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SocialistViewpoint

★ The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it. —Karl Marx ★

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Economic Inequality in the USA

By LAUREN McCAULEY



December 2, 2015—The divide between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in the United States has never been so vast, with a new report out Tuesday revealing that the nation’s 20 richest individuals own more wealth than the entire bottom half of the population.

What’s more, with a combined worth of \$2.34 trillion, the richest 400 Americans—who include Bill Gates, Donald Trump, Oprah Winfrey, and heirs to the Wal-Mart fortune—own more wealth than the bottom 61 percent of the country, or 194 million people.

“America’s skewed wealth is one of the most critical issues of our time,” stated Chuck Collins, senior scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and co-author of the report.”¹

What’s more, the study compares the *Forbes* list with other segments of the population, showing great disparity in how this wealth is distributed. For example, the combined net worth of the Forbes 400 roughly equals the wealth of the entire African American population, plus a third of the Latino population.

As Collins notes, this staggering gap in wealth has worsened since the global recession and has proved problematic—even in cases where the billionaires are generous philanthropists.

the nation’s 20 richest individuals own more wealth than the entire bottom half of the population.

“Concentrating wealth to this extent gives rich donors far too much political power,” Collins explains, “including the wherewithal to shape the rules that govern our economy.” He cites the recent *New York Times* report, which found that half of all political contributions in the 2016 presidential campaign came from just 158 families.

The study follows numerous other recent reports that suggest the world, and particularly the United States, has reached what Collins refers to as “peak wealth inequality.”

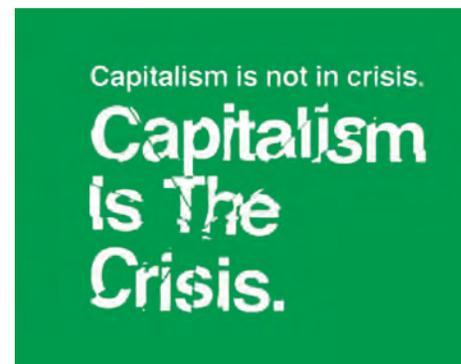
Collins and report co-author Josh Hoxie, who heads the IPS Project on Opportunity and Taxation, put forth a number of solutions to reverse this trend, including closing offshore tax havens and tax code loopholes, which they say the wealthy frequently exploit. Further, the report calls for the re-institution of progressive income tax policies, which would both “break up the concentration of wealth and generate trillions of dollars in new revenue to invest in wealth building opportunities for working families.”

Among the report’s other recommendations to help spread the wealth: raising the minimum wage and overhauling campaign finance, to stem the influence of money on politics.

—*Common Dreams*, December 2, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/12/02/mind-blowing-inequality-americas-20-richest-own-more-bottom-half>

¹ <http://www.ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Billionaire-Bonanza-The-Forbes-400-and-the-Rest-of-Us-Dec1.pdf>



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www.socialistviewpoint.org

email: info@socialistviewpoint.org

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U.S. Wars, Police Violence and Incarcerations

By BONNIE WEINSTEIN

The whole world is in turmoil suffering the capitalist descent into barbarism. Working people are just beginning to realize that we are all in the same sinking boat.

Across the globe, we are facing the economic reality of austerity for us, and untold accumulation of wealth for the ruling elite. Democratic rights are being decimated. Police brutality and murder are rampant. And while the military, police and the corporations can kill, mutilate and rob with impunity; the poor are locked up for the crime of being impoverished.

We are reaching a tipping point both in our climate crisis of capitalist pollution and environmental destruction and our overwhelming social crisis of unending war, poverty and criminalization of the poor. What workers do not yet realize is that we have the power to change all of this.

Workers have the power

There is a great divide between those with well-paying jobs, such as those working in the abundantly-funded military industrial complex, building bombs, *etc.*, and the vast majority of the rest of us.

Not that the divide can't be closed. But there needs to be a huge rise in consciousness. Workers need to realize that by working together democratically and in our own common interests, we *can* make the world a better place and, in fact, we are the only hope to make that happen!

The purpose of oppression

The huge U.S. military and incarceration complexes are indelibly linked. Their intent is to make capitalism appear all-powerful and make workers think, not only that we are weak and defenseless, but that workers of different races, religions, and sexual orientations—even occupations—are somehow our natural enemies. They want us to fight amongst ourselves for crumbs.

U.S. capitalism's war for profits on the workers of nations across the globe—which is what U.S. wars are all about—is the very same war of police murder, brutality and mass incarceration of workers at home. The warlords are one in the same.

Capitalism's wars and police violence are designed to inhibit workers' solidarity—especially here in “the belly of the beast.”

The capitalists will do anything and everything in their power to blur the connection between capitalist, imperialist wars and the enforced poverty of the masses through austerity measures, police violence and incarceration here at home.

In effect, capitalism is forcing workers to pay for our own military bombardment and incarceration. And, we are being forced to supply the hard labor to build the weapons used to murder and oppress us, and to pave the road to their murderous descent into barbarism.

The capitalist class knows full well that the only force that can take this despotic power from them and change the world for the better is the unified force of the working class.

