

# *RAY O. LIGHT* NEWSLETTER

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**May Day 2008:**

## **The International Workers Holiday Finally Coming Back to the Land of its Birth**

*May Day, the holiday of the international working class, brings into sharp focus two cornerstones for the successful struggle for workers power, for socialism leading to communism: (1) Our struggle is not primarily national but international in character. (2) The working class makes history. The May Day theme of this newsletter is in keeping with the life, spirit and legacy of Crispin “Ka Bel” Beltran, our good friend, who died as we began work on this newsletter.*

***Dedicated to the Memory of Crispin “Ka Bel” Beltran  
Proletarian Fighter for Philippine National Democratic  
Revolution and for Proletarian Power Internationally***

The ILWU’s May Day Initiative  
and the Establishment of “Workers Uniting — The Global Union”

May Day 2008 produced some inspiring and courageous actions. In many oppressed nations there were strong protests against the rising prices on basic food stuffs that are bringing large masses of poor and working people to the point of famine.\* In Europe and elsewhere, there were working class demonstrations in defense of decent jobs and wages. In the imperialist countries on both sides of the Atlantic there were large and numerous immigrant worker demonstrations in defense of their basic human rights. In France, and other countries, a positive sign was that solidarity with the immigrants was a key component of organized labor’s May Day demonstration. In Latin America, in particular, there were also demonstrations in support of popular anti-imperialist regimes mobilized around Cuba and Venezuela that are taking a path somewhat independent of U.S. imperialism.

To us, the most surprising and refreshing development on this May Day was an outstanding display of *proletarian internationalist solidarity* be-

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\*Even in the USA, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 12% of the U.S. population and 17% of the children don’t have enough food.

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Boxholder DLD-354  
58 Batterymarch St.  
Boston, MA 02110  
USA

tween the dock workers in the USA and the workers in the same sector in Iraq, the main country being militarily and politically occupied by U.S. imperialism today!

This outstanding May Day event was based on an initiative supported by an overwhelming majority delegate vote of the Longshore Caucus of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) at their meeting in February to prepare for upcoming contract negotiations with the Pacific Maritime Association, a group of cargo carriers, terminal operators and stevedore companies up and down the West Coast of the United States. The dock workers resolved to “take labor’s protest to a more powerful level of struggle by calling on unions and working people in the U.S. and internationally to mobilize for a ‘No Peace, No Work Holiday’ May 1, 2008 for 8 hours to demand an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East.” On May Day, true to their word, twenty-five thousand ILWU longshore workers shut down all twenty-nine West Coast ports for eight hours.

On the eve of May Day the ILWU’s international working class solidarity inspired a fraternal response from the General Union of Port Workers in Iraq who pledged to stop work for one hour on May Day. Exhibiting the same generous *proletarian internationalist* spirit as the ILWU, the Iraqi port workers asserted: “We the port workers view that our interests are inseparable from the interests of workers in Iraq *and the world*; therefore we are determined to continue our struggle to improve the living conditions of the workers and overpower all plots of the occupation, its economic and political projects.” (4-28-08, ROL emphasis) The Iraqi trade union exclaimed: “We are certain that a better world will only be created by the workers and what you [the ILWU] are doing is an example and proof of what we say.”

It is inspiring that an organized sector of the U.S. proletariat, the proletariat in the chief oppressor nation in the world, took this initiative in opposition to “its own” ruling class and in solidarity with the workers and oppressed peoples of Iraq. It is fitting that such a proletarian internationalist initiative was taken by U.S. workers, among whom, for so long, May Day has hardly been celebrated at all, and has even been scorned by large numbers, but from which section of the international working class the international workers holiday had originally sprung some one hundred and twenty years ago.

The ILWU-led solidarity between U.S. and Iraqi workers this spring serves as a vivid reminder of the great potential of May Day events and other coordinated international workers actions for the class struggle

occurred in the initiation of the May Day holiday by U.S. workers described above does not make the building of a proletarian vanguard (Leninist) party unimportant. In fact, the power of the international working class is what gives the proletarian vanguard party *its* significance! Lenin’s answer was to lead in the formation of the “party of the new type,” the Bolshevik Party, which waged a merciless struggle against both “left” and right opportunism, and led the working class and its peasant and soldier allies to victory in the October Socialist Revolution. Lenin then led in the building of the Third Communist International, the world communist party, which ultimately was the cornerstone of the defeat of world fascism in the Second World War. This magnificent victory paved the way for the victorious Chinese national democratic revolution and the establishment of a Socialist Camp that threatened the very foundations of world capitalism.

Today in the USA, we need to help build such a Leninist party that is serious, honest and disciplined enough to discover, organize and lead and be led by such advanced workers as the proletarian internationalists to be found among the ranks of the ILWU and in the ranks of the fledgling Workers United — the Global Union. And *we need a new Communist International to inspire and organize our class internationally for the battles and victories ahead.*

**Long Live the Proletarian Internationalist Spirit of May Day!  
Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples — Unite!**

promoted “non-alignment” (either with socialism or capitalism) among the frontline fighters for national liberation and socialism.

