

## Tesla Update

Our regular readers will recall that Tesla Motors, in a joint venture with Toyota, made plans for an electric car factory, where New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc. (NUMMI) was located in Fremont, Calif. [“Why Gag Order Cannot Hide Truth About NUMMI,” Autumn 2010.] Note from the article that follows that this GM-Toyota owned NUMMI plant (New United Motor Manufacturing Inc.) had pressured workers in the UAW (United Auto Workers) to agree to “give-backs” and other major concessions, under the threat of closing the plant. This NUMMI plant was closed anyway and production of these vehicles was moved to nonunion Toyota plants in Texas and Mexico, where the labor is much cheaper. In the shadow of these developments, Tesla announced that this new Tesla-Toyota owned plant in Fremont had a policy of “neutrality” on unions in this plant and that workers could make their own decision on this matter.

How many of these UAW members from NUMMI will get jobs at this Tesla plant is problematic, to say the least. As of a Reuters Sept. 20 report, this question still remained unanswered. In fact, whether workers will have UAW or any union representation was reportedly still an “open question.”

According to *Automotive News* (July 12), UAW President Bob King announced that the UAW would picket Toyota car dealers in California and New York to protest this closure of the NUMMI plant and to demand the right of workers to union representation. King has enlisted the support of liberal pro-capitalist reformist politicians, such as Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Such a political alliance is another sign of the direction that the UAW is heading. Reuters also reported King’s declaration that workers should go for “flexible compensation” and “profit-sharing” schemes, which do not cause a corporation to be “back in a cycle of uncompetitiveness.” In other words, Kings is actually saying that workers should cooperate with capitalist enterprises in increasing profits, which is nonsensical if he expects workers to demand that the company pay them higher wages for their labor in collective bargaining. So who does the UAW really represent? The writing was on the wall in 2007, when the UAW accepted a four-year contract with “competitive” measures like reducing the wages for entry-level workers to nearly half the amount paid for workers with seniority. Clearly this gives the company an incentive to eliminate older workers and to hire more new or younger ones at lower wages. Yet King

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*In China—*

## Foxconn Workers Defy State-Controlled ‘Union’!

*By Diane Secor*

**T**HE bureaucratic state of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is well-known as one of the most powerful and despotic police states in the world. Resistance to China’s state apparatus can mean a one-way ticket to a slave labor prison camp. (See *The People*, Nov-Dec. 2004). Workers in such camps produce many of those “made in China” products sold by such U.S. retailers as Wal-Mart.

For decades, the PRC regime has acted as the guarantor of an abundance of cheap, docile labor for foreign and domestic capitalists. This system has been facilitated by the state-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). Indeed, as the only legally recognized trade unions in China, the ACFTU has acted as a tool at the disposal of the PRC police state for subduing worker unrest.

Recently, however, a spate of strikes and other signs of resistance to deplorable wages and working conditions have cropped up in defiance of the discipline imposed by the ACFTU. Workers at Foxconn Technologies at Shenzhen, for example, have ignited a spark of resistance to the state-controlled unions, and their resistance seems to have inspired a vast numbers of workers employed by other foreign-owned and Chinese firms.

Foxconn belongs to Hon Hai Precision Industry Co., Ltd., a Taiwan-based manufacturer of the iPhone and other commodities for Apple, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, and other U.S. high-tech corporations. Conditions at Foxconn’s Shenzhen plant caused enough misery to induce “a string of worker suicides,” according to Reuters (Oct. 1). Workers’ protests at this particular plant prompted the firm to announce a “roughly 66 percent pay rise for assembly line workers.”

Strikes or any workers activities or organizations outside of this ACFTU umbrella have led to arrest and imprisonment. Whether the Foxconn and similar rebellions signify a serious breakdown of the ACFTU’s control of China’s workers remains to be seen, but these defiant outbreaks certainly suggest a rapid growth of discontent within China’s burgeoning working class.

According to Dr. Sheo Nandan Pandey, a China scholar at SAAG (South Asia Analysis Group), an India think tank, the Foxconn suicides were a desperate response to “sweatshop working conditions” at the company’s Shenzhen plant in the Pearl River Delta region. According to SAAG, however, Foxconn workers are not alone in refusing to

submit to such coercion. In numerous other electronics firms, and in other sectors of the economy, workers have gone on unauthorized strikes and “won wage concessions.” What may be of more significance, however, is that workers on strike at Foxconn and other foreign-owned plants are specifically demanding the right to organize their own unions independently of the ACFTU. Increasingly defiant, workers do not seem intimidated by the fact that such unions are outlawed.