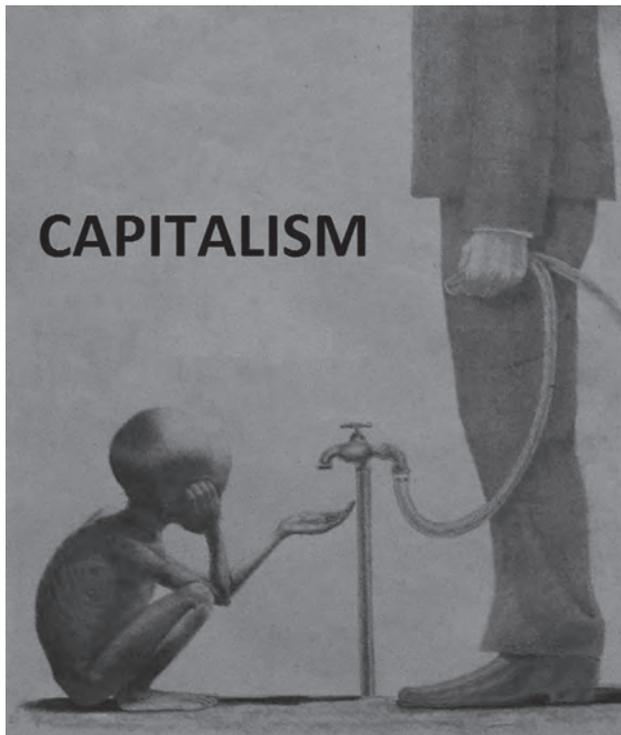
We can stop building weapons of violence, mass destruction and oppression and build the things we need for life, instead.

This will happen only when we come to the fundamental, conscious, realization that we can only reach our fullest potential as a humane society through peace, love, equality and cooperation. The current capitalist alternative—war, bigotry and competition—only leads to barbarism.

That's why we have to oppose war and police violence as one and the same thing—capitalism's method of getting us to blame and fight each other instead of them.

The chaos and descent into barbarism can sometimes be blinding; yet the solution is simple—end capitalism and build a socialist democracy worldwide under the control of the working class and in defense of all life on Earth!

The only solution is world socialist revolution!



What is the “War on Terror?” And How to Fight It

BY MARILYN VOGT-DOWNEY

The attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, and in San Bernardino on December 4, 2015, have provided ample “justification” for authorities to ramp up “The War on Terror.” They were followed by draconian attacks on civil liberties in France. They have spurred escalated imperialist military intervention in the war-torn regions east of the Mediterranean Sea, particularly Syria and Iraq. The U.S. government has moved to officially deploy its Special Operations Forces to “oversee” military assaults in that region by various armed groups. In addition, the intense U.S. government-led bombing campaign launched in September 2014, allegedly aimed at ISIS targets, has been stepped up and has now been joined by the previously hesitant French and British governments.

The war hysteria has been galvanized to a fevered pitch: One particularly delirious hawkish presidential candidate—Ted Cruz—has even called for “carpet bombing” the Iraq-Syria region to destroy ISIS and “find out” if the “sand can glow,” according to the online magazine *Politico* on December 5, 2015.

The “War on Terror” was launched in 2001. Fourteen years and trillions of dollars later, it is alive and well, and so are the “terrorists.” Moreover, there is not the slightest doubt that these escalated military offensives will neither end the former nor destroy the latter. Meanwhile, the ghastly attacks by ISIS and other such groups provide abundant opportunities for the corporate-owned media and politicians to remind the world’s working-class of the urgency of “The War on Terror,” which Pentagon officials predict will last into the next generation.

Nor is there the slightest doubt, as the evidence below will show, that the U.S. government has fabricated “The

War on Terror” to meet U.S. imperialism’s long-term geopolitical goals. The evidence will show that either directly or through its vassal states, the U.S. government is responsible for organizing armed terrorist groups across Asia and has been doing so for decades, causing tens-of-millions of deaths and injuries. This policy has led to the destruction of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and now Yemen, and has already been extended into Africa.¹