Revisionists in state power collaborated with U.S. imperialism to support vacillating bourgeois and petty bourgeois reformist and pacifist leadership of the national democratic revolutionary struggles in the oppressed nations at the expense of the proletarian forces in those national liberation movements and at the expense of the revolutions themselves. One consequence of this entire process of development was the political defeat of the proletariat in the former socialist camp as well as the political setback of the proletariat in the USA and the proletariat of the other imperialist countries. Most importantly, it resulted in the isolation of militant proletarian movements in the oppressed nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Bourgeois nationalism replaced proletarian internationalism as the principle upon which so-called Marxist-Leninist parties functioned around the world. Thus *May Day, the holiday of the international working class, lost its power commensurate with the actual loss of power by the international working class.*

-*May Day and the  
Relationship of the Vanguard Party to the Working Class-*

While in prison, in 1896, five years after the first celebration of May Day in Russia, Lenin wrote a May Day leaflet for the St. Petersburg League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class. Two thousand copies were distributed to workers in forty factories in St. Petersburg. He called on the Russian workers to join “our fellow workers of other lands in the struggle – under a common flag bearing the words ‘Workers of all Countries, Unite!’” Lenin informed the workers about the First of May general holiday of labor that had already been celebrated in a number of countries for five years or so. A month and one half later, when the great textile strike of 40,000 workers broke out in St. Petersburg, the strikers told the organizers that the first impetus was given by the modest May Day leaflet. (See *May Day*, Philip S. Foner) *Such is the encouragement that workers in one country derive from the militant activity of workers in the rest of the world.*

The fact that the workers are capable of taking decisive collective action against capital in the absence of a proletarian vanguard party that is leading the political, social, economic and military struggles against the capitalist state and linking the struggles of the international working class in a common front against the international capitalist class as

of our times as well as the strategic role of the international working class in bringing about a world of peace and justice, a world of socialism leading to communism.

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On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, another dramatic step toward proletarian internationalism was taken by a U.S. union. At its liveliest union convention in decades, the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) voted to formally join its 850 thousand members together with the two million members of the largest British union, Unite, to form the world’s first global union, appropriately named “Workers Uniting — the Global Union.”

The fact that the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), a conservative, business unionist oriented U.S. union, is now throwing off at least some of the shackles of great nation chauvinism to reach across the Atlantic to merge with the largest union in Great Britain is a sign of *how ripe the international working class is for global unions, for proletarian internationalism at the level of **mass** organization.*

Leo Gerard, President of the United Steelworkers stated: “This union is crucial for challenging the growing power of global capital.” Even AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, the chief trade union collaborator with the Bush Regime and U.S. imperialism in this period, in a surprisingly militant tone, volunteered that the agreement is “a bold and innovative approach to addressing the crushing effect of corporate-driven globalization on workers and communities. Together, these unions have put multinational companies on notice: Pushing down wages and working conditions for your employees by pitting one country’s workforce against another will not work forever.”\*

Tom Woodley, the British trade union leader of Unite, stated, “This agreement will enable us to use our considerable resources to organize workers from new and growing sectors at home *and in developing countries.* *There will be no more no-go areas for trade unions.*” (ROL emphasis)

So, not only does Workers Uniting — the Global Union represent the first global union, as a trans Atlantic organization in the short run, but also, in the long run, the new union aims to follow the work wherever

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\*Ironically, Sweeney has served U.S. imperialism as the main U.S. trade union leader pitting the U.S. labor movement against the workforce of all other countries. No doubt, the existence of the Change to Win Coalition, as a rival to the AFL-CIO, along with the political-economic pressures of imperialist globalization, compelled Sweeney to give this merger his blessing.

the multinational corporations move their operations, making it a truly *global* union.

Thus, two months after the profound proletarian internationalist May Day action by the ILWU, a second U.S. union, the Steelworkers, pioneered a proletarian internationalist path organizationally, that is fully in keeping with the legacy of May Day, the holiday of the international working class.

*-The ILWU Spreads the Message-*

As an integral part of its initiative, the ILWU Longshore Caucus appealed, on a non-sectarian basis, to both the AFL-CIO and the Change to Win Coalition (the large alternative coalition of unions that split-off from the AFL-CIO in 2005) for “unity of action” of all U.S. organized labor “to bring an end to this bloody war once and for all.” Beginning with postal union locals in San Francisco, New York City, North Carolina and elsewhere, local unions, metropolitan area central labor councils and state union bodies responded to the ILWU’s call. By May Day 2008, the San Francisco County Labor Council, the King County Labor Council in Seattle, the Washington State AFL-CIO, the Vermont AFL-CIO and the South Carolina AFL-CIO, among others, had all endorsed the ILWU action and/or undertaken some May Day action in solidarity with the ILWU.