Strikes are becoming so common at China’s other Taiwan-owned factories, at Japanese-owned plants, such as Honda, and other foreign-owned and Chinese businesses, that Foxconn’s parent company, Hon Hai, is seeking to move away from Shenzhen and the Pearl River Delta region in general to relocate farther inland, where there is an abundant and presumably more docile supply of cheaper labor. However, workers’ protests are also happening in some of these “less developed regions” of China.

Should foreign capitalists lose confidence that the PRC’s police state can guarantee sufficient access to “sweatshop” labor, they can also move their plants to countries, where workers are poorer and more desperate for jobs, with repressive regimes. Some countries may ban unions altogether or some may have an arrangement comparable to the ACFTU or to the pro-capitalist AFL-CIO in the United States. Another option for the PRC is greater repression and increased reliance on prison labor. But with such large numbers of determined striking workers in almost every sector, would the arrests of millions of people be too risky or too costly an option? Almost every sector of China’s economy would be affected with social disintegration of communities and the long-term disruption of the production of essential commodities, which are not made with prison labor. No doubt about it, there is power in a united working class!

What is the significance of these Foxconn strikes and resistance to the ACFTU framework, which has spread throughout the more industrialized areas of China? Certainly, these Foxconn workers, as part of this larger trend, portend the possibility of a massive Chinese class conscious working class movement. Such classconsciousness could lead to the formation of genuine Socialist Industrial Unions. But with a vast, extremely complex society, such as in China, it is too early to draw any definite conclusions on the outcome of

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*The Workers' Bookshelf—*

# 'Descent Into Chaos'

DESCENT INTO CHAOS: THE UNITED STATES AND THE FAILURE OF NATION BUILDING IN PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN, AND CENTRAL ASIA, By Ahmed Rashid, 544 pages, hardcover. Penguin Books, June 2008. Please order from local book dealer or online, not from SLP.

*By Bernard Bortnick*

PAKISTANI journalist Ahmed Rashid has written his most definitive account describing the dreadful entanglements encompassing the U.S. led war in Afghanistan. It is appropriately titled *Descent Into Chaos* and subtitled *The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia*. His past works, "Taliban" and "Jihad" were both well written and thoroughly documented reflecting his extensive knowledge of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan in terms of people personalities and places. *Descent Into Chaos* seems to summarize these earlier works and is filled with penetrating observations of ruling class personalities and imperialist efforts engaged in the struggle to control what has recently been cited as a treasure trove of Afghanistan's mineral wealth.

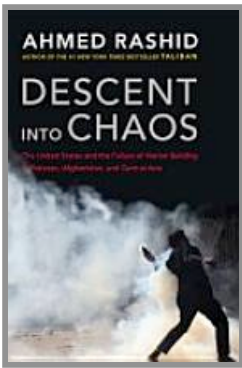
The spurious frenzy on leaked classified information on a web site called WikiLeaks contains information that seems to virtually parallel that covered by Rashid's investigations and revelations. Enough had been known that President Obama deflected criticism of the leak under his administration as no "big deal."

A major focus of the book is the arrogance of the Bush Administration which is repeatedly exposed. Its strident war preparations to topple the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, with a perfunctory interdiction in Afghanistan, is criticized by the author. The U.S. strategy was cited as using the local war lords to run the country, while the Bush cabal concentrated on "Shock and Awe," charging into the Iraqi debacle while neglecting efforts to set up a centralized capitalist state with Hameed Karzai as president. The U.S. supported the authoritarian rule of the Pakistani militarist General Musharraf whom both V.P. Cheney and Rumsfeld repeatedly lauded. He in turn worked with the Pakistani secret service, the ISI, working to undermine Karzai in the hopes of countering India's commercial and political inroads in Afghanistan. (The Pakistani ruling class generally regards Afghanistan as their hinterland in the event of a war with India.)