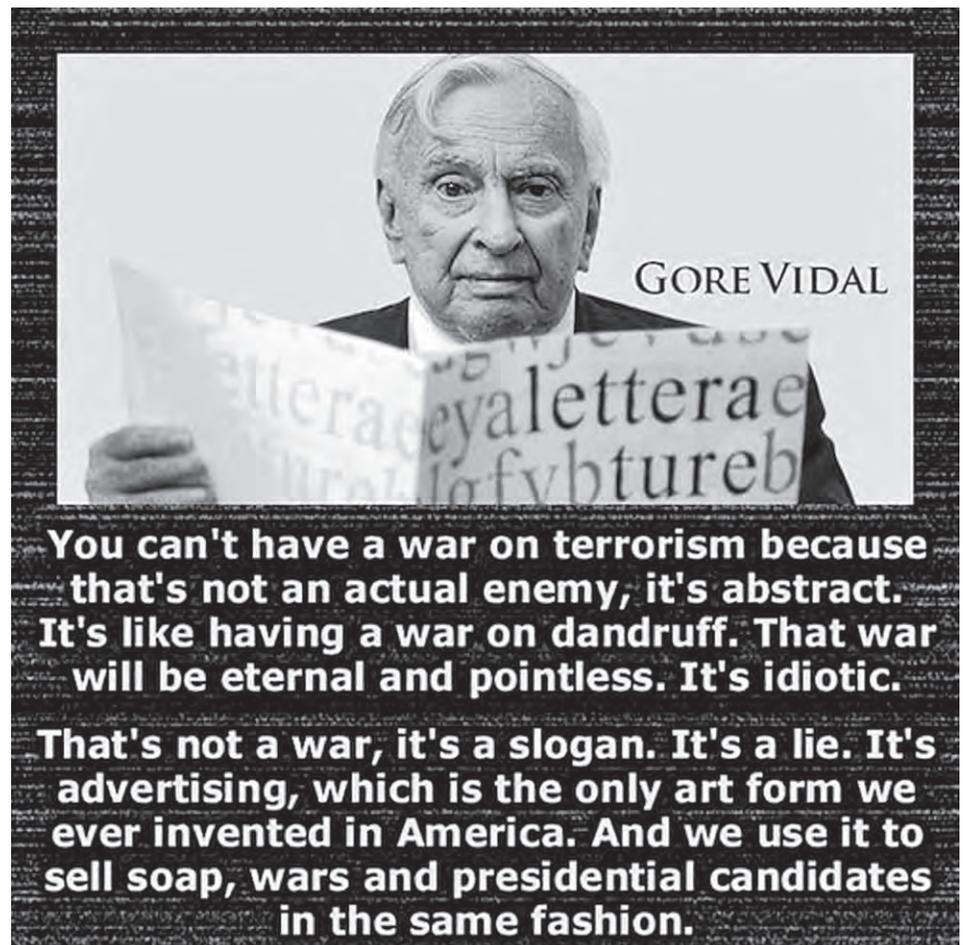
These are not just “wars for oil,” as echoed in the popular refrain. There is much more involved than just oil—although oil is a part of it. The underlying purpose of this policy is clearly to promote a state of chaos that makes it easier to negate and preemptively remove any organized resistance to the

unfettered exploitation of resources by the capitalist class, particularly the U.S. capitalist class.

Furthermore, the ultimate aim—particularly as regards the regions of Asia and Europe—is undoubtedly to clear the way to finally retake for U.S. imperialism and its allies, unlimited access to the resources removed from their reach during the last century by the proletarian revolutions in Russia (1917) and China (1949).

Who’s helping?

The U.S. imperialists are operating through the regimes in their flunky states in Pakistan and in the Persian Gulf region. The regimes in the Gulf region are controlled by local family dynasties accountable to no one except



their imperialist sponsors. The regime in Pakistan relies on a petty-bourgeois, U.S.-backed military elite and, like the Arab monarchies, is in no way accountable to the oppressed working class there, which is hard put to even organize unions.

The role of these retrograde regimes in creating and facilitating the violence that is tearing apart countries from Afghanistan to Libya has even been reported by bourgeois media such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Guardian* of London. It has also been acknowledged on occasion by some of U.S. imperialism's leading politicians, such as John Kerry and Hillary Clinton, who posture as if U.S. imperialism is helpless to stop these regimes from doing what they are doing.

The implementation of this plan requires the creation of groups of ruthless, anonymous, masked mercenary armies who commit rampant atrocities, usually in the name of jihadi "holy war against infidels." Exactly who is building these armies? How are they funded? And by whom? Where do they get their ideologies? We have clear evidence that the gangs of armed thugs that have been tearing Libya and Syria apart since 2011 were not only funded by, but were created by, and through, these Gulf States.

How do we know this?

The responsibility of the Gulf States—of both the governments themselves and "private donors"—for the rise of the armed "religious fundamentalist" military brigades in Syria was well documented by the prominent establishment "think tank," the Brookings Institute back in December 2013. Its report, entitled "Playing With Fire: Why Private Gulf Financing for Syria's Extremist Rebels Risks Igniting Sectarian Conflict at Home," by Elizabeth Dickinson, was based on months of investigation in the Gulf states and conversations with individuals who had been directly involved in the process.²

According to the Brookings Institute's study:

"Over the last two and a half years, Kuwait has emerged as a financial and organizational hub for charities and individuals supporting Syria's myriad rebel groups. These donors have taken advantage of Kuwait's...relatively weak financial rules to channel money to some of the estimated 1,000 rebel brigades now fighting against Syrian president Bashar al-Assad..."

The report opens with a summary of its findings:

"This memo charts how individual donors in the Gulf encouraged the founding of armed groups, helped to shape the ideological and at times extremist agendas of rebel brigades, and contributed to the fracturing of the military position. From the early days of the Syrian uprising, Kuwait-based donors... began to pressure Syrians to take up arms. The new brigades often adopted the ideological outlook of their donors. As the war dragged on and the civilian death toll rose, the path toward extremism became self-reinforcing.... Today, there is evidence that Kuwaiti donors have backed rebels who have committed atrocities and who are either directly linked to al-Qa'ida or cooperate with its affiliated brigades on the ground."