The broadening of this U.S. working class protest of the imperialist war, in turn, inspired a broad cross-section of the Iraqi labor movement to sign a unified Statement “To the Workers and All Peace Loving People of the World.” This document, while taking the moderate tone of an appeal to the conscience of “all people,” nevertheless decisively exposes the criminal character of the U.S. imperialist military invasion and occupation of Iraq *from the perspective of the working class*. Thus, the Iraqi trade unionists expose the fact that “the invaders” (U.S. imperialism), in the name of “liberation,” “have destroyed our nation’s infrastructure, bombed our neighborhoods ... helped to foment and then exploit sectarian divisions and terror attacks where there had been none.” Likewise, the Iraqi trade unionists expose *the common front of capital against the Iraqi working class*, evidenced by the fact that the Ba’athist legislation of 1987 which banned trade unions in the public sector (80% of all Iraqi workers) has remained in effect – from Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist Regime to Paul Bremer’s post-invasion Occupation Authority to each subsequent Iraqi U.S. imperialist puppet administration up to the present.

The unified statement of organized labor, the unionized sector of the working class in Iraq, unlike petty bourgeois pacifists or professional

opment of a policy in most socialist countries of betrayal of the oppressed nations based on the ascendancy of the national bourgeois class in the socialist countries.” (*The Role of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in the International Marxist-Leninist Movement: The October Revolution Vs. The “Cultural Revolution,”* April 1968) The accuracy of our observation cannot be in doubt today. For the socialist camp has been dissolved under the impetus of the ascendant national bourgeoisie in the formerly socialist countries and their respective rapprochements with U.S. imperialism at the expense of the oppressed peoples.

The rise to dominance of the imperialist camp by U.S. imperialism, after World War II, coincided with the biggest triumphs of the international communist movement, i.e. the Soviet-led global defeat of fascism. On the one hand, the imperialists knew how to take advantage of victory. It was an old story. The new victor country, the USA, pushed aside not only the defeated Axis Powers of imperialist Germany, Italy and Japan but also its British and French imperialist allies. Now there was but one imperialist superpower.

The global triumph experienced by the Soviet Union and the international communist and workers movement, on the other hand, represented a new favorable situation that had never existed before. Within this unprecedented favorable situation, however, illusions about continuing in peace-time the war-time anti-fascist alliance with the USA, including petty bourgeois democratic and pacifist illusions with regard to the nature of U.S. imperialism, provided seeds of defeat within the victorious Socialist Camp. The fatal conservative emphasis on peaceful co-existence with U.S. imperialism and peaceful transition to socialism, especially promoted by the communist parties that were now in state power, led the international communist and workers movement from victory to defeat. Even the May Day cutting edge slogans of former days were replaced by “respectable” petty bourgeois demands for a classless “peace.”

One extremely harmful remnant of the period when the national liberation movements were emerging on the frontlines of the struggle against imperialism, headed by U.S. imperialism, and the Socialist Camp degenerated based on attempting to make unprincipled deals with U.S.-led imperialism, is the pervasive *bourgeois nationalist* perspective of “every country (and its working class) for itself.” “Peaceful coexistence” and “peaceful transition to socialism” were used to justify narrow reactionary nationalism by the Soviet revisionist tendency. Such anti-Marxist concepts as “self reliance,” “third world,” etc. covered over the betrayal on the Chinese revisionist side. *Both* these powerful opportunist trends

of each of these forces both singly and collectively. As Lenin observed approvingly about Karl Marx, “Above everything else he put the fact that the working class, heroically, self-sacrificingly, and taking the initiative itself, *makes* world history.” (Lenin’s emphasis, *Preface to Marx’ Letters to Kugelmann*)

The tremendous breakthrough demonstrated in this one relatively small initiative of the ILWU on May Day 2008, as well as the pioneering effort involving the United Steelworkers that has led to the formation of “Workers Uniting — the Global Union,” indicate the powerful, irreplaceable role of the *international working class* in the class struggle for socialism and communism. For Marxism-Leninism, the working class is the foundation for the entire movement of revolutionary socialism. No band of heroic and enlightened individuals, not even a Marxist-Leninist party, can substitute for the working class itself.

From this first conclusion, we can also conclude that for the vanguard of the working class there is no other path that can lead to socialism other than through winning the hearts and minds of the *working class through their own experience* to see the need to carry out the revolutionary struggle for socialism.

(2) Contrary to current conventional wisdom on the “Left,” that workers struggles and other militant struggles against capitalism and imperialism need to be *nationally* based, the May Day Holiday of International Workers Solidarity was established, a hundred years *before* “globalization,” based on the recognition that something as “revolutionary” as the eight hour work day could only be won through a universal struggle, *through a coordinated international struggle of workers around the world*. And in May 1890, through *coordinated international struggle*, tremendous concrete gains *were* made. In the USA alone, forty-six thousand carpenters and thousands of allied laborers in other building trades won the eight hour workday; an additional thirty thousand gained a nine hour day. And, according to Gompers, writing a week after the event, “Every trade and labor union of the country has vastly increased its membership.” (*May Day*, Philip Foner, p.45) Throughout Europe and in a number of Latin American countries demonstrations were held and gains were made. It was so successful that it was carried on from 1890 onward, spreading to Asia and beyond within the next few years.