This duplicity didn't prevent Anglo-American capitalism from playing 'patty-cake' with the dictator. The massive supplies of military equipment sent to Pakistan, ostensibly to fight terrorism and the Taliban placated the Pakistani militarists and helped to counter the widely held view by Pakistanis that the General was in bed with Bush. What-

ever, it additionally nourished the capitalist Warfare state.

The antagonisms that exist among the various states in the region emerge in the course of Rashid's account. For example, China's historical support of Pakistan is based upon mutual mistrust of India. The northern border between India and Tibet has never been settled and was the object of a war in 1960. Pakistan and India have been disputing Kashmir for 60 years and have fought two wars over it. Russian influence among the Central Asian states is still evident and despite the collapse of the USSR, the residual elements of authoritarianism are pronounced in all the Central Asian nations. This has taken the form of repression of the majority Islamic population whose youth are vulnerable to demagogues and whose resistance augments the insurgencies in Pakistan and Afghanistan.



At no place in the book is there recognition of the fundamental social character of the region steeped as it is in tribal society, and lying millennia behind capitalist development and property relations.

The widespread perception that somehow capitalist parliamentary government and political democracy can be imposed upon an agrarian tribal society is deeply flawed since the motivations behind such actions are grounded in imperialist exploitation and promotion of local ruling classes to the benefit of the imperialist powers.

*Descent Into Chaos* is written as if it is advice and warning to the "Powers that be." It averts any discussion of the basic antagonisms that exist under the capitalist system that compels ruling classes to act as they do. Consequently, for Socialists it is a somewhat tiring review, filled with facts and recommendations that fail to gain traction by addressing the one looming question of our age, capitalist destruction or socialist survival and progress. Thus, Socialists will find Rashid's hand wringing account, exhaustive as it is, to be tedious as they search for a broad indictment of ruling class motivations. No social problem is

ever solved under the capitalist system. It is just transformed into something more hideous. The current war in Afghanistan is part of that horror.

*Afterthoughts on 'Descent Into Chaos'—*

A few additional observations I believe are relevant regarding Ahmed Rashid's recent book *Descent Into Chaos*.

Nationalism is an integral part of the development of capitalist society. Attempts to manufacture "nations" out of what remain basically tribal social relationships throughout the world have invariably led to authoritarian regimes besieged with fractious tribal groups that vie with one another to grab pieces of the imperialist pie by accommodating those foreign exploiters of whatever the country has to offer. This happens to be the case in Afghanistan, where the majority of the population are Pashtun and speak a different tongue than minority groups that occupy the northern and eastern parts of the country. There are three other ethnic groups besides Pashtuns. The Tajiks, Hazaras and Uzbeks, comprise 27 percent, 9 percent, and 8 percent of the population respectively. Whatever nationalist cohesion can be developed in Afghanistan is in the nature of a synthetic product.

The same can be said of Pakistan. In fact the Pashtun majority in Afghanistan share a porous border with Pashtun tribal groups in Pakistan. Pakistan itself is a construct manufactured to try to settle a desired independent identity among Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. However, within the political boundaries of Pakistan are other tribal groups who resent the domination of the central government. Specifically, the people of Balochistan, comprising only 4 percent a large but a resource rich area in southern Pakistan has nurtured an insurgency opposed to the central government. Besides the Balochs, there are three other major tribal groups and another 23 percent of other ethnic groups.

When ruling class imperialists barge into a country, they care not a wit for these delicate interrelationships of the people and territories they seek to dominate. Capitalists and their political proponents remain blissfully ignorant of such relationships and they don't care about the social anarchy destruction and death they cause.

*Descent into Chaos* should be regarded as a major source book for any Socialist interested in developing a comprehensive analysis of Central Asia.

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## Question Periods

(*Weekly People*, September 23, 1961)

**Barring nuclear war, theoretically in the not too distant future automation may reduce the wage working class to a small minority of the population—a sort of labor “aristocracy.” Could labor “aristocrats” be expected to establish Socialism? Isn’t it possible that your Socialist Industrial union may become outmoded before it is born?**

It is undeniable that automaton has the potentiality of reducing the work force in industry to a fraction of its present numbers. Indeed, we have said before that if the American workers remain apathetic long enough, if they continue to chase the will o’ the wisp of reforms, and if they fail to repudiate the AFL-CIO type of “unionism” that today actually functions as a prop for capitalism, they will ultimately find themselves in a degraded condition not unlike that of the proletariat of ancient Rome. The labor of the Roman proletariat was rendered useless by captive slaves; that of today’s proletariat is being displaced by automated machines.

