in the midst of the fight against racism, in the midst of the fight for peace and equality, and in the midst of the fight for political independence.

This is not surprising because our strategic policy is rooted in the objective situation and political alignment of class and social forces at this moment.

We can't allow our ideological mood and temper, or our occasional frustration springing from the grinding and defensive character of today's struggles, to pull us away from this strategic course.

Lenin once wrote in answer to Trotsky and other critics who opposed his notion of a democratic stage of the struggle in Czarist Russia:

“To the proletariat the struggle for political liberty and a democratic republic in a bourgeois society is only one of the necessary stages in the struggle for the social revolution which will overthrow the bourgeois system.... Strictly differentiating between stages that are essentially different... does not at all mean indefinitely postponing one's ultimate aim, or slowing down one's progress in advance. On the contrary, it is for the purpose of accelerating the advance and of achieving the ultimate aim as quickly as possible that it is necessary to understand the relations of classes in modern society. Nothing but disillusionment and unending vacillation await those...who would be socialist, yet are afraid openly to call the impending revolution in Russia—a bourgeois revolution.” (The Autocracy and the Proletariat)

Lenin had no hesitation of embracing a political task—a bourgeois democratic revolution—that fell far short of a socialist revolution. In fact, the idea that it can be bypassed for a more revolutionary stage he considered so much foolishness.

Similarly, our strategic policy to assemble a broad labor-led coalition is no detour, but rather the key link to moving the whole chain of struggle forward. Winning this struggle will reconfigure class and social relations on every front to the advantage of the working class and popular movement.

This has to be the ground floor of communist politics. Were a different administration in the White House, were the Republicans to lose their majority in the Congress, were the ultra-right presence to fade, were right-wing ideology to lose its potency, were the mass constituency of the ultra-right to fracture, were the depth and degree of activity of millions to increase—were all this to happen—then our strategic policy, alliance relationships, political demands, and tactics of unity would change accordingly.

Does this mean that we rein in our demands at this stage of struggle—the answer is no. But we should never forget that the best way to win advanced demands is to complete this stage of struggle. Once the political terrain shifts in a decisive fashion the possibilities of winning national health care, union rights, affirmative action, citizenship rights for immigrants, a peace budget, and so on increases geometrically.

Over the past few years, we have gained enormous prestige and goodwill, we have strengthened our relations to labor, we have made new connections to broader movements, we have been elected to leadership positions of mass organizations, we have brought our ideas into the broader movement, the *People's Weekly World* (PWW) and *Political Affairs* (PA) have won new friends, and we have increased our size, all because of our policy of building the broadest possible unity to defeat the right wing.

Are there weaknesses in our work? Of course there are, but they don't stem from our strategic policy. In fact, our strategic policy has positioned us to address our biggest shortcoming—the need to rapidly increase our membership size and revitalize the party clubs.

Thus, in the months and years ahead, every communist has to become a builder of our Party and press. Let me repeat that: every communist has to become a builder of our Party and press.

Everyone has to become a communist spokesperson to an ever-expanding network of coworkers, co-activists and friends. Let me repeat that: everyone has to become a Communist spokesperson to an ever-expanding network of coworkers, co-activists and friends.

The old notion that this task is the responsibility of a few communist leaders and activists needs to receive an honorable, but long overdue and much needed, burial.

After all, the Cold War and McCarthyism are over. The Cold War is not even a memory for most of the members of the Young Communist League (YCL). Therefore, we must put to rest the political culture, habits and practices that were shaped by that era.

With some notable exceptions, it made us too timid when it comes to bringing our ideas into movements and struggles; it made us too timid to sell subscriptions to the PWW and PA; last but not least, it made us too timid to ask people to join the Party and YCL.

The Party as an organization has to grow by a variety of means: our press and publications, the internet, public events, classes—all of this—but it is also imperative that every communist overcome timidity and, taking a page out of the book of our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender comrades, come out of the closet.

For in the end, the Party is not some distant organization, but it is you, you, and you and I. It is all of us. Each of us has to become a recruiter of new members, a builder of our press, and a tribune of our ideas.

THE WORKING CLASS & CLASS STRUGGLE

Not since the Great Depression in the 1930s has the working class experienced such an assault on its living standards, rights, and conditions of work. What is striking about it is the fact that everything that workers have won is all back on the table and all at once. It is the perfect storm.

Engels wrote,

“The organization of the workers and their constantly growing resistance will possibly check the increase of misery to a certain extent. However, what certainly does increase is the insecurity of existence.” (Engels, A Critique of the Social Democratic Programme of 1891)

Isn't this sense of insecurity the condition of every section of the working class today? Since the transitory gains won in the late 1990s, which only partly compensated for earlier reversals, average real wages have been declining.

The relatively low official unemployment rate masks substantial hidden unemployment. Older workers have substantially increased their employment rate, which means that for younger workers there has probably been no improvement since the end of the recession. This trend is a spin-off of the pension crisis, which is growing and will continue to grow.

Working families have maintained living standards only because of consumer credit, longer hours of work, and by turning every family member into a wage earner.

The entry of women into the workforce in record numbers over the past thirty years is the most notable feature of this trend. While the right wing hails the traditional (patriarchal) family unit, with the women bearing children and performing unpaid labor to reproduce male labor power for a new bout of class exploitation, the logic of the right wing's policies and the deeper transformations in the system of capitalism are forcing women into the workplace where they are forced to occupy subordinate and underpaid positions. Meanwhile, the elimination of the social safety net and social entitlements and the additional task of elder care have further added to women's unpaid labor in the household.

Bankruptcies are also rising, and the new bankruptcy law and rising rates for consumer debt will force millions into a form of indentured servitude. Medical costs are a huge burden, and cause half of all bankruptcies. And the pension crisis, as some of our own comrades know, is galloping across industries and decimating working-class communities.