The flow of donations, which began under the auspices of charity in the spring of 2011, quickly morphed into a torrent of military aid:

"By the fall of 2011, some Kuwaitis involved in charity work began to say they supported an armed uprising. And by the winter, Kuwaiti individuals and charities...began channeling a portion of their funding into the creation of armed groups."

Various donors created their own jihadi armies. Infighting began among agents of the numerous armed groups as they competed for funds. The various funders sought to see their group outdo the group of their competitors.

This process quickly became common and was played out vigorously over the social media, precluding the unification of the resistance. The armed conflicts between groups escalated and—obviously—so did civilian deaths.³

"Although it is impossible to quantify the value of private Kuwaiti assistance to the rebels, it almost certainly reaches into the hundreds-of-millions of dollars. Donors based in Kuwait have also gathered contributions from elsewhere in the Gulf. ..."

And it was not only donors from and through the Gulf states who are responsible for the organization and funding of these competing jihadi armies. Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan also play a role. Dickinson goes on:

"...a great deal of the money and supplies...passes directly through Turkey, Lebanon, or Jordan before crossing into Syria...At least half-a-dozen Kuwaiti donors...travel to Syria personally."

The report concludes:

"Gulf donors have contributed to the ideological and strategic alignment of today's [December 2013] rebel groups, in which extremists have the military upper-hand."⁴

"It is unclear just how or when the decision to actually fund the armed brigades began, but witnesses in early meetings described an 'implicit desire' from the donors to create military resistance."⁵

The bourgeois media marvel at the social media proficiency of ISIS in relaying "studio quality" videos of its atrocities. However, the use of social media for this purpose was fostered early on in the process of building these competing Islamic fundamentalist formations. According to Dickinson's report, social media was widely employed in the early phases of the fundraising process as an avenue through which the jihadi groups that had been created *via* the donations throughout the Gulf sought to promote themselves. Social media was a

critical tool, used both by the donors and by all the armed groups to promote their feats and alleged conquests in competition with other groups.

“Witnesses...describe fighting among representatives of armed groups in Kuwait as they faced the perverse incentive of trying to prove their brigade had suffered more martyrs and fought more difficult battles. Jealousies and conflicts broke out among donors as well. A flurry of brigades were thus created and ceased to exist in the span of months.

“One way armed groups secured longer-term backing was by adopting the ideologies of their benefactors.”

And, their most zealous backers were advocates of the extreme Salafist branch of Wahhabi Islam, the Sunni sect that is the official religion of the family monarchy ruling Saudi Arabia. From throughout the Gulf Emirates—all of them Sunni religious states—and on through to Kuwait, the funds flowed to Syria to foment bloody conflict—jihad against “infidels,” especially infidels of the Shia variety.⁶

Almost all of the groups “actively cooperate with al-Qa’ida’s Jabhat al-Nusra,” which had been one of the most notoriously brutal of the jihadi groups until the appearance of ISIS on the scene.⁷

“The conflict metastasized into full-scale civil war by early 2012 when some Gulf countries also backed particular rebel groups... each brigade and political faction depended on an independent funding stream.”⁸

This vast and disparate fundraising network created “thousands” of armed brigades which expended a great deal of their resources attacking each other—a situation in which no group had sufficient force to actually prevail. Meanwhile, all the groups that were created were united in their opposition to a political solution to the Syrian crisis. The main victims of this bloody conflict were the civilians who were caught in the crossfire.

By the end of 2012, Dickinson reports, Kuwaiti-funded mercenaries had led offensives where hundreds of civilians were massacred. These offensives, along with the al-Assad government’s brutal bombing led to mounting civilian casualties and death tolls. The ensuing war was destroying entire towns and/or sections of cities and causing populations to flee for their lives. Any secular nationalist or working-class opposition to the al-Assad regime that had managed to get organized was out-gunned and outnumbered by the jihadi armies created by the Gulf donations. One notorious jihadist donor openly called for the blood of his sectarian rivals: “Among the beautiful things inside Syria is that the mujahedeen have realized that they need to deeply hit the Alawites, in the same way they kill our wives and children.”⁹

In 2013, in an effort to appear to “crack down” on jihadi donors, the Kuwaiti regime finally passed laws to “criminalize terrorist financing” and restrict money laundering. However, enforcement was virtually nonexistent.¹⁰

Meanwhile, in Qatar...

Nine months later, in a follow-up article in *Foreign Policy* magazine, Dickinson documented the even more critical role of another key Gulf donor: The Qatar regime had “pumped tens-of-millions of dollars...to hardline Syrian rebels and extremist Salafists ...”¹¹

The Qatar regime uses another system to build proxy armies: it channels state funds through middlemen. Because there were no established rebels when the uprising in Syria started, Qatar backed businessmen and Syrian emigrants in Qatar who promised they could rally fighters and guns. We learn that the Qatar government employed the same plan of action in Syria that it employs with respect to other proxy armies that it funds: “Taliban insurgents, the Somali Islamists, and Sudanese rebels.” “The same Qatari network has...played a major role in

destabilizing nearly every trouble spot in the region and in accelerating the growth of radical and jihadi factions... Libya is mired in a war between proxy-funded militias, Syria’s opposition has been overwhelmed by infighting and overtaken by extremists....