But there are serious errors of thinking in the question posed above, nevertheless.

For one thing the phrase “not too distant future” is suggestive but vague. Actually, while the spread of automation continues to contribute to chronic unemployment at an increasing tempo, it would take at least a couple of decades, probably longer, to reduce the employed workers to a minority of the population, and even then the industrial work force will number millions.

For another thing, it is wishful to imagine that under conditions of mass unemployment to workers employed in automated industries would constitute an “aristocracy.” Capitalists abhor an “aristocracy” of labor—*vide* the railroad workers who had that status in the 1920’s. They would use the labor surplus to beat down the wages of employed workers to a minimum. It is contrary to the nature of capitalism to allow workers to settle down in contentment and security.

But the most serious error in the thinking behind the question posed above is the assumption that Socialist Industrial Unionism may become outmoded as a result of technological development. Even where automation has made spectacular advances, as in meat packing and steel, workers operate industry, hence have the potential economic power to take it over in the name of society. Moreover, economic processes, including agriculture and distribution, are becoming more and more industrialized, hence more and more susceptible to Socialist Industrial Union organization.

He who says that the Socialist Industrial Union is outmoded says that Socialism is outmoded, for without the Socialist Industrial Union the aspiration for Socialism is futile. It is, of course, possible that the workers may remain apathetic even while the ranks of chronically unemployed grow to massive proportions. We do not think that they will, and we shall do all in our power to insure that they won’t. Nevertheless, it is possible. In this case, society would move into an era of industrial feudalism, which, while it would not last forever, might keep the workers in a state of industrial serfdom for decades.

It is to avert such social retrogression that the SLP works so hard to spread the pro-

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# Deindustrialization, Globalization and The Socialist Industrial Union Program

Robert Bills

National Secretary

Dear Comrade Bills,

\* \* \*

It seems to me that the Party has a tenuous hold on reality relative to its program and relevance. You have stated on a number of occasions that the SIU program is out of sync with the reality of working class America, largely as a result of the industrial base of the country having been virtually gutted by outsourcing, not to mention automation. The majority of organized unions are largely in the service sector, and they in turn are to some substantial extent residing within the political state, with all of the inhibitions against strikes and job actions that the political state imposes. Industrial America is enfeebled by small non-union industrial shops, reverting back to an earlier time.

The working class is out there, and the class struggle is out there, but for our class and Socialists the fog grows thicker. We can’t rely anymore on the prescience of the great Socialist thinkers in the current situation. It’s a totally different world than when Marx and De Leon lived.

You have placed the issue of where we go from here in the hands of the NEC, where it properly belongs. But the dearth of comments is deafening. I don’t think any of us have a clue. Despite growing poverty, insecurity, ill health, crime, and all of the other maladies of capitalism, the socialist movement is in a quandary.

What are your thoughts?

Fraternally,

B. BORTNICK

NEC Member

Bernard Bortnick

NEC Member

Dear Comrade Bortnick:

This is in response to your email of November 17, which I promised to answer long ago, but which, apart from some personal distractions, I decided needed more thought than I initially anticipated.

\* \* \*

Apart from its seemingly negative tone, you start with what could have been an excellent lead-in sentence to an in-depth article or, better yet, an SLP resolution on the SIU program in this so-called era of post-industrial globalism. Unfortunately, however, you pass on without any attempt to explore the question.

Now, while I may have said things that misled you into thinking “that the Party has a tenuous hold on reality relative to its program and relevance,” my view of the matter really is quite different. What I said [to the NEC in Session] in 2003, and what the NEC cited with approval, was that the program has suffered from *neglect* for half a century or

more, but that this *neglect is no reason to conclude that time and evolving circumstances have passed it by*. As the NEC expressed it:

“Comrade Bills delineates changes in society and the economy brought about by the technological revolution in the last half of the 20th century and their effects on the division of labor and makeup of the working class. He observes a “theoretical lethargy” in the Party that kept the Party from updating its program and propaganda to account for these changes, with the result that ‘the SIU program must appear to be irrelevant to many workers.’” (Emphasis added)

I stick by that because nothing has changed during the intervening seven years.