Forty years ago, as Youth for Stalin, we made the following observation: “Since the death of Stalin, the two main characteristics of the international situation have been (1) the intensification of the contradiction between the oppressed nations and U.S. imperialism; and (2) the devel-

NGO job holders, recognizes *the economic motive* behind U.S. imperialism’s invasion and occupation of Iraq. It calls for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops, passage of a labor law that protects the rights of workers to organize, bargain and strike, an end to meddling in their “sovereign economic affairs by the IMF, USA and UK,” and, specifically, that the U.S. government and others immediately cease lobbying for “the oil law” which would hand over control of Iraqi oil to U.S. dominated multinational companies like Exxon, BP and Shell.

The Iraqi labor movement concludes its unified statement with the following proletarian internationalist vision: “We look forward to the day when we have a world based on co-operation and solidarity. We look forward to a world free from war, sectarianism, competition and exploitation.”

So the ILWU’s May Day initiative has had the effect of striking a blow for unity within the U.S. labor movement, for unity within the Iraqi labor movement, and for unity among the workers of the world. Quite an accomplishment for a trade union located in the belly of the beast, where, for several generations, large sections of U.S. workers have reaped some of the crumbs (based on imperialist bribery) from the virtually unchallenged hegemony of U.S. monopoly capitalism and imperialism in the world capitalist system.

What conditions led to the ILWU’s fine May Day accomplishments?

*-The ILWU’s origins in the class struggle-*

First of all, the ILWU was founded at the height of U.S. working class militancy, in the midst of the Great Depression in the 1930’s. This was a period when U.S. workers would not allow the capitalists to divide the class with red-baiting, race-baiting and other divide and conquer schemes. Indeed, in practically every key battle during this period, including in the founding of the ILWU, vital leadership and organization was provided by the Communist Party of the USA, affiliated with the Communist International. In 1934 the West Coast Longshoremen’s Strike was in danger of being broken by state violence perpetrated by the local police, hired goons and the National Guard, when the San Francisco General Strike arose in the form of a solidarity strike of all San Francisco’s working class with the longshoremen. This massive confrontation led the authorities to back off of the San Francisco longshoremen at the heart of the West Coast-wide port workers’ struggle.

The strike demands were won: including the six hour work day and the union hiring hall, accomplishments almost never achieved either be-

fore or in the almost seventy-five years since by any other section of the U.S. working class! Ultimately, it also resulted in the successful founding of the ILWU.

In the course of the strike struggle, Australian immigrant rank and file leader, Harry Bridges, emerged to become the San Francisco leader of the old AFL union, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA). Then Bridges became the West Coast District ILA leader. At this point, with the creation of the industrial union-based Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO), there was a mass demand that the ILA have a referendum vote of its entire membership on whether the ILA should disaffiliate from the AFL and join the CIO. The West Coast District, under Bridges, was the only one to hold the democratic referendum. Upon its decision, the new militant ILWU was formed and affiliated with the CIO. Bridges was elected as its first President.\*

Thus, from its very beginning, the ILWU had a rich experience of struggle to draw upon; it had an immigrant leader, and a spirit of solidarity with the rest of the working class which had been crucial to its successful birth.

*-The ILWU's strong social position in relation to the means of production-*

Karl Marx taught that, "social-being determines social consciousness." Marxist materialism points to the strong social position of longshore workers or dock workers whose principal occupation is to load and unload ships that transport goods produced and marketed *globally*. In fact, the rapid growth of trade with India and even more with China in the past decade has made the West Coast longshore workers' role in the U.S. and world economy all the more important. It has given them more leverage in relation to the capitalist exploiters. In this era of "imperialist globalization," the longshore workers' relationship to the means of production requires them to work in concert with workers in the same occupation all over the earth. Not surprisingly, the ILWU initiative received the backing of the International Dock Workers Council and the International Transport Workers Federation, representing longshore unions in Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. *Proletarian internationalism is at the very heart of their job.*

It is this fact of life that has helped sustain the ILWU workers, virtually alone among U.S. workers in the past fifty years, in their commitment

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\*The U.S. government would subsequently attempt to deport Bridges, the outstanding trade union leader, more than a half dozen times in an effort to decapitate the ILWU and the dock workers of the USA. The government never succeeded.

