

**Update**

# **THE WORKER**

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## **Ideas**

**by Bill Foster**

The following article, written by Bill Foster, is based on material which originally appeared in the pamphlet "Change."

The Workers Party is devoted to the struggle to change society, to the struggle of the working class for emancipation. In the course of participating in this work, I have often come across individuals who insist that "change is impossible" because "people have backward ideas."

Of course, it is easy enough to show that this view is, at best, an over-generalization. Some people have progressive and revolutionary ideas; others have "backward" ideas. Do those with progressive ideas outnumber those with backward ideas? This is hard to say and we will return to this point later. But for now, we have to ask: "What is the source of "backward" ideas, and are people incapable of changing their ideas?" And even more importantly; "Is the fact that an individual may hold, various 'backward' ideas the primary thing determining his or her actions? Does the existence of certain ideas in the heads of people automatically prevent them from joining in the struggle for social progress and emancipation?"

In our society it is the capitalist class which is the die-hard opponent of progressive change. In fact, in today's world, the capitalist class is a reactionary class, a retrograde class which holds back human

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## **Defeat U.S. Imperialism's Program of Nuclear Blackmail!**

As part of asserting itself as the "sole superpower" and maintaining a "decisive military advantage" over the rest of the world, U.S. imperialism is applying a hypocritical, double-standard on the issue of the acquisition of nuclear weapons by other states. For example, while the U.S. government imposes economic sanctions on Iran for an alleged intention to build nuclear weapons "some time in the future," it says nothing about the existing nuclear arsenal of Israel.

The fact is that international treaties such as the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) have been used by the U.S. government as a means for ensuring its nuclear superiority and its nuclear blackmail over other nations and peoples. For example, in the 43 years since the NPT went into effect U.S. imperialism has not only greatly enlarged its nuclear arsenal and modernized its delivery sys-

tems but spread its net of nuclear weapons over the entire globe, deploying these instruments of mass destruction in many countries and filling the oceans and skies with nuclear armed submarines and bombers.

The U.S. government's nuclear weapons program and its policy of nuclear blackmail arises from the economic aims and strategic objectives of U.S. imperialism. In 1945, the U.S. dropped two atomic bombs on Japan. Top-level government officials admitted that these bombs were dropped with the aim of threatening the Soviet Union and the emerging national liberation movements. As then Secretary of War Stimson wrote in his diary, the U.S. wanted to emerge from World War II as the imperialist superpower with the "atom bomb ostentatiously on our hip."

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## **Join in the Discussion**

At first sight, it may seem that the problems facing our country and people are nearly insurmountable. The billionaire capitalists who monopolize political and economic power are imposing a thoroughly backward program on us – slashing social investments, increasing the exploitation of the workers, militarizing the economy and marching on the road of foreign aggression. In short, monopoly capital is ruling in the most arbitrary manner and attacking the people.

But is this problem really unsolv-

able? With the enormous level of economic development achieved by our country, cannot all of us envision a society which eliminates poverty and exploitation and guarantees the economic rights and well-being of everyone? With all the experiences of the workers' movements, the struggles of the oppressed minorities, of the women and youth – all trying to assert themselves and claim the right of the people themselves to be the sovereign creators of society – can-

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progress and social development in order to maintain its domination over society. The capitalist class, through its ownership of the mass media, its domination of the government, its control of the educational system, etc., bombards society with its reactionary ideas. Billions upon billions of dollars are spent and the most varied theories invented and taught in order to extol the virtues of the capitalist system, based on the exploitation of the working class, to spew out racist ideology, to glorify militarism and war and so forth. Long ago, the capitalists also began to create all kinds of apparatus to penetrate directly into the working class and popular movement – to create a labor aristocracy, various opportunist and diversionist political groups, etc., – in order to disorient the working class, split its ranks and undermine the struggles against capitalist exploitation. All of these things constitute the objective basis for the existence of reactionary ideas in our society. Yet, one of the favorite tricks of the capitalists themselves is to try to justify their own bestial activities through phony "public opinion" polls, which claim that the masses of people hold racist or chauvinist ideas and fully accept the status quo of capitalist exploitation.

Two issues immediately arise. Firstly, one who is concerned about the existence of backward ideas in society should direct his fire, his criticism, against the capitalist class and its ideologists. Secondly, we must ask, why do the capitalists, who never part with a dime except in anticipation of a greater return, spend billions of dollars literally trying to force their ideas down the peoples' throats, if the people are backward and uninterested in changing the capitalist system?

The fact is that regardless of the

"ideas in their heads," the workers and broad masses of people are continually forced to struggle in defense of their rights, forced to struggle to change the social relations in society, which at present insure their exploitation and oppression at the hands of the capitalists. No one likes to be laid off or have her/his wages cut; capitalist exploitation and oppression necessarily give rise to the idea of resistance as well as to the objective class struggle. No one likes to be beaten or harassed by the police simply because of their skin color (or for any other reason). In fact, the very conditions and objective struggles of the workers inevitably give rise to ideas about the solidarity of the whole working class, about a world free of exploitation and oppression, about a society based on cooperation amongst all the laboring people.

Thus the necessity and basis of change in society does not begin with the ideas in peoples' heads, but with the objective conditions under which people live. The world and society move and change according to objective laws inherent in them. Whether you believe in the law of gravity or not, you will surely fall if you jump off a cliff. A worker may vote for Bill Clinton, but this does not change the fact that Clinton is a representative of the capitalist class and as such will attack the rights of the workers. The contradictions of capitalist society, which are intensifying every day, give rise to an objective struggle between the working class and the capitalist class, a struggle which can find its resolution only in the overthrow of the capitalist system and the emancipation of the workers.

The point is that the "ideas in people's heads" continually change as the objective conditions under which

they live change and reality reveals itself. When the war in Vietnam began, for example, some workers supported it, others were unaware of it, while only a small percentage actively opposed it. But as the war went on and the savage nature of U.S. imperialism was revealed for all to see, the small anti-war movement grew into an unprecedented nation-wide struggle of tens, even hundreds of millions. Every day the crisis of capitalism reveals the inability of the capitalists to meet even the elementary needs of the people. Countless other big and small examples can be given.

Thus, for a person interested in progressive change, the starting point, the question of principle, is not the ideas in people's heads but the objective contradictions in society. One must determine which classes support the status quo and which forces necessarily seek change; one must take a firm stand on the side of the working class and oppressed masses. The thesis that "change is impossible" because "people have backward ideas" is not only a false over-generalization but also a prescription for acceptance of, and surrender to, the status quo. It leaves the individual in a passive position, relieved of any responsibility to take a stand of principle, and detaches the individual from the objective struggle of the working people against their exploitation and oppression.

But if ideas arise from reality, then one might ask, why is it necessary to propagate and fight for progressive and revolutionary ideas? Won't these ideas spontaneously arise in the heads of the working class and oppressed masses?

While ideas arise from objective reality, they are also part of reality and,

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## Nuclear Blackmail

In the sixty-plus years since the end of WW II, U.S. imperialism has repeatedly used nuclear weapons as an instrument of its foreign policy. During the Korean war, in Lebanon in 1958, during the Cuban missile crisis, in Vietnam, in Iran in 1980 and many other times, the U.S. government has threatened the peoples with nuclear strikes and even risked all-out nuclear war in order to suppress the national liberation movements and intimidate other states and peoples.

Yet even while it is U.S. imperialism itself which boasts a first-strike nuclear doctrine and the biggest nuclear arsenal, the U.S. government uses the pretext of "stopping nuclear proliferation" in order to interfere in the affairs of other countries. The Obama administration relies on its own allega-

tions of a so-called "nuclear threat" from North Korea and Iran as a means to pressure these countries.

The U.S. government uses the program of nuclear superiority and blackmail in order to protect the empire of the U.S. multi-national corporations, which plunder the resources and super-exploit the labor of peoples throughout the world. To control sources of raw materials, maintain its strategic spheres of influence and domination, and protect its investments, U.S. imperialism, relies, in the final analysis on military might, including its policy of nuclear superiority and blackmail.

Grave dangers are confronting the peoples everywhere. Contradictions and rivalries between the big imperialist powers and competing capitalist states are intensifying. So too, imperialism is step-

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ping up its program of colonial and neo-colonial domination, including its military pressure and intervention against sovereign states. These contradictions bear the seeds of new imperialist wars, including the danger that nuclear weapons will again be used against the peoples.

The peoples of every country aspire to a world of peace and cooperation amongst nations, to a genuine disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons and other instruments of mass destruction. The struggle for disarmament and peace must be directed against U.S. imperialism and the other big imperialist powers, who hold their nuclear swords over the whole world and carry out interference and aggression against the peoples.

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## Discussion

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not we all envision a society run by the people themselves? So too, cannot we all envision a world of peace of friendship amongst the peoples?

What is required to turn this vision – a vision which arises from the very conditions of modern society and from the aspirations of the people – into reality? All that is required is to develop the human factor – to bring the thinking, organization and action of the people to bear on the situation.

The activity of our Workers Party is devoted to assisting the development of this human factor. To this end, one of the continuous activities of our Party – an activity which we consider to be decisive at the present time – is to organize discussion amongst the people.

What kind of discussion?

Firstly, the discussion must be

organized on the burning and fundamental problems facing society and the people. It must aim at creating a new political unity amongst the people on the basis of a genuinely pro-social agenda. For our part, the Workers Party initiates discussion on the basic program of economic rights, democratic renewal, a democratic foreign policy and socialism.

Secondly, the discussion must be based on the active participation of people. The issue is not to lecture people, nor to simply go along with what anyone says. The issue is to create an atmosphere in which information and analysis is brought forward, in which people can look into their own experience and discuss their own vision and agenda for society, in which political issues can be sorted out over a period of time.

Organizing such discussion is

especially important today when the Democratic and Republican politicians, along with the monopoly-controlled media and other institutions of the status quo, are doing everything to de-politicize people and degrade their consciousness – doing everything to suppress the human factor.

Organizing discussion which 1) starts from the concerns of the people themselves and the needs of social development and 2) stimulates the active participation of people, at once goes against de-politicization. Such discussion empowers people by bringing forward the agenda of the people and encouraging their active role.

As our Party continues its work of stimulating the discussion on the widest possible basis, we invite all our readers to join in.

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in turn, play a big role in either advancing or retarding the struggle of the working class and people. While the conditions of the workers necessarily give rise to struggle against exploitation and oppression, this spontaneous struggle alone does not arm the workers with the history of the struggle of other workers, or with a scientific explanation of the root cause of exploitation and the solution to this problem. Just as the capitalists, in their struggle to enforce the exploitation and enslavement of the workers, propagate various ideas, so too, an indispensable part of the class struggle of the workers is the fight for revolutionary ideas – ideas which reveal the underlying cause and solution of the problems faced by the people, ideas which point out the path of struggle and victory.

In the course of its struggle against the capitalist class, the working class has created the theory of Marxism-Leninism to guide its struggle. Marxism-Leninism is the science which reveals the objective laws of motion of society. For 150 years, above all, the propaganda of the capitalists has been directed against this theory. The capitalists have burned the books of Marxism-

Leninism, passed laws not only forbidding Americans from espousing this theory but even declaring it a crime to "think" about it. On a world scale, millions and tens of millions of workers have been murdered for espousing this theory. But precisely because Marxism-Leninism arises objectively from the struggle of the working class, precisely because it is the theoretical expression of the actual existing relations and motion in society, Marxism-Leninism can never be eradicated or replaced. The capitalists can no more wipe out Marxism-Leninism than they can wipe out the law of gravity or annihilate the entire working class.

On the basis of the Marxist-Leninist theory, the Workers Party analyzes the objective problems confronting the workers movement today. That is, we are continually involved in clarifying the tasks which arise from the conditions facing us. So too, we are continually involved in drawing more and more people into this work of analyzing the conditions of the class struggle and working out solutions. Clarifying the tasks at hand and carrying through the ideological and theoretical work necessary to assist people in taking up these tasks is a

decisive part of the working class movement for emancipation.

Returning again to the question of what ideas actually exist in the heads of the U.S. working class and people. Of course I cannot know the ideas in the heads of 200 million people. But I do know that when I first entered into active political life I also was influenced by the widespread theory that "people are backward." But for more than 20 years, my consistent experience has been that by taking a firm stand of principle alongside the working masses in their struggles, by taking the initiative to go to the masses with the revolutionary ideas which reflect their real conditions and aspirations, I have never been disappointed. In fact it has been the ideas and aspirations of the masses which are an inexhaustible source of strength and inspiration. On the other hand, if one chooses to go along with the status quo, and approaches the people with the idea that they are backward, one will never see the revolutionary ideas or learn of the revolutionary experience of the masses. My advice to those obsessed with the alleged "backward ideas" of the masses is that such individuals should look first to their own ideas.

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