I have always accepted the Party’s view that the SIU program is highly adaptable and would become even more relevant with advances in technology. This view of the matter was expressed many times in the past, as in the following passage from the pamphlet, *Automation*, written by Eric Hass and Stephen Emery:

“Although the advance of automation will, like previous technological innovations, doubtless general structure of industry, the practicability of Socialist Industrial Unionism will not be the least bit impaired thereby. For De Leon has sagely provided us with a flexible principle of organization—one that takes the existing organization of industry as the mold to which the workers’ industrial union must always conform; the form of the union altering as the form of industry alters. Accordingly, in the measure that automation further simplifies and streamlines the organization of our industries it will perfect these to serve as the mold of the Socialist Industrial Union—and as the constituencies of a Socialist Industrial Republic!”

Whether this is true today is one question the SLP ought to be discussing in great depth and in great detail because of the technological developments, the decentralization and, of course, globalization that you mention. (As a possible point of departure from which such a discussion might begin, I attach two “Question Period” columns from the *Weekly People*, the first from 1961, the other from 1963.)

The pamphlet made another point that, in my opinion, is more a source for concern, i.e., whether the SIU could still fulfill its function as the irresistible and non-violent force needed to consummate the revolution. The pamphlet put it this way:

“The integral Socialist Industrial Union is the only power through which the workers can surely and peacefully enforce a majority vote in favor of Socialist reconstruction. The SIU will enforce and execute the revolutionary mandate of the Socialist ballot by taking possession of the nation’s industries and

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## ... Program

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placing them under the democratic management of the workers who operate them. Thereafter, our Socialist Industrial Union will carry on as the permanent basis of an industrial representative government through which we can democratically administer and operate our Socialist economy to produce an abundance for everyone."

The answer to this facet of the question is, of course, largely contingent upon the answer to the first.

At any rate, I do hope this might help kick-start the long-deferred discussion and evaluation of how advancing technology and globalization have impacted the efficacy of the SIU program.

Fraternally yours,  
ROBERT BILLS  
National Secretary

## Question Periods

(Continued from page 3)

gram of Socialist Industrial Unionism, the organization of the workers in accord with their class interests, and the consolidation of their power as society's producers.

(Weekly People, March 2, 1963)

**Considering the tremendous gains of automation in displacing workers, will this not make the Socialist Industrial Union program invalid?**

No, it will not. Automation is indeed making tremendous strides. And it will doubtless make even greater strides in the future, especially when computers become more sophisticated. Nor is there any doubt that automation in the next several years will displace very large numbers of workers or that the latter will constitute a growing army of permanently unemployed. It is conceivable, even likely, that some plants may be entirely automated. Even so, the Socialist Industrial Union program, which is a product of the industrial age, which aims to organize the workers as a class, employed and unemployed, and which is entirely adaptable to changes in industrial techniques, will remain valid—the only conceivable means whereby to accomplish the Socialist revolution in America.

Indeed, the more the industrial mold is perfected the more logical and valid does the Socialist Industrial Union program become.

The Socialist Industrial Union program calls for the workers to organize politically and industrially—politically under the banner of the SLP, to ventilate the aims and tactics of Socialism, and establish the *right* to replace private capitalist ownership with social ownership, and industrially to back up this right with an irresistible *might*. The goal: a society in which the means of social production are owned socially and administered democratically by the workers through their own Socialist Industrial Union councils.

Note that the Socialist Industrial Union program doesn't call on the workers to take over this or that individual plant; it calls on them to take over the entire economy, which is to say, *all* the factories, mills, mines, railroads, stores, warehouses, etc. Now then, a particular process in steelmaking may be automated. Human labor may be virtually eliminated from this process. But when the time comes for the works to back up the

revolutionary Socialist ballot this will not stop the workers, say, at the Bethlehem Steel facilities at Sparrows Point, Maryland, from taking over that great steelmaking complex—including its automated sectors.

Neither would the fact that some factories were completely automated deter *the organized working class* from taking over the entire economy.