Evidently, Workers World Party leaders do not believe that *workers* will create a workers world?! And this petty bourgeois cynicism and liberalism is shared by most left wing radicals functioning in the USA today.\*

*-Some May Day Conclusions-*

(1) Contrary to current conventional wisdom on the "Left," that May Day, as the international working class holiday, was mainly created by the conscious vanguard socialist movement of the time, the proletarian truth is that May Day was created *primarily* through the concrete struggle of mass trade union as well as vanguard working class organizations fighting for the eight hour work day in countries around the world. The Marxist International Socialist Congress (Second International) at its founding congress in Paris in July 1889 adopted a decision to organize "a great international demonstration" to demand the eight hour work day. However, the Second International's resolution specifically refers to and takes up the date projected by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which the AFL was already mobilizing around. Thus, the initiating organization for the first international day of workers solidarity (May 1, 1890) was the AFL, a U.S. union under the leadership of its conservative president, Samuel Gompers.\*\*

In "*Left Wing*" *Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin discusses the dialectical interrelationship of *the masses, the working class, the vanguard party and its leaders*; he discusses the revolutionary significance

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\*While often speaking in the name of the "working class," opportunist forces have no confidence in the workers and their ability to *make* world history. Commonly, these mostly petty bourgeois professors, teachers, preachers, NGO'ers, social workers, trade union staffers and their student followers and interns ascribe little or no significance to the activities of the working class either positive or negative. They don't have to answer to the workers; they answer to the foundation that provides their grant or the bureaucrat that runs their agency or has power over their union staff job.

\*\*In fact, after the unprecedented victories in achieving the eight hour and nine hour work day in the first international workers holiday on May Day in 1890, AFL President Samuel Gompers had bragged with some justification that he and the AFL had founded the May Day holiday. By the end of that decade which saw the rapid rise of U.S. imperialism, however, Gompers had begun to distance himself and the AFL from the holiday. By 1905, there was no further mention of the AFL's role in founding May Day or the fact that the holiday had been founded in the USA. In 1920, the National Security League, an anti-labor, pro-business organization, launched a campaign to have 200 city mayors sponsor "patriotic days" on May 1<sup>st</sup> to offset May Day. Shamefully, this campaign won the support of the AFL! In 1923, Gompers himself told the *New York Times* that a patriotic celebration on May 1<sup>st</sup> should be supported by U.S. workers since May Day had "none of the European meaning" to them!!

the Catalinotto piece and the newspaper's coverage leading up to May Day, which, like Catalinotto's piece, downplayed the ILWU initiative.\*

A May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008 *Workers World* editorial on the legacy of Crispin "Ka Bel" Beltran, the outstanding Filipino working class leader who recently passed away, seems to have him confused with someone else, there is such a studied evasion of his proletarian class stand! Incredibly, the National Committee of Workers World Party fails to mention that Ka Bel was a worker himself or to mention any of the responsible leading positions, mostly dealing with the working class, which he held. For example, Ka Bel was the pre-eminent leader of the patriotic Filipino working class movement and the beloved Congressman representing the Filipino working class in the Philippine House of Congress at the time of his death. He had been the top leader of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), the May First Movement, the militant trade union federation in the Philippines, for most of the twenty-eight years of its existence.

As reflected in the KMU's name, under Ka Bel's leadership, not only were the interests of the Filipino working class militantly defended, but proletarian internationalist solidarity with labor unions and workers in the USA and elsewhere in the world was consistently upheld. It is no accident that the most internationalist union in the USA, the ILWU, had, on several occasions over the years, invited Ka Bel to attend its convention. Nor is it an accident that the U.S. imperialist government, afraid of Ka Bel's revolutionary anti-imperialist and proletarian internationalist influence, never permitted him entry into the USA so that he could attend an ILWU Convention. Finally, in keeping with his consistent internationalism, Ka Bel was elected the Chairman of the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS), an international anti-imperialist united front, at its founding assembly. This fact, too, was omitted from the statement of the National Committee of Workers World Party on the legacy of Ka Bel! Does Workers World Party believe that one cannot be a *proletarian* fighter while upholding and fighting for national democratic revolution from imperialism, as well?! Is there no significance to the fact that such an outstanding leader in the world anti-imperialist movement, in the struggle for global justice, did so almost entirely as a representative of the Filipino *working class* and that he remained with and functioned as part of this class, even with his last breath?

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\*Likewise, at an international seminar in May 2000, when asked what was most significant about the "No to WTO" protest in Seattle in December 1999, Catalinotto had responded that it was *the students* going up against the police. The leader of ROL, USA countered that most significant was the fact that *the workers*, a large section of organized labor gathered in Seattle, for the first time in fifty years or more, had taken a stand against a U.S. government foreign policy.

to proletarian international solidarity, even in the most backward periods of reaction and hysteria in the USA. Outstanding examples of ILWU solidarity over these decades include: protests against the U.S. war in Vietnam in the 1960's and in opposition to Augusto Pinochet, the U.S. puppet dictator in Chile, and to dictatorial regimes in Central America, in the 1970's, and, more recently, against apartheid in South Africa, in defense of imprisoned Afro-American liberation leader Mumia Abu-Jamal and then Liverpool dockworkers, and also in solidarity with the very significant protest against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle at the end of the 1990's.

The ILWU also showed solidarity with the Charleston Five in 2001, immediately after 9-11. South Carolina is one of the most corporate dominated states in the USA, with the traditions of slavery still casting their shadow. Over the decades, it is often the state with the lowest unionization rate in the country. Also, over the years, while the ILWU organized and represented dock workers and others on the West Coast, in Alaska and Hawaii, the notoriously Mafia-connected and corrupt ILA, the old AFL union, has continued to cover the East Coast and Gulf Coast USA waterfronts. Charleston, South Carolina local 1422, however, had, by the turn of the new century, come under the leadership of progressive Black workers headed by Ken Riley as local president.

After a Danish ship pulled into port and scabs were brought in to unload its cargo, the union workers had attempted to picket the ship and found themselves forced to fight against the armed might of the state, including six hundred battle-dressed troops backed by land, sea and air vehicles. The South Carolina Attorney General, seeing his path to the Governorship, was ambitious to crush the Black-led union, which exerted strong community influence in the Charleston area. He arrested and re-arrested the local union leaders.

But, despite the fact that George W. Bush and U.S. monopoly capital's power and prestige were at their height immediately following 9-11, even with the hostility and sabotage of the top union leadership of their own ILA, the Charleston 5 won their freedom through a pre-trial settlement in which all felony charges were dropped. This was due to the fact that longshore workers in sixteen countries *and* the ILWU on the West Coast had pledged to "silence the ports" on the day the trial was scheduled to open (November 14, 2001). Global shipping corporations were nervous about what would happen if the defendants were found guilty and they had already agreed to honor the ILA contract and not use scabs in the port of Charleston. This victory, too, underscores the strength of the dock workers' social position, with its pronounced proletarian internationalism.

*-Independent Political Action by the ILWU-*

The important May Day political initiative of the ILWU was not the result of the decision of any political party. Rather, it came out of the ILWU *workers' own political and economic experience* in dealing with U.S. imperialism. Given its rich history, the ILWU had a solid standpoint upon which to evaluate this political-economic experience and to draw correct proletarian political lessons.

The ILWU trade unionists took this independent May Day political action against the imperialist war based on several noteworthy factors as reflected in the Longshore Caucus resolution itself. Five years earlier, on May Day 2003, ILWU delegates had passed Convention resolutions calling for an end to the war and occupation of Iraq, taking the lead among U.S. unions in opposing “this bloody war and occupation for imperial domination.” While making the 2008 May Day decision, they recognized a real and present danger of U.S. imperialist expansion of the Middle East war (it is losing) into Iran, Syria and/or Pakistan. The ILWU also observed that, even with millions worldwide having marched and demonstrated against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the *non-proletarian* protesters had been unable to stop the wars.

Most importantly and profoundly, the ILWU trade unionists recognized that “many unions and the overwhelming majority of the American people now oppose this bipartisan and unjustifiable war in Iraq and Afghanistan but the two major political parties, Democrats and Republicans, continue to fund the war.” *Thus, the ILWU broke with the Democratic Party on the question of the war, freeing itself politically to take its outstanding May Day initiative.*

*-Immigrant Workers Struggle Bringing May Day Back to the USA-*

For almost the entire post World War II period, for sixty years, almost the last place on earth one would find May Day celebrations by its working class population was the USA, the land of its birth. This was based on the imperialist bribery of a large section of the U.S. working class out of the U.S. imperialist super-profits stolen from the proletariat of the oppressed nations. As Lenin taught, the essence of imperialism is revealed in the fundamental distinction between oppressing and oppressed nations.

U.S. imperialism's very success as the chief oppressor nation in the world in the post World War II period, a period characterized by revisionist domination of the international communist and workers movement, led to such harsh oppression of the peoples of Mexico, Central America and

At a time when workers routinely worked a ten to fifteen hour day, the winning of the eight hour day was a revolutionary aim. There was widespread recognition by working class leaders and organizations around the globe, and by Samuel Gompers and the AFL leadership, in particular, that in order to have the possibility of winning such a powerful and universal demand, international solidarity and coordination would be vital. It was on the basis of this concrete need and demand of the working class in the USA and internationally that the international workers holiday, May Day was created.

In light of its misreading of May Day's historical origins, with its burial of the *mass working class demand* for the eight hour day, it is not surprising that FRISO fails to even mention the ILWU initiative, its political strike against the U.S. imperialist war in Afghanistan and Iraq, in its May Day article in *Fight Back*.