Applying “the Libyan Solution” in Syria

Dickenson quotes Andreas Krieg, an advisor to the Qatar Armed Forces, describing just what the Qatari monarchy did—and surely is still doing—to Libya, actions it has repeated in Syria with the same results:

“The first battlefield test of Qatar’s proxy chain was in Libya [in 2011] where there was a broad regional consensus—as well as U.S. support—to oust then-leader Muammar al-Qaddafi. Qatar, together with the UAE [United Arab Emirates], had signed on to Western airstrikes against the regime. But Doha [Qatar’s capital, seat of that family monarchy] also wanted to help build up rebel capacity on the ground.”

The Qatar regime had a job to do:

“They had to literally go to their address book and say ‘Who do we know in Libya?’ says Krieg. ‘This is how they coordinated the Libya operation.’ Doha lined up a collection of businessmen, old [Muslim] Brotherhood friends, and ideologically aligned defectors, plying them with tens-of-millions of dollars and 20,000 tons of arms...After a months-long war, the rebels took Tripoli and Qaddafi was dead. Doha’s clients found themselves among the most powerful political brokers in the new Libya. And long after the NATO strikes had ended, some Qatari-backed militias continued to receive support....”

The imperialists expected that the protests in Syria would “quickly topple the Assad regime” as protests had toppled the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, Dickinson continues. However, that didn’t happen.

“By August, Washington was calling on al-Assad to step down... Not long thereafter, Qatar began its Syria operation, modeled on [its] Libyan adventure.... Like the tendering of a contract, Doha issued a call for bidders to help with the regime’s overthrow.”

Thus, the tiny ruling clique of Qatar actually initiated the devastating armed conflicts that—supported by the hundreds-of-millions of dollars collected by “wealthy donors” in the Gulf through Kuwait—fueled a five-year war that has killed over 250,000 Syrians and turned half the population into refugees and entire cities into rubble, with no end in sight.

Prelude to ISIS: Creating a Sunni-Shia rift

The U.S. government began its official, direct military intervention against Syria in September 2014, after the advancing conquests of the now-notorious ISIS, which stands for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Whence the soil that nourished ISIS?

ISIS began as ISI—Islamic State of Iraq—an offshoot of al-Qa’ida of Iraq (AQI), a Sunni jihadi group funded through/by the Saudi regime. AQI’s targets were allegedly the Shia-dominated governments imposed by the U.S. government after its 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq.

The governments imposed by U.S. imperialism in post-2003 Iraq were clearly directed toward fueling a murderous Sunni-Shia warfare from the outset. This process started with the “de-Ba’athification” of Iraqi government payrolls by the very first U.S. occupation government under the imperialists’ proconsul L. Paul Bremer III. “De-Ba’athification” excluded from government jobs some 400,000 members of the Ba’ath political party, the party that ruled under Saddam Hussein.

Many Ba’ath members were Sunni. Therefore, so were most of these 400,000 dismissed workers who ended up suddenly without an income and banned from working for either the government or the military—virtually

the only jobs available. This fed the growth of Sunni resentment against the U.S. military occupation and the government it imposed. (The Ba’ath Party is also the party of the al-Assad government in Syria. The Ba’athist party is an Arab nationalist party that arose to resist the post-WWI imperialist-imposed monarchies. The Ba’ath party in Syria was dominated by the Shia Allawite sect while the Ba’ath Party in Iraq was dominated by Sunni Muslims.)