While this brutal offensive is class-wide in scope, the decline in living standards falls especially hard on women, young people, industrial workers, African American, Latino and other racially and nationally oppressed workers, and immigrants. NAFTA and other trade agreements have resulted in a great increase in immigrant workers who are ruthlessly exploited, have no rights, are under increasing legal pressure, and live separated from their families, often for long periods of time.

The attack on living standards has coincided with an equally vicious attack on working conditions. Union rights have been gutted and workplace safety sabotaged. The pace of work has been intensified and work rules have been trashed. Jobs are combined left and right. The destruction of our country's manufacturing base is encouraged by governmental policies. And new technology comes into the workplace only for the purpose of displacing workers and speeding up the workforce that remains.

The flip side of this coin is that corporate profits are astronomically high, and the wealthiest of the wealthy are making out like bandits. Income inequality is at record levels—in fact, the gap is so wide that even mainstream publications worry that it has gone too far and could end in a social explosion.

NOT A NEW SITUATION

The deteriorating conditions of the U.S. working class are not new. If anything what I just described continues a trend that began more than a quarter-century ago. There have been moments when the working class won some gains, to be sure, but the graph line has been either flat or downward.

While much of this is attributable to the new stage of capitalist development and globalization, it is also a result of the economic policies of successive administrations.

Capitalist globalization is an objective process, but its particular trajectory and particular impact are in no small measure a political process. That is, they depend on the ability of one or another section of the capitalist class to utilize the state and global institutions as well as its financial power to advance its interests, while at the same time reducing working people's living standards and hollowing out their political and organizational bases of power. Some call this "neoliberalism" and it has been pursued with a vengeance in its neoconservative, ultra-right incarnation, but more about that in a moment.

While the reasons for this go beyond the scope of this report, suffice it to say that an old regime of accumulation and regulation of the economy and labor power (Fordism and

military Keynesianism) has been supplanted by a new regime (flexible networked production, neoliberalism, and military Keynesianism). And the transition from one to another occurs in a world capitalist economy that is saturated with excess commodities, unable to generate a sustained and robust economic expansion, and experiencing increasing instability.

NEW CONDITIONS OF STRUGGLE

As you would expect, this transformation of the conditions of accumulation and regulation has transformed the conditions and heightened the intensity of the class struggle. So far, these changes have been to the advantage of capital.

So much so that the owners of capital are setting aside the old social contract between labor and capital, as limited as it was, in favor of a new contract in which labor is virtually stripped of any rights.

And since the election of Reagan, the recasting of the labor-capital relationship in capital's favor has been immeasurably aided by the ascendancy of right-wing neoconservatism in our country, which from the very start has employed the full coercive power of the state—legal, legislative, institutional, regulatory, financial, and force itself—to fracture and weaken the working class and its organized sector. Early on, the architects of this policy stated straight out that their aim was a “union free” environment.

These neoconservative attacks on labor haven't take place in isolation, but rather have been bundled up with a generalized assault on democratic rights and especially the rights and conditions of racially oppressed communities, women and immigrants.

Nor can they be separated from the ultra right's assertion of power on a global level. They are two sides of a single coin to restore U.S. capitalism's fortunes and unrivaled power.

More than we sometimes like to admit, the attacks on labor has been successful. Nevertheless, the meaning and implications of this process cannot be reduced simply to quantitative measurement, that is, how much was won and lost in collective bargaining, whether a particular piece of legislation passed or failed or whether union membership grew or declined in the course of a year.

All this is important to be sure, but communists also closely examine the qualitative features of the class struggle, namely, the character of the struggle, the degree of unity achieved in the course of struggle, the growth of class-consciousness, the winning of new allies, and the overall balance of power.

By this measure, big sections of labor and its leadership have been adjusting their thinking, structures, and practices to new conditions of struggle. New demands have surfaced, new constituencies have emerged, new alliances have been cemented, a new

level of consciousness has evolved, and new forms of political independence have sprung up. And the unions, which are the main mass organization of and schools of struggle for our diverse working class are evolving into champions of the whole working class and other social strata and social movements.

Compared to where labor was under the Meany and Kirkland regimes, the changes have been enormous. Compared to where it has to go, much still needs to be done. But we should never forget that the working class is up against enormous concentrations of class power at the economic level and a murderous neoconservative grouping at the political level.

THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Indeed, since Bush entered the White House, one of his overarching missions has been to destroy organized labor, not only because it is the obstacle to the extraction of maximum surplus value at the point of production, but also because it has been the mainstay of the developing fightback against the ultra right.

Labor's role in last year's election was nothing less than remarkable. For some time, the labor movement has recognized that the terrain of struggle in the economic and union-organizing arena is dependent on a shift in power in the political arena. Without such a shift, the going will be uphill for the working class. While class and democratic struggles bring victories, the winning and consolidation of qualitatively new conditions and terms of the class struggle in the workplace and collective bargaining arenas will occur only with a decisive shift of power in favor of the working class and people and against the ultra right in the political arena. Isn't that the lesson of the Great Depression and the New Deal?

For this and other reasons, we are greatly concerned about the impending split in the AFL-CIO. July 25-28 the labor federation will hold its national convention. This is perhaps the most dangerous time for labor since the bitter days of the Cold War. The ultra right and big business are licking their chops at the prospect of a major split. There is a grim possibility that five major unions, representing close to a third of the membership, will leave the AFL-CIO. They have already formed the Change to Win coalition, which could become the basis for a new and competing national labor federation.

Our position is clear. We are committed to strengthening and increasing labor unity. In a time of all-out attack on workers' rights and on democracy in general, we are squarely against splits that will only serve those who want to destroy organized labor.

No one in the labor movement, including the AFL-CIO leadership, thinks that things are fine and nothing has to change. But whatever changes are made should result in greater and higher levels of unity, not fracturing and splits.

As our Party's Labor Commission statement put it, "Rigid demands, name calling, and ultimatums will not change anything, but only harden positions and undermine real and constructive debate. No idea, no matter how important, no short-term interest, no matter how pressing, no single issue, no matter how imperative, can be placed above the absolute need for the greatest possible labor unity today." And I would add that those labor leaders who are pushing for a split are making a grave error.

Too little of the discussion about labor's future has taken place in the union halls and in the workplace. Very early on we recognized the importance of this debate and the potential it had to either help or harm labor and the people's movements. Our Party, the PWW and our trade union comrades have worked hard to fight for unity, against a split and for positive changes that will strengthen labor.

We will continue in these next three weeks to do everything we can—especially to mobilize rank-and-file union members—to oppose a split. But if one does occur, then we will hit the ground running, and work with both the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win unions. We will throw ourselves into every campaign that will unite labor in action and show the power of solidarity. We will continue to see labor as the core of building the broadest possible coalitions to beat back the ultra right and the transnational corporations. And we will fight to unite and reunite labor into one powerful movement.

One immediate struggle around which all of labor and its allies must rally is the struggle of the General Motors workers to save their jobs and benefits. GM management has issued an ultimatum and labor and all of its allies must prepare for a bitter battle. And every communist, every club, every district, and every collective must answer the bell too.

THE FIGHT AGAINST RACISM

Racism is not a static phenomenon. It changes and has to be constantly studied.

We do this in order to become more effective fighters against racism and for equality. We can't rest on our history, although we should draw inspiration and understanding from it as we go forward.

Racism is one of the main fault lines of our nation's economics, culture, politics, and historical trajectory. It brings billions of dollars and confers enormous advantages to the owners of capital who are overwhelmingly white. It sustains the rule of the capitalist class. It's a shameful violation of our nation's ideals and is morally debilitating.

Racism is not a given of human existence. It is neither above history nor a completely autonomous structure of oppression. If it were, then we might as well give up now.

Rather, racism is a product of history and struggle. As a set of practices and as a developed ideology it arose in the course of capitalist development.

Racism is fluid and adaptable. It doesn't live alone, but mingles with backward anti-working class, anti-people, and pro-imperialist ideologies and practices. They come as a package.

Racism is not simply one group of people thinking badly about another. Or, to say it differently, racism is not just an attitude, not just a feeling or a prejudice.

Instead, racism is materially rooted in the institutional structures of our society. The material conditions and social relations of racial exploitation, subordination and dependence are not relics of the past (slavery and Jim Crow), but rather, they are constantly reproduced in contemporary life.

Racism mobilizes white people in a reactionary direction and facilitated the ultra right's ascendancy to power. In conferring relative advantages on white workers and people, it makes it more difficult for them to see that they have material as well as non-material interests in fighting racism. And, finally, it locks tens of millions of people of color into grossly inferior conditions of life.

NEW RACIST OFFENSIVE

The rise of the right and capitalist restructuring in the early 80s was accompanied by a new racist offensive—featuring the downsizing of manufacturing, which threw hundreds of thousands of workers of color out of work and major cities into long-term crisis, the privatization and hollowing out of the social safety net, the stacking of federal courts with racist judges, redistricting aimed at reducing minority political representation, the growth of the prison-industrial complex, and the weakening of affirmative action.

Since entering office, Bush has ramped up attacks against people of color through the courts, legislation, regulatory measures and executive orders. Despite the “color blind” rhetoric and nominations of a few African Americans and Latinos to high positions in his administration, on the strength of his record, Bush is a racist president. Scratch George Bush and you will find the ghost of Strom Thurmond.

RACISM AND 9/11

The racist assault was given a new dimension and intensified following September 11, 2001. The Patriot Act and numerous other laws and policies were rushed through Congress or implemented by executive order with little or no debate.

As a result, the government ordered the deportation of up to 13,000 immigrants and detained more than 1,200 Arab and Muslim men in the months after 9/11. Of these, some

remain in “indefinite detention,” without charge, without trial, and, in some cases, without legal representation.

The FBI asked colleges to turn over information on Arab and Muslim students, and various agencies conducted “voluntary interviews” with Iraqi Americans in the lead-up to the 2003 invasion.

One of the most egregious practices was the nominally voluntary “special registration” of immigrants. From September 2002 to September 2003, 93,741 people registered through Point of Entry registration, and 83,519 men and boys registered through the first round of “special registration.” Of the registrants, 13,799 people were put into removal proceedings and 2,870 were detained. Almost none were charged with terrorist acts.

Overall, the policies justified by the “war on terror” do little to make Americans safer. In fact, they make immigrants and other people of color in the U.S. a lot less safe and give the go-ahead to racist vigilantes, including the Minutemen and other hate mongers.

These policies also served to reestablish the legitimacy of racial profiling in policing, an idea that was becoming increasingly unpopular before September 11.

To rationalize this new racist offensive, the right wing think-tanks have manufactured a racial discourse over the past two decades.

This discourse goes something like this: “Great progress has been made in getting rid of racism; we are now a color-blind society. The roots of social and political problems of African Americans and other racially oppressed peoples are individual and internal to their communities, culture, values, habits and family dynamics. Race conscious remedies foster dependence and alienate white people.” And finally, according to this new racial discourse, “What is past is past, and the starting line in life is nearly the same for everybody.”

While this discourse substitutes for cruder forms of racism that have lost their ideological potency and are unacceptable to significant sections of white Americans, it is no less dangerous or disabling. In fact, it is in some ways more dangerous because it is more sophisticated.

Thus, the struggle against the new racist offensive is imperative on an ideological and action level. No deep-going political transformation is possible without a consistent and many-sided struggle against racism and for full equality. Marx once said labor in the white skin could never be free as long as labor in the black skin is branded. Appreciating this crucial and penetrating insight opens up new possibilities of struggle and victories. Despite its persistence and embedment in our society, racism can be transcended. If we leave Chicago convinced that the fight against racism and for equality has a new urgency and can be won, for that reason alone we could declare this Convention a success.

But what do we mean by a new urgency, and what does it require of us?

It demands more initiative. It demands a broad mobilization for the renewal of the Voting Rights Act and the defeat of the Patriot Act. It demands a fight against budget cuts and layoffs. It demands a fight against gentrification and commercial development that uproots whole communities of the nationally and racially oppressed. It demands a fight against Bush's "No Child Left Behind" policy. It demands the eviction of military recruiters from high schools and poor neighborhoods. It demands the abolition of mandatory sentencing and draconian drug laws.

It demands a simple and short path to citizenship and the arrest of vigilante anti-immigrant gangs. It demands fully empowered citizen review boards over local police. It demands a full-blooded commitment by the federal government to revitalize our cities. It demands tough enforcement of civil right laws.

It demands the immediate sacking of Bush's appointees to the Civil Rights Commission. It demands that the discriminatory laws directed at Muslim, Arab and South Asian people be rescinded. It demands a renewed commitment to affirmative action and other race-conscious remedies. It demands a big increase in the minimum wage. It demands a federal budget that prioritizes economic justice, peace and equality.

The struggle against racism is not simply a subset of the struggle for democracy but the most important element of this struggle. It is this understanding we have to bring to the working-class and people's movements and we have to do it with a new urgency, confident that white workers and white people generally can be won to the necessity and moral rightness of this struggle.

ROLE OF THE LEFT & LEFT-CENTER UNITY

In the pre-Convention period, the role of the left has come up in several discussions. Since different views have been expressed, I would like to give you my opinion.

The role of the left is to move and unite broader forces. It is to engage in the struggles that are stirring people to action. And it is to help the broader movements to move from one stage of struggle to the next.

The role of the left is not to invent the class struggle, nor to monitor the leaders of the broader democratic movement, nor is its principal task to be a fount of wisdom for those who are slugging it out in the trenches.

The left shouldn't squirrel itself away in pint-sized forms that only attract people of like mind and are tone deaf to the actual dynamics of the existing struggle. The role of the left and left-led forms change as conditions of struggle change, as shifts takes place in the thinking and actions of millions.

Left-led forms today should have a broader character than they did in the 1960s and 1970s. They should engage with the main organizations of the working class and people. And they should fit everything that they are doing into the overall struggle against the Bush administration.

We would make a mistake if we tried to duplicate the rank-and-file organizations that we participated in nearly four decades ago. At the time we had no voice, no venue to express and act on our views. Right wing, anti-communist, and class-collaborationist elements, including some right-wing social democrats, dominated the labor movement at the time.

But much has changed since then. New currents have emerged in the labor and people's movements. More than twenty years ago, our beloved comrade Fred Gaboury coined the expression "fresh winds" to signify the growth of militant currents at various levels of the trade union movement. Since then these trends have developed further, while simultaneously, the influence of the right has diminished.

As a result, we adjusted our tactics, making them more flexible and open-ended, so that we could help build the broadest possible labor unity against the corporate offensive and the growing right danger.

In his address to the 7th Congress of the Communist International, Dimitrov, in a radical shift, suggested that the communists unite with social democratic workers who were left-of-center in their thinking, but not communists by any means, so that maximum unity could be achieved against fascism. Our situation is different, but much can still be learned from a reading of that section of his speech:

"It must not be imagined," Dimitrov argued, "that the Social Democratic workers who are becoming revolutionized will all at once and on a mass scale pass over to the position of consistent class struggle and will straightaway unite with the Communists without any intermediate stages... No. It is... the business of Communists, to help them to free themselves from the hold of reformist ideology. The work of explaining the principles and program must be carried out on patiently, in a comradely fashion."

"We shall do all in our power," he went on to say, "to make it easier, not only for the Social Democratic workers, but also for those leading members of the Social Democratic Parties and organizations who sincerely desire to adopt the revolutionary class position [fighting fascism], to work and fight with us against the class enemy."

"The attitude to the united front," he said in ending this section of his report, "marks the watershed between the reactionary section of Social Democracy and the sections that are becoming revolutionary."

Don't Dimitrov's words have meaning for us today? We aren't looking fascism in the face, but the Bush administration is a right-wing authoritarian regime and broad sections of the labor movement—center forces, social democrats, Democrats, social reformists, liberals, even some Republicans—are opposing its policies and battling capitalist globalization as well.

Don't we have to welcome this shift? Don't our tactics have to take into account these new realities and change accordingly? Don't we have to shed the political skin of a bygone era when the main currents of labor are? Don't we have to unite with them in fighting policies of the Bush administration?

The answer is we do and we have.

And yet for a few comrades, who themselves are on the periphery of the labor movement, it is hard to get rid of that old political skin. They want to accent differences, not commonalities; they want to take labor's leaders to the woodshed rather than finding ways to disagree without being disagreeable. And they never forgot, for they never learned, that the basis for left-center unity is the most advanced demands of the center, not the demands of the left. Gus, Henry Winston, George Meyers, Helen Winter and other such Party veterans drummed this ABC of communist politics into the heads of comrades of my generation who, in our younger years, tended to be a bit sectarian.

Thankfully, most of us learned this lesson.

Does this mean the left should mothball its ideology and deeper understanding, and in our case, the building of the Party and press at a much quicker pace?

By no means. But again we make these contributions within the context of joint struggle and unity, within the context of assembling the main social forces that are necessary to slow down and reverse the Bush juggernaut.

Although I have spent some time discussing left-led forms, I also want to say that in many, many instances, communists and the larger left don't need intermediary forms, but instead can participate in broad mass forms in which we are welcomed and, in more than a few cases, are in the leadership.

We would make a grave mistake, especially in view of our size, if we didn't avail ourselves of every opportunity to become directly engaged in the main organizational expressions of the working class and people.

THE PRE-CONVENTION DISCUSSION

The pre-Convention discussion has engaged most of the Party membership and clubs. The discussions have been lively and most comrades generally agree with our two discussion documents (the Draft Party Program and the Draft Convention Main Political

Resolution). Of course, nearly everyone has suggestions to improve them politically and stylistically. And that is how it should be. After all, both are drafts, not final documents.

There were some differences of views, but less than what you might think from reading the pre-Convention materials. Usually comrades take the time to write when they don't agree with something, and not the other way around.

That there is broad agreement on the direction of the draft program comes as no surprise to me. The committee has simply put into programmatic form our political assessments and practices of the past twenty years.

It was not long into Reagan's first term that Comrade Gus Hall introduced the concept of the all-people's coalition against the ultra right. In his report to the December 1981 meeting of the National Committee, he wrote,

“Only a broad coalition of all the forces on all fronts—an all-people's front—united around a common program for democratic rights, racial and national equality, economic justice, and peace can guarantee... victory.”

Later in the same report he wrote, *“All tactical questions must now be synchronized with the overall objective of defeating Reagan and all the Reaganite politicians.”*

He and other comrades further developed and refined this policy as the ultra right gained more and more power, culminating in their control of all three branches of the federal political structure.

And at our last Convention four years ago, we reaffirmed that position unanimously.

So this strategic stage isn't a new kid on the block. It has a history. I don't fault the comrades who updated the program in 1981 for not mentioning it because the ultra-right danger was only in its infancy, but I would fault the present committee if this strategic concept were not at the core of the program they have drafted.

Were we to revert back to the old program, we would find ourselves outside the main currents of struggle. Where would it have left us in the recent elections? I'll tell you where: out in the cold.

SOME DIFFERENCES

While most comrades agree with the draft program's substance and direction, a handful hold such strong differences with it that they propose that the present committee be disbanded and a new committee be formed to update the old program

I don't agree with this approach at all.

Our previous strategic policy of curbing monopoly power as a whole was overtaken by events, namely, the ascendancy to power of the ultra right and the most reactionary section of transnational capital.

Over this same period, other changes of enormous consequence occurred. The class struggle took on new features; socialism suffered a historic defeat with the collapse of the Soviet Union; the world balance of forces changed qualitatively; the national question assumed some new characteristics; and the depth and scope of the environmental crisis grew.

These changes alone would warrant a major editing, if not a full rewrite, of the old program, but what really forces us to write a new program is the new configuration of power that has taken shape in our country and the grave dangers associated with that.

So that we are all on the same page let me briefly review some of the main elements of our current strategic policy.

One, the ultra right has over the course of two decades achieved a position of dominance over the main political structures of our country and represents the most reactionary section of the ruling class.

Two, divisions and differences over domestic and international issues wrack the capitalist class.

Three, the main form of the class struggle is against the Bush administration and the main obstacle to class and democratic advance is, as you would guess, the Bush administration. Win the battle against Bush and the ultra right and the whole chain of struggle will move forward.

Four, at the core of a broad all-people's coalition is the working class, the racially oppressed, women and youth and around them are gathered other diverse social forces and movements, but our strategic policy also envisions the winning of every possible ally, to use Lenin's words, no matter how unstable and vacillating.

Five, with the takeover of the Republican Party by its right wing, the old phrase, "Tweedledee and Tweedledum," no longer fits. Obviously there are still similarities between the two parties of the capitalist class, but just as obvious and more important from the standpoint of the class struggle are the differences between them at the level of policy formation and constituency base.

It is easy to rail at the Democrats with the same vigor that one rails at the Republicans, but a Communist Party has to do more than display its revolutionary zeal. It must also appreciate that the differences between the Republicans and Democrats on a variety of issues create openings for the people's movement to put the brakes on some of the most severe policies of the Bush administration.

We supported John Kerry, a centrist, not because we were infatuated with him, but because his victory would have given us a little breathing space on issues like Social Security, judicial nominations, reproductive rights, Iraq, gay and lesbian rights, budgetary priorities, nuclear weapons policy, and so forth.

Six, our strategic concept calls for the broadest possible unity. We don't think that social democrats, liberals, social reformists, and progressives are a "fifth column" inside the working class and people's movement. We don't consider them enemies, but allies in our common struggle against the Bush administration and the ultra right. This is anything but a class-neutral concept of unity. And anyone who thinks otherwise is mired in hopeless sectarianism and has learned nothing from reading Lenin.

Do we have differences with such forces? Of course we do, but we should discuss those differences in a friendly way and expect the same in return. And we should do it in the context of our common struggle against the Bush administration. A mature political party must possess an ability to recognize and appreciate that people and social forces do change.

Finally, our strategic policy sees the defeat of the ultra right as a way station, not a final destination.

As you can see, our strategic program can't simply be reduced to opposing the Bush administration. It includes that, but it is a much bigger package.

Is this policy revolutionary? Is it militant? Does it express our Communist identity? Should it be bedrock of our new draft program?

I would answer yes, yes, yes, and unequivocally yes. Any other strategic policy at this moment would leave us on the sidelines of the great struggles that will shape our future and our children's futures.

Let me end with a few more words from Dimitrov:

"In the present situation," Dimitrov said, "self-satisfied sectarianism... more than anything else impedes our struggle for the realization of the united front: sectarianism, satisfied with its doctrinaire narrowness... satisfied with its simplified methods of solving the most complex problems.... Self-satisfied sectarianism will not and cannot understand that the leadership of the working classes by the Communist Party does not come of itself. The leading role of the Communist Party in the struggle of the working class must be won. For this purpose it is necessary, not to rant about the leading role of the Communists, but to earn and win the confidence of the working masses by everyday mass work and a correct policy."

Dimitrov goes on to say, *“This sectarian ‘sticking to principle’ is nothing but political helplessness in face of the difficulties of directly leading the struggle of the masses.” (United Front Against War and Fascism)*

BILL OF RIGHTS SOCIALISM

Another issue in the pre-Convention discussion that attracted a lot of heat is the phrase “Bill of Rights” socialism. I have read most of the submissions on this and find them very unconvincing. In fact, I find it truly mind boggling that anyone would so strenuously object to this phrase and go to such lengths to wrap those objections in Marxism-Leninism.

For socialism to win a mass constituency in this country it has to have democracy at its core. Any vision of socialism that seems to devalue that will be stillborn.

Some comrades argue that just saying “socialism” is good enough for them. The word doesn’t need to be qualified. But the issue isn’t what we’re comfortable with, what we like, what sounds good to our ears. If the winning of socialism only took those of us in this hall, we would have done it long ago.

For socialism to become a possibility, the American people in their great majority have to embrace it wholeheartedly. And at this moment they don’t and one of the main, if not the main, reason is that they have deep misgivings about socialism’s commitment to democracy.

In fact, the American people have a perception that socialism and democracy are contradictory. We can say that this is based on ruling class propaganda, but even if that’s the case, even if we are of the opinion that there was no democratic deficit or violations in the Soviet Union and the other socialist states, we still have to address the perception held by millions that socialism is undemocratic.

Thus, I strongly feel that we have to emphasize our commitment to democracy and democratic practices, our commitment to preventing arbitrary violations of individuals’ rights, and our commitment to preserving and expanding our Bill of Rights in a socialist USA.

We can’t simply say that socialism by its very nature is democratic or that democracy is encoded in the relations of socialist production or that the winning of working-class power settles the democracy question once and for all. Nor can we ask the people to blindly trust the democratic sensibilities of the governing party or parties. You’d need more than that and a nickel to get a cup of coffee and a fair hearing on socialism in most working-class neighborhoods where democratic sentiments and traditions—not to mention mistrust of government—are deeply embedded.

Socialized production only creates the structural possibility of democracy. Its full realization takes place over time and requires the sustained participation of millions in socialist construction and decision-making.

Will the phrase “Bill of Rights Socialism” bring millions to the socialist cause overnight? No, but what it will do is signal to the people of our country that our vision of socialism has democracy at its center, and we can begin the conversation on more favorable ground.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The role of the various racially and nationally oppressed people was another topic that elicited some spirited discussion. Without responding directly to some of the comments, I would like to say a few words on the national question.

The fight for racial equality has been a strategic cornerstone of our outlook for decades. Early on, we brought to every struggle the slogan “Black and white, unite and fight.” The realization of this slogan led to the victories in the Depression and WWII and, a few decades later, to victories over legalized segregation.

The slogan reflected our conviction, first of all, that without a more vigorous struggle for Black-white unity little could be won; second, that the fight against racism was an indispensable condition for that unity; and finally, that the African American people are the main strategic partner of the working class.

The logic of this position rested on the role of slavery in country’s history, the overwhelming working-class makeup of the African American people, the location of Black workers in the strategic centers of the economy, and the interrelationship between the African American freedom struggle and the general class and democratic struggles in our country.

Several years ago, we enlarged that slogan to “Black, Brown, and white, unite and fight” and emphasized multiracial, multinational unity. This was never meant to diminish the strategic role nor deny the political sophistication and power of the African American people or the necessity of Black-white unity. Rather, this broader unity concept and slogan attempted to capture the changing demographic profile of our working class and people, the new dynamics of class and democratic struggles, and, above all, the new requirements for victory against the ultra right.

It is clear that multiracial, multinational unity—of African American, Latino, Asian, American Indian, Caribbean, South Pacific, and European American—is an indispensable condition for victories against racism and for democracy in this new century. Isn’t this the lesson of the successful mayoral campaign of Antonio Villaraigosa? Isn’t it the lesson of the 2004 elections? Isn’t this the conclusion that we can draw from what successes there have been in the anti-Wal-Mart campaign?

The Mexican and Mexican American people, for example, are bringing a contagious militancy, creative tactics, a coalition approach, and class-consciousness to the struggle for equality and class unity. The main currents of this movement see themselves not as separate from the general democratic and working-class movement, but rather as an integral part of it.

At the same time, we should give no quarter to the pundits who would like to use the growth of the Mexican American and Latino community to foment divisions between Black and Brown, to weaken labor unity and stir up anti-immigrant hostility.

We have never reduced the significance of the national question to a simple quantitative formula. Politics, as Lenin said, is more like higher mathematics than simple arithmetic. That's particularly true of the national question.

The material basis for multiracial, multinational unity is the system of racist oppression, exploitation, subordination, and dependence. The subjective basis is both the common experience shared by people of various racial and national backgrounds and the growing understanding of their community of interests.

In making this adjustment, we should not lose sight of the specific features of the national and racial oppression of the African American people or any other oppressed people, for that matter. But on the other hand, what we should accent is the commonality of conditions and struggles.

Anything that is said or done that causes even the slightest division between racially and nationally oppressed communities is a disservice to the struggle for equality.

This Convention has to embrace the challenge to deepen our theoretical understanding of the national question and to qualitatively upgrade our day-to-day practice of fighting for equality and against racism.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY

In surveying our work over the past four years, there is much to be proud of. We have been involved in most of the main struggles of the working class and people. Last year nearly the entire Party was deeply engaged in the fight to defeat Bush. Our role in the battleground states was exemplary.

Our contributions to the peace movement have been considerable and consequential. In the labor movement we have distinguished ourselves as well. Young communists have made notable contributions to the struggles of the young generation.

In the movements for equality, we are beginning to have a larger presence, although there is much more that needs to be done.

We participate in the meetings and conferences of a wide range of state and national organizations and coalitions, and are invariably warmly welcomed. *The People's Weekly World* and *Political Affairs* are read by growing numbers of activists in key movements and struggles.

This new level of activism is in keeping with the decisions of our last Convention, where we insisted on the importance of extending and deepening our mass connections. We spoke of “getting in the mix” and reaching out to the main organizations of the working class and people. We stressed the importance of coalition building and introducing ourselves to new constituencies of social activists. We said that we didn't have to invent the class struggle, but rather, to engage in the class and democratic struggles that were sweeping the nation. And we argued that the main task was to politically and organizationally strengthen the all-people's coalition that was challenging the Bush administration.

We want to continue this process. I have said more than once, mass struggle is the ground floor of communist politics. Without that, we are nothing but a debating society. And although the debates might be interesting and appear to be high theoretical disputations, in the end they would turn sterile and hollow. Our Party isn't a study circle; it's a working-class action organization that employs Marxism-Leninism to guide its work.

This Convention should reaffirm our commitment to be on the ground floor of the struggles in the workplace and working-class communities. At the same time, the overriding challenge to this Convention is to reinvigorate our efforts to grow the Party and revitalize our clubs and district organizations.

But before I get to some ideas as to how we can do that, I want to say a few words about the Party's role.

Mass struggles are the locomotive of social change and social revolution. In the course of them, workers and their allies accumulate experience, gain a deeper appreciation of what they are up against and come to understand the necessity of unity and the need for a more just world.

The depth of this political knowledge, however, depends in no small measure on the durability and quality of the union between the working class and its allies and the communists and other left forces.

According to classical Marxism, the working class and people can win victories and deepen their political understanding in the course of struggle, but on their own they do not acquire fully rounded class and socialist consciousness.

Or to put it differently, experience in struggle does not automatically translate into a revolutionary outlook. Such experience is essential, to be sure, but an understanding of the laws of capitalist development, of the systemic roots of racial and gender oppression,

of the complicated trajectory of the revolutionary process, of the role of the working class and of diverse social forces at each stage of struggle, and of the necessity of socialism, requires more than just experience.

For masses to develop a revolutionary outlook entails the presence of a substantial contingent within the working class and people's movements that creatively and flexibly develop and apply Marxist concepts and methodology. In other word, it requires more "Reds."

Our charge, therefore, is to build the Party and YCL and in doing so, we will strengthen the political capacities of the broader movements, or as Marx put it, "in the movement of the present, [we] represent and take care of the future of that movement."

STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF THE PARTY

So the question for this meeting is: are we combining our work in the mass movements with the all-sided building of the Party and YCL and our publications? Is our growth keeping pace with the new activists that are entering the theater of struggle? Do we devote as much energy to strengthening the political and organizational capacities of the Party as we do to extending our mass relations? Are we giving sustained attention to our clubs?

While we can cite some important achievements, we can—and we must—work harder and smarter to enlarge our ranks.

Some might think that the objective of a bigger and more grassroots based party is not so important, even self-serving. But nothing could be further from the truth. Communists make very special contributions to mass struggles.

We bring experience and an organizing mentality in everyday struggles. We understand who the main class and social forces are at each stage of struggle. We are resolute fighters for racial and gender equality and against racism and male supremacy. We defend gay and lesbian rights and oppose homophobia. We are a unifying force. We are internationalists. Unlike the ultra left, we bring a non-dogmatic Marxism into the working class and people's movements.

And finally, we are convinced that socialism is both necessary and possible.

Saying this doesn't mean that we trump other progressive, left, and socialist forces that make important contributions to the movement as well. But our working-class character, treasure trove of experience, emphasis on unity, and ability to apply Marxism in a creative way are a powerful package that is unique to our Party.

We want to become the strongest and most respected organization on the left in the eyes of other left and progressive people, in the eyes of the labor movement, in the eyes of the

movements of the racially and nationally oppressed, in the eyes of the women's and youth movements, and in the eyes of every social movement in the country.

That's a tall order, but we are headed in the right direction.

You may think I am making a fetish out of size. Well, I don't think so. Had we 20,000 members, imagine how much more we could do. Imagine what a difference we could have made in the battleground states last year.

It goes without saying that we should welcome every new member into our Party. At the same time, we should give special attention to bringing in the best activists from the core constituencies of the all-people's coalition, and particularly from the ranks of organized labor.

We don't want to have a situation where we engage in politics over here, say, among workers—Black, Brown, and white—but recruit over there, say, among some other strata. Recruiting in the course of struggle is a hard nut to crack, but we can make progress if we are dogged and creative, and move the task of growing the Party to the front.

At the national level, we must take steps to greatly strengthen the Organizing Department. It is the collective that has to give greater impetus, resources and ideas to the companion tasks of building the movement and building the Party. During the elections last year, the Organizing Department did quite well in this regard. But all of us who are members would agree that much improvement is necessary. While it is not a magic bullet, additional staffing of the department must be on the to-do list. We can change our structure, develop ambitious plans, and rethink our mission, but without proper staffing it turns into another episode in frustration.

At the district and club level, I suspect inadequate attention is being given to Party-building. This may mean dropping some things; it will probably mean re-ordering priorities, and it will certainly mean asking more of leading comrades and collectives.

In the end, however, we have to change our style of work so that the building of a bigger Party is organic to our mass work. We can change our structure and redeploy our staff, but it will come to a hill of beans if we don't shake off the residue of the Cold War and become convinced that we must boldly build the Party.

PARTY CLUBS

Strong clubs are the cornerstones of everything we do. Without active grassroots organization in the neighborhoods and workplaces, our mass relations will lack depth and our ability to influence our multiracial working class, let alone build the Party within it, will limp.

Since our last Convention we have made some progress, but much more needs to be done to revitalize existing clubs or build new ones in working-class communities and in shops. And we won't until the status and vitality of our clubs assume much greater importance for every national and district leader and collective. Despite all our talk, most of the Party leadership doesn't organize its work in such a way as to be helpful to the clubs. I know that is the case with myself and I would venture to say that I have a lot of company. Here, too, we have to change our style, habits, and priorities. This constitutes one of the main challenges for us going forward over the next four years.

So how do we change all this? How do we strengthen the political and organizational capacities of the Party? How do we begin to grow steadily and breathe new life into our clubs?

This is what we have to discuss at this Convention and when we return to our states and cities. I would like to offer some specific ideas, not so much because I am wedded to them, but more to get us to think practically about these matters. We can't simply call on people to work harder; we have to come up with fresh approaches and break with some old patterns.

OUR PRESS

First of all, a growing Party is only possible if our press has a growing readership. We publish a great newspaper, but as the comrades in that editorial collective will tell you, the terrific fruits of their hard labor are still read by far too few people.

At some point soon, we need to organize a national conference on building our press, for which the PWW Editorial Board and the Organizing Department should prepare a comprehensive and concrete plan for expanding the paper's readership. An element of that might be visiting 200 Midwest readers between now and November, to sign them up as PWW builders. We have to make a breakthrough.

I also think we need to discuss with *Political Affair's* board how to better integrate PA, which has become a truly outstanding magazine (and in many ways a new magazine), into Party life.

More generally, we need a more organized and creative campaign to get our message out to a wider audience—starting, of course, with building the circulation of the PWW and PA, but also including further developing our growing on-line presence. We need an approach to major and progressive media as well. We should also make an effort to speak on college campuses.

I'm sure everyone would agree that it is imperative that we invest more in our educational work. This means, first of all, in the education of our own members, old and new, but beyond that we should consider organizing some new public classes and forums

in at least a few districts, starting with those in the regional centers. Arizona's Salt of the Earth Labor College has made a great contribution in that regard.

We should also consider a national tour by Party leaders to discuss our vision of socialism as well as explore the idea of a broadly sponsored conference on socialism.

We have to take some steps to build our Party in the South. We said this at the last Convention, but the political importance and organizational challenge are just as great, and we must once again examine the concrete possibilities for doing so. In recent months we have had some very promising developments.

Some of you have seen the new Party center here in Chicago—what a beautiful place! As you know, the plan here, in New York City and in Los Angeles is to remodel and revitalize these Party buildings as regional centers for our work. The idea is to turn a modern, confident, communist face to the public: to open our doors to the community organizers, to house the Party, PWW and YCL, and provide space for meetings, forums and schools. We are in the early stages of this process, but we should agree that we are going to get the job done over the next two years.

As I said earlier, we are very happy to have so many YCL members and friends here today. The YCL is not just another organization or task for the Party—we should be, and are, each other's champions. In the post-Convention period, we should sit down with the YCL's leadership and figure out some bold, but realistic plans for building new YCL clubs and for helping the Party reach out to young people. New York, Chicago, and some other districts have the possibility for big growth—how can we help make that happen? Finally, as Lenin said the task of the youth is to learn, so let's organize a serious national school for these new comrades, perhaps for three to four weeks in December of this year.

A month ago we had a very important conference in Tucson on the issues and struggles of immigrants. An excellent resolution was drafted out of that meeting. As part of the concrete follow up, I propose we hold a meeting in Los Angeles to discuss the challenge of bringing more immigrants into our Party, which should be a home for all workers, documented and undocumented. Such a meeting should tackle the problem of how to become a truly bilingual organization. Such a meeting would be an expression of our internationalism, so necessary in our "globalized" world.

Speaking of globalization, it was suggested in our National Board discussion that we consider hosting a conference on globalization to which we would invite some of our fraternal parties. It would be very exciting and stimulating.

As part of the series of discussions on Party-building, we should ask the Labor and Organizing Departments to present their thinking on industrial concentration. How do we implement this policy when we are so dispersed and have so few shop or even industry clubs? How do we adapt to the economic restructuring and re-composition of the working class that has occurred over the past few decades? And how does industrial concentration fit into our broader strategy of defeating the right danger?

Finally, I spoke earlier about the question of understanding and appreciating the specifics of the national question, as an absolute necessity for our Party to play its role in building class unity. This fall, let's have meetings, at least in the regional centers if not in every district, to map out some concrete plans for building the Party in the communities of the racially and nationally oppressed.

FINAL WORDS

Comrades, we have great challenges ahead of us, but we are communists. And communists never melt before great challenges. We rise to the occasion. We consider challenges not as mountains to climb, but rather as opportunities to be seized.

Over the course of the next three days, let's discuss the great challenges that face the people of our country and the world. Let's make decisions that will plunge our Party and the YCL into the great struggles of our time for economic security, equality and peace. Let's leave here resolved to build a much bigger Communist Party, YCL, and communist press. And let's leave this Convention determined not to melt in face of difficulties and dangers, no matter how big, but to turn those difficulties and dangers into opportunities and seize the time, seize the day, seize the hour.

NO MANDATE! NO SURRENDER!

ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE!

¡VENCEREMOS, SÍ SE PUEDE! WE SHALL WIN!

Communist Party, USA • WWW.CPUSA.ORG