

**One Hemisphere, Indivisible:  
Permanent Revolution and Neo-liberalism in the  
Americas, by Guerry Hoddersen**

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Looking back**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Returning Vietnam vets were also a key component in the

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

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

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

## **Belt-tightening as a permanent way of life**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Latin America: from dictatorship to "free trade"**

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

## **Imperialism, war and Bonapartism**

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *The invasion and occupation of Iraq*

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

### *Fractured antiwar movement*

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

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

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

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

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

### *Bonapartism in the state*

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

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

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

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

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

## **A smaller world, a global class consciousness**

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

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

movement against capitalist globalization is spreading.

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

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



<http://www.RedLetterPress.org>