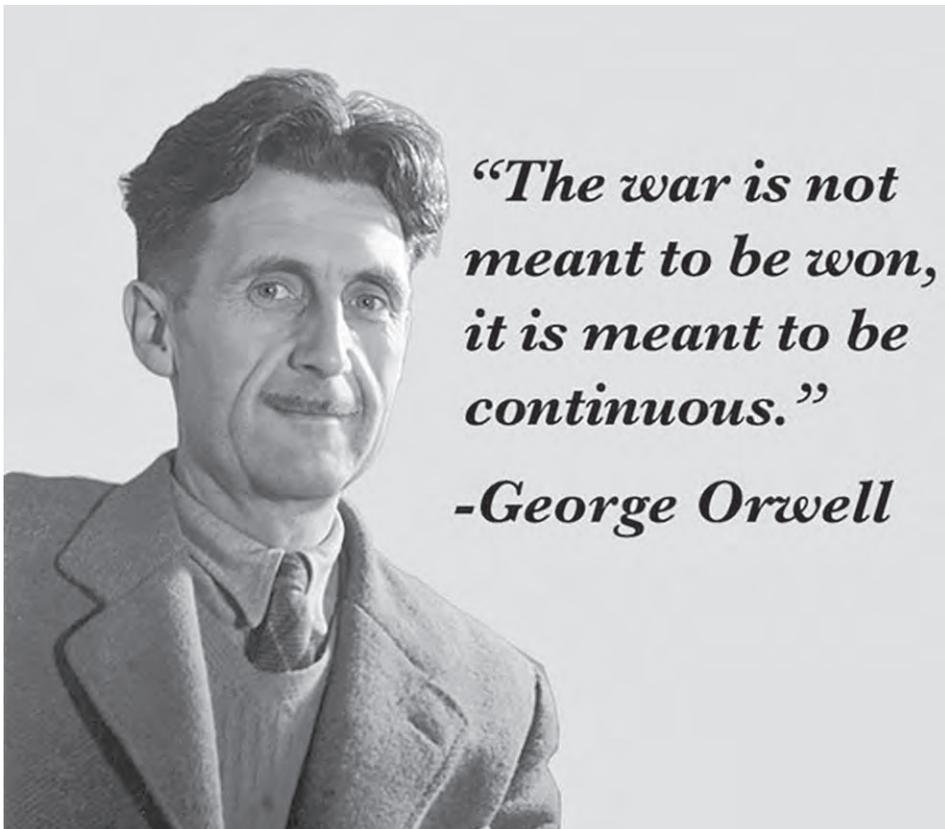
Turning a “Rift” into a bloody gash

“De-Ba’athification” was accompanied by a surge of assassinations targeting hundreds of Iraqi professionals and intellectuals, many of whom were Sunni. These horrors were followed by the rampant growth of Shia death squads after the mysterious bombing of the Golden Dome Shia Mosque in Samara in February 2006, for which no group claimed responsibility. Both the surge of assassinations and the rise of death squad activity against Sunnis are associated with:

1. the U.S. military’s deployment to Baghdad of James Steele, a notorious State Department operative with vast experience organizing death squads against the worker and peasant insurgency in El Salvador in the 1980s, and
2. the arrival in Iraq—as a U.S. military commander—of his collaborator General David Petraeus.¹²

Over the next several years, these U.S. government-sponsored death squads kidnapped, tortured, and executed tens-of-thousands of men in Baghdad and elsewhere, creating piles of tortured, dead bodies and armies of widows and orphans.

The working-class neighborhoods where these killings took place were unable to organize self-defense groups on a massive scale to defeat these death squads, however, because under the U.S. Occupation government, it was



illegal for civilians to own a gun! U.S. Special Forces carried out ongoing night raids on homes. Those found to be in possession of a gun were dragged off to indefinite detention or worse. As a result: according to the *New York Times* of January 18, 2015, “tens-of-thousands of Sunni men [are] languishing in jails [in Baghdad], having never seen the inside of a courtroom.”¹³

The creation of these death squads targeting Sunnis—and certainly others—made it virtually impossible for the Iraqi workers to organize as a class across religious lines against the U.S. imperialist occupation and its quisling governments, which was, of course, the purpose of the death squads. Moreover, the most talented, experienced, and vocal activists were surely among the first targets.

Despite the enormous obstacles, however, the Iraqi Sunnis managed to organize widespread protests against government corruption and for jobs and services and to set up encampments beginning in the winter of 2012. These were violently suppressed by the occupation government. The repression was accompanied and followed by a string of car bombings that hit popular markets and meeting points, killing thousands of Iraqis of all religions, for which no one claimed responsibility.¹⁴

Who was “ISI” and what was it doing?

The Islamic State of Iraq declared its existence in 2007 as a united front of Sunni jihadi groups. By its name, it declared that its goal was to set up a Sunni State that would rival and replace the Shia state ensconced in U.S. imperialism’s “Green Zone” fortress in central Baghdad. By 2011, splits had developed within it. Nevertheless, ISI gained strength.

By 2013, ISI began invading and occupying Iraqi regions and cities with long motorcades of white Toyota trucks carrying hundreds of well-armed, masked men all dressed in black carrying the ISI flag, a *tour de force* that had never been seen before.

Sometimes, the ISI invasions of a city took the form of entering a town with vehicles equipped with massive explosive devices that destroyed whole blocks when detonated. The Iraqi troops whose job it was to defend these cities and regions dropped their weapons and fled the ISI invaders.

Then, ISI began to take over “rebel-controlled regions” of Syria and changed its name to ISIS—the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. By mid-2014, news of its atrocities—mass and individual beheadings and executions, raping of women, expulsions and murders of “infidels,” *etc.*—were widely advertised by ISIS on social media and sensationalized through the bourgeois media around the world, over shadowing other news from Syria. “Stopping ISIS” became the pretext for the U.S. government to finally announce its official intervention into the war in Syria. In September 2014, the U.S. government began bombing Syria allegedly “to stop ISIS.” The U.S. government’s partners in this bombing campaign were Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan—the very governments that had started and fed the conflict!

By the end of 2014, the flow of the populations out of Syria to escape the escalating conflict became a flood. Where the U.S.-sponsored bombing campaign had assisted in “liberating” a city such as Kobani and Sinjar, the cities were abandoned and there was nothing left but rubble.

After the events of November 13, 2015, in Paris, the French “socialist” government authorized its air force to join the bombing campaign, targeting the Syrian city of Raqqa that was occupied by ISIS. ISIS took control over Raqqa in Syria after defeating rival Islamic jihadi groups.

On to Libya (again)!