In this connection, it is important to establish the point that when we say the Socialist Industrial Union aims to organize the working class we mean just that. Today's unions, which are based on acceptance of capitalism, are not interested in organizing the unemployed; they are interested only in organizing workers who have jobs and can pay dues. But the Socialist Industrial Union, which aims for a society in which there will be no involuntary unemployment, will organize the unemployed as well as the employed. Thus it will recruit the unemployed steelworkers into the steelworkers' industrial union, the unemployed railroad workers into the transportation workers' industrial union, the unemployed textile workers into the textile workers' industrial union, etc.

At some stage in the mass displacement of workers by automation the fear that already touches millions of workers will be rationalized. The realization will grow that there is no solution to the problem within the capitalist system. Thought, discussion, enlightenment will produce action. The real question therefore is: At what stage will this occur? The answer will doubtless involve many other factors, not the least of which will be the economic distortions and political reaction resulting from capitalist economic anarchy.

## Tesla Update

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has also indicated that the UAW will try to "rollback" some of these losses that the workers have suffered.

According to Reuters, the UAW is also under pressure from the Obama administration's GM bailout program to not pursue these "rollbacks" to make GM more "competitive," in order to lure foreign or American investors. King has expressed support for these government bailout "restructuring" schemes, such as selling stakes in GM to China's Shanghai Automotive Industry Corp. (SAIC), on terms favorable to stockholders. Such arrangements will put the UAW in a much weaker bargaining position, if they expect to get any "rollbacks."

Likewise, after GM's bankruptcy, this joint NUMMI ownership of GM and Toyota collapsed. According to the *The Detroit News* (June 17), King urged Toyota to allow the UAW to organize nonunion workers in foreign factories, in order to reverse the concessions made by the UAW workers in the United States. He said that the intent was to not put firms in the United States at a "competitive disadvantage." Toyota responded by ensuring that they would not be at such a "disadvantage" by closing NUMMI and seeking pools of cheaper labor in Texas and Mexico. Then this Tesla-Toyota venture was formed to replace NUMMI, with a Tesla profession of "neutrality" on the question of any union representation. That is the way that capitalism functions, a system that King openly supports.

In case there was still any doubt, the UAW has now proven itself to be completely unreliable in defending workers' interests, even to the point of open agreement with concessions, in order to make the company more profitable. But in the ruthless quest for high profits, auto firms in the United States are trying to avoid even making small concessions on higher wages. If Tesla does allow unions in this new plant, such union representation will predictably be limited to an emasculated UAW.

Diane Secor

## Foxconn Workers...

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this workers' resistance to state control.

The difficulty in analyzing these trends is underscored by the lack of Western reporters and observers in China, who have a solid grasp of the class struggle and its dynamics. Nationalist, regional, and local political and cultural factors can divide workers and divert groups of workers from the growth of class unity and classconscious organization. For example, according to a Sept. 23 Reuters report, in Shenzhen, where that Foxconn plant is located, hundreds of workers organized a strike at the Japanese Synztec Precision Parts Co. Ltd. At Japanese-owned factories in China, strikes and other protests for high wages may be tolerated by the PRC regime, if this can be used as leverage in disputes between China's and Japan's ruling classes. For instance, this Reuters report also stated that Japan and China have conflicting claims over "energy resources," i.e., oil or gas deposits, in the Diaoyu or Senkaku islands. This territorial dispute has escalated into a broader "trade war," with reportedly a threat by China to halt exports of "rare earth" minerals, used "to enhance batteries, computer and weapons systems, and other applications."

As more Chinese workers in Japanese and non-Japanese-owned firms organize independently of the ACFTU and communicate with each other, Chinese workers at Japanese plants may be less inclined to fall into the nationalist trap. Workers can also avoid diversions by regional issues through communications with other workers in different parts of China to establish common ground. The growth of class consciousness may, in general, flourish if workers in different sectors and different regions of China communicate with each other in ways to try to evade interference by the state, such as through the internet. Thus we can expect to see the PRC try new ways and new devices to monitor and to block certain internet communications, with the full support of foreign investors, who make a killing off the cheap labor, such as the U.S. high tech firms, who use Foxconn.

The important point in this is that "exploitation," however seemingly otherwise, is not the act of any individual capitalist, or set of capitalists, perpetrated upon any individual workingman or set of workingmen. Exploitation is a *class* act—the act of the whole capitalist class—perpetrated upon a *class*—the whole working class.—Daniel De Leon