Similarly, Bayan USA, the U.S. affiliate of the outstanding mass anti-imperialist organization, Bayan, in the Philippines, which has itself carried out a number of positive anti-imperialist activities including extensive anti-war work in the USA, in its 2008 May Day statement, nevertheless, mistakenly claimed that May Day's historical roots are in the struggle for socialism. Ironically, the main architect of May Day, the conservative trade unionist, Samuel Gompers, was the first national trade union leader in U.S. history who was *not* a socialist. Bayan USA also went along with the general trend in the U.S. immigrant rights movement to turn a *proletarian internationalist* holiday into a *bourgeois or narrow nationalist* occasion by calling May Day “Immigrant Workers Day.”

In an article on the 2008 demonstrations entitled, “Millions March on May Day,” co-written by John Catalinotto, a *Workers World* editor, the ILWU political strike is only accorded one sentence. The same issue of *Workers World* (5-15-08), to their credit, does feature a solid front page article on the West Coast Port Shutdown by an elected ILWU leader, Clarence Thomas, who was Co-chair of the Port Workers' May Day Organizing Committee. But the prism through which Workers World Party members view the May Day demonstrations is much more reflected in

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day prior to May 1, 1890. These were: Washington's Birthday in 1889, Independence Day in 1889, Labor Day in 1889, and Washington's Birthday again in 1890. By the time that Gompers appealed to the Paris International Congress of Marxist Socialists in July 1889, two of these U.S. national holidays had already taken place and great momentum had already been developed among U.S. workers for the upcoming May Day demonstration in 1890.



collaborationist unionism and to smash genuine left forces that were trying to educate the workers to proletarian internationalism through their own experience.

The RCP showed a lack of respect for the actual level of class consciousness of workers in the USA in 1980 – the fact that for over three decades the U.S. section of the international working class had been largely bribed and “lulled to sleep” into supporting U.S. imperialism against workers and oppressed peoples of other lands, that, through U.S. imperialist propaganda, May Day had been labeled a “Russian” or “Communist” holiday with no connection to the U.S. workers’ struggle, and that, on this basis, May Day workers’ protests in the USA had become a thing of the past.

Twenty-eight years later, in 2008, with no formal educational campaign launched by a conscious vanguard organization, thousands of U.S. workers, led by the ILWU, celebrated the May Day Holiday in protest against “their own” government’s imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan; and many of them took to the streets.

In the April/May 2008 edition of *Fight Back* newspaper, a generally positive anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist paper, the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO) one-sidedly reported that “May 1 was declared International Workers Day” “in honor of the U.S. workers’ fight for the eight-hour day and the anger at the executions” of the Haymarket martyrs. The executed and imprisoned Haymarket martyrs had indeed been the most outstanding leaders of the eight hour struggle in Chicago and of the entire U.S. labor movement. They were important labor leaders on a world scale. And they were all political figures as well; each was an anarcho-syndicalist and most of them were members of the International Working People’s Association.

But the first celebration of May Day as an international workers holiday was *motivated largely by the workers’ desire to win the eight hour work day and as part of their struggle to achieve it*. The Haymarket affair in Chicago and then the anti-worker violence perpetrated by the state militia in nearby Milwaukee, Wisconsin on the day after the Haymarket events generated mass anti-worker hysteria across the entire country in 1886. More than two years had passed before country-wide agitation for the eight hour day was renewed at the December 1888 AFL Convention in St. Louis.\*

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\*The AFL decided on its concrete plan to mobilize workers throughout the USA and around the world. It selected May 1, 1890 as the date on which organized labor would enforce the eight hour day. It also planned to take advantage of four traditional U.S. holidays to mount mass rallies in support of the eight hour

the Philippines as well as other neo-colonial peoples that there has been a large migration into the USA, where immigrant workers are being super-exploited within the U.S. multinational state boundaries almost to the level of super-exploitation in their native countries.

The U.S. ruling class utilized the great nation chauvinism and anti-foreigner mass sentiment in the USA to help keep the immigrants powerless and without rights; while it drew in so many immigrant workers that they are now a major force powering the U.S. economy and a major source of profits for the U.S. monopoly capitalists. In this light, the growing immigrant worker resistance to the open attacks against them in the USA in the past few years has even been backed by a section of the U.S. monopoly capitalist ruling class which is afraid that its supply of cheap immigrant labor will be shut off if the USA becomes too repressive and hostile to the immigrants or even closes its borders.

For their part, the oppressed Latino and Filipino and other immigrant masses bring with them still fresh traditions of militant struggle, including the celebration of May Day. As a result of all this, spurred on by the latest political attacks on their immigrant status, May Day 2006 provided a massive outpouring of fighters in defense of immigrant rights in some of the largest demonstrations of workers in U.S. history! This stunning demonstration of workers unity in action stopped the openly chauvinistic criminalizing of the immigrants at least for a while; *it also once again brought home the significance of the international workers holiday to the land of its birth*. The stage was set for the ILWU’s 2008 May Day initiative against the U.S. imperialist wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

*-Political Opponents and Supporters of the ILWU -*

The Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) accused the ILWU of using the war protest as a pretext for the one-day work stoppage, allegedly in order to strengthen its negotiating position for their upcoming contract struggle. However, even a casual reading of the longshore caucus resolution to hold the May Day protest reveals the serious proletarian political assessment that led the longshore workers to this initiative. In reality, it was the PMA that attempted to disrupt and divide the longshore workers in the lead-up to the contract battle. In fact, the PMA refused to accede to the union’s proper request to hold the one-day work stoppage in line with a contractual provision and past practice. This set the stage for an arbitrator to compel the ILWU leadership to direct the members *not* to observe the one shift work stoppage that they had planned and voted to do. As ILWU local #10 Executive Board member Jack Heyman pointed out, with a strong tradition of rank and file de-

mocracy, the ILWU workers conducted the strike virtually unanimously anyway, defeating the PMA provocation.

Of course, any *genuine* anti-war activist in the USA should have been impressed by the ILWU's May Day initiative. This was *not* the case, however, at an anti-war conference full of petty bourgeois professors, NGO staffers and other pacifist professionals held in Boston just a few days before May Day. The leaders and participants in the "End the Wars Abroad and at Home Charting A Path for 2008: A New England United Conference" (co-sponsored by the Tufts University Peace & Justice Studies Program) were almost unanimously *disinterested* when the ILWU decision to hold an eight hour work stoppage up and down the West Coast was announced during their Conference.

This antipathy was manifested despite the fact that two of the three keynote speakers came from San Francisco, where the ILWU is headquartered. While Professor Steven Zunes remained silent on the issue, Max Elbaum, editor of *War Times*, warned that not too much should be made of this workers' demonstration. No doubt this antipathy toward the ILWU and the working class on the part of these social pacifists and social chauvinists is in direct proportion to their political embrace of the Democratic Party and of U.S. imperialism.

What a contrast with the positive response by *serious* political opponents of the Bush-led, U.S. imperialist war of terror on the proletariat and peoples of the world! Both Cynthia McKinney, former Georgia Congresswoman and current Presidential candidate, and Cindy Sheehan, Gold Star mother and current congressional challenger to war criminal House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have drawn political strength from and provided political strength to the ILWU and its May Day work stoppage. Both spoke, along with progressive Hollywood actor, Danny Glover, a San Francisco native, at the May Day March and Rally in San Francisco led by the ILWU.

Cynthia McKinney stated, "I want you and your members to know that at least one 2008 Presidential candidate is proud to stand up publicly in full and unqualified support of your resolution to celebrate International Workers Day by protesting the war and occupation where it counts: at the point of production. My campaign, the Power to the People Campaign, will stand with you on May 1<sup>st</sup>, all along the West Coast, and anyplace where working people take up your call to resist the war. We'll be with you on the picket line." And she kept her word.

The outstanding anti-war leader Cindy Sheehan wrote to the ILWU in support of their May 1 work stoppage: "... your decision to stop work on

the West Coast docks on May 1, 2008 points the way for all of us who struggle to end the disastrous war and occupation of Iraq. This illegal and immoral war has been forced on us by the Republican administration, and has been funded enthusiastically by both the Democratic and Republican parties in Congress. The Democratic Party, under the leadership of Nancy Pelosi, continues a policy of full cooperation with and financial support for the Bush administration's war. While many Democrats will utter words that are critical of the highly unpopular war, their party simply will not use its political power to take any action to stop the carnage. The ILWU has shown that it is an independent workers' union, morally superior to the Democratic Party in every respect."

Proletarian internationalist leader, Crispin Beltran, in an outstanding speech written just days before his death and read for him at the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) Third International Assembly in Hong Kong in mid June noted the following: "In a bold display of class solidarity, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union declared an eight-hour strike last May Day to protest the war in Iraq. ... The strike demonstrated the collective power of the workers." Ka Bel recognized the ILWU strike as one of the key May Day protests in the world in 2008.

*-Opportunism on the Issue of Whose Day is May Day, on its Historical Origins and on the Legacy of Crispin "Ka Bel" Beltran-*

The healthy respect shown to the ILWU dock workers by Cindy Sheehan, Cynthia McKinney and Crispin "Ka Bel" Beltran is, unfortunately, not shared by many of those who proclaim themselves anti-imperialists, Marxists, socialists and/or communists in the USA today. Such opportunists are as far away from Lenin's and Marx's approach to the working class and the toiling masses as they can get.

The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP-USA) now focuses its attention on the lumpen-proletariat and even more on privileged petty bourgeois students, having long ago given up on the U.S. working class. In 1980, at a time when the RCP still paid attention to the working class it tried to dictate to the workers what they should think and do.

The RCP had a year-long educational campaign to convince the U.S. workers that they should take to the streets to celebrate May Day. At the same time, the RCP attacked union members and union organization. The RCP's provocative, ultra-left approach to U.S. industrial workers and their unions provided the right-wing class collaborationist trade union bureaucrats a basis to appeal to the "patriotism" and anti-communism of a section of the workers and rally their support for class