Now, ISIS has set up operations in the ruins of Libya, in the city of Surt, where it has already been advertising

its presence by committing various atrocities, such as crucifying an aged ultra conservative Muslim imam, beheading Christians, forcing residents to flee and creating even more refugees. A Saudi “administrator” was sent in to preside over ISIS in Surt, and ISIS “periodically rotates administrators,” who are—not surprisingly—“typically from the Persian Gulf.” Its recruits—some 2,000—are reportedly masked foreigners, and ISIS is able “easily to transport fighters” in and out of Libya according to its needs. It is rapidly overpowering the other proxy armies creating even more havoc in Libya and is soon expected to take over 150 miles of Libyan coast.

Another point of note is the ISIS is the al Qa’ida computer “database”—which is what “al Qa’ida” means. (According to the Urban Dictionary, “The name came from a database created by bin Laden at the end of the 1980s that contained the names of Islamic extremist fighters who fought against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s.”) Two drivers kidnapped by ISIS and later released reported their experiences to a *Times* reporter:

“The Islamic State seemed to command a strong intelligence network... They [the captives] marveled at an interrogator’s probing and well-informed questions about their families and personal histories. ‘If he said he was my own brother I would have believed him,’ one driver said.”¹⁵

And Afghanistan!

The same *Times* article reports that ISIS donors are also moving to push ISIS to take on the Taliban in Afghanistan, a development that will create even more bloodletting and chaos there. “Western officials” inform that “in recent months the [ISIS] core group delivered several hundred-thousand dollars to the Afghan fighters helping them gain ground and recruits.” Yes, money like that would probably “help gain

recruits” in Afghanistan where decades of U.S.-funded wars have left that country in ruins, with many Afghans joining the flood of refugees fleeing to Europe. In fact, Afghanistan is now such a dangerous and inhospitable place to live that the entire “government” has chosen to live elsewhere.¹⁶

Who is in charge?

As U.S. imperialism and its allies, along with France and Britain, are joining in the frenzy to bomb Syrian cities into rubble, it is important to come to grips with what is actually happening so as to begin to make a plan to stop this carnage.

Who is actually overseeing all this mad destruction? Who is really behind this plan to recruit armies of psychotic, psychopathic mercenaries whose job it is to take over and destroy entire nations? Why are these “private donors” and the autocratic regimes in the Gulf States able to organize genuine, terrorist jihadi armies without being punished by the U.S. government? After all, young Muslim men in the U.S. accused of the slightest connection with groups on the U.S. “terrorist” list, face arrest and long prison terms.

Let’s think a minute

The Gulf monarchies—Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, along with Saudi Arabia—are artificial political constructs totally beholden to imperialism for their creation and their very existence. The boundaries for each of them were established by the British imperialists after World War I. “Thus Britain—like France in her sphere of the Middle East ...—established states, appointed persons to govern them, and drew frontiers between them...and did so mostly in and around 1922. As they had long intended to do, the European powers had taken the political destinies of the Middle Eastern peoples in their hands....”¹⁷ The process also led to the creation of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon,

Jordan, and—of course—the initial Zionist State of Israel.

The U.S. imperialists—like the British imperialists before them who carved out these authoritarian, theocratic fiefdoms on the Arabian peninsula—have always and continue to use these strategically-located, artificial “nation states” to advance their military, geopolitical, and economic interests in the region.

All of these regimes are family-run absolute monarchies and police states based on the same sharia law propagated by the jihadi “terrorists” they engender, applying stoning, beheading, lashing, and amputation as punishments. None of these regimes grants any rights to workers. In fact, the overwhelming majority of the populations of some of the Gulf emirates are foreign indentured servants from impoverished lands who have no rights. It is this labor force that has built the garish “modern” eye-popping projects these emirates are notorious for.

It is these monster regimes that are being used by U.S. imperialism to fund the brutal jihadi armies that have been unleashed on the world.

The dog wags its tails

All of them survive—despite the enormous wealth the monarchies have amassed through the exploitation of the oil under the ground they were given—at the behest of their U.S. imperialist handlers, even if they are allowed independent posturing from time to time. They all serve as imperialist military outposts and agents and are not independent agents at all.

Saudi Arabia: (population 28.7 million, eight million of whom are not citizens)* The Saudi family monarchy has collaborated with British and U.S. intelligence agencies since World War II to create and nurture the precursors of ISIS during the Cold War against “atheists and communists” and the Soviet Union. In fact, the current King

Salmon is a veteran CIA agent and collaborator. As head of the Saudi intelligence agency, he helped the CIA recruit foreign mercenaries for “jihad” in the CIA’s “secret war” in Afghanistan in the 1970s and ’80s, one of whom was Osama bin Laden. And—as stated above—the extreme, strict version of Islam that is espoused by ISIS and “al-Qa’ida” is a politicized version of the fundamentalist Wahhabi Islam—the religion of the Saudi family and the official state religion. By 2013, according to some sources, the Saudi monarchy had taken the leading role in supplying money and arms to jihadi groups fighting in Syria.¹⁸

Bahrain: (population 1.2 million, more than half are not citizens)* This small island is a U.S. Navy base, the home of the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and the U.S. Fifth Fleet.

Qatar: (population 1.8 million, 1.5 million of which are not citizens)* is home to a vital Pentagon facility: “the highly classified...Combined Air and Space Operations Center.” This Center:

“...coordinated all of the attack and surveillance missions for the [U.S. government’s] wars in Iraq and Afghanistan...It hosts liaison officers from 30 allies in Europe and the Persian Gulf...Inside this warehouse size command center, three giant digital maps [carry] tracking details of every aircraft—civilian and military—in the skies over three vital regions: Syria and its neighbors, the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan and beyond. Qatar is also the location of the massive and strategic Al Udeid U.S. military base, central to the Pentagon’s wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria and from which it launches bombing missions against the region.”¹⁹

United Arab Emirates: (population 9.2 million, 7.8 million of whom are not citizens.)* Along with the other monarchical states, the UAE has been “allowed” to build its own air force, joining bombing missions to serve U.S. mili-

tary goals in Libya and Syria. UAE pilots, trained by the U.S. Air Force, actually fly U.S. planes on bombing missions against Syria, Iraq, and other targets in the region. In fact, the secret U.S. base at Al Dhafra is the only overseas base for the U.S. government's F-22 Raptor.²⁰

The air forces of these monarchies, like the rest of their military forces, serve as extensions of the Pentagon and carry out the Pentagon's policy directives. The UAE regime is planning the purchase of 30 F-16s to add to the 80 it already has. That is, there will be roughly one F-16 for every 12,600 UAE citizens! Like the other Gulf regimes—the UAE is a major Pentagon customer.

Kuwait: (4.1 million, 2.8 million of whom are not citizens) This tiny place on the Arab peninsula at the tip of Iraq was created in 1922 by the British to provide an imperialist port and military base on the Persian Gulf, and it has never been anything else. Today, “the U.S. has at least ten active military facilities in Kuwait, and Kuwait has been referred to by some analysts as the U.S. government's ‘unsinkable aircraft carrier.’”²¹

(Of the Gulf States, Yemen is the only one that does not have a U.S. military base, and the U.S. government—along with the other Arab monarchies—is now bombing Yemen to ruin.)²²

These entities, created to serve British imperialism, have now been taken over by the U.S. imperialists. None of these so-called countries is independent. They are U.S. military bases and outposts in the Gulf region.

And what makes these regimes extra special and dangerous?

These autocratic artificial states provide amazing advantages for U.S. imperialism. First, they are close to the countries that the U.S. government wants to attack and lay waste. Second, these oil-rich regimes not only spend billions boosting U.S. war industry profits but also provide skilled military personnel to assist U.S. military opera-

tions. Third, and most important, they have virtual immunity from the class struggle because they have virtually no indigenous proletariat. The “expat” indentured workforce comprises nearly half—43 percent—of the population of the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, and Oman] in 2010.²³

The conclusion is inescapable: These Gulf regimes created, funded, and armed the jihadi forces that are destroying Syria and Libya in order to promote Washington's expansionist plans.

(Coincidentally—also revealing whose hands are pulling the strings—after reviewing a recent ISIS internet recruitment video, a *New York Times* reporter observed that “Nowhere in the hour-long production—full of threats, drive-by shootings, explosions and gunfights—does an ISIS fighter mention the United States or directly mention or threaten Israel.”)²⁴

“Let's you and him fight”

Bourgeois cretin Donald Trump inadvertently articulated U.S. imperialism's policy in Asia and Africa: “Let them [the populations of these regions] fight each other and we [U.S. imperialism] will pick up the remnants” (September 18, 2015). He was offering this as his U.S. foreign policy solution to the conflicts in Syria and the region. However, this already is U.S. foreign policy. The only part that Trump had wrong was the word “Let.” The U.S. policy is not to “let” them fight, but to create sectarian divisions and then recruit, pay, arm, and train “them” and then deploy “them” to create bloody havoc—to make people fight each other.

Where are the jihadists trained? While reporting on the facility in Jordan where a Jordanian soldier allegedly shot to death five U.S. and one South African military contract workers, the *New York Times* quoted a retired Jordanian brigadier general who “said that the training center where the shooting erupted was a par-

ticularly sensitive site, having hosted thousands of foreign recruits since it opened in 2005.”²⁵ This base is one of many clandestine U.S. government-funded training sites across the region and into Africa.

Who are the real terrorists and what are they doing?

Al-Qa'ida was created by the CIA in collaboration with the Saudi regime and the government of Pakistan.²⁶

The U.S. government, working with the governments of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, created the Taliban in the 1990s, recruiting, arming, and training students from madrassas in Pakistan to send into Afghanistan to battle the armies of warlords.

These warlord armies themselves had been organized, armed, trained by the U.S. government—along with the governments of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere—to fight alongside the jihadi armies of al-Qa'ida against the Soviets. The U.S. government's goal at that time was to destroy the nationalist government in Kabul that the Soviet army was defending against bloody attacks by retrograde and reactionary forces. These retrograde and reactionary forces who were resisting modernization, by the way, had also been incited, organized and funded by U.S. imperialism.²⁷

Today, U.S. imperialism's political and military client state Pakistan actually sheltered and continues to shelter hundreds of top Taliban leaders. These included the Taliban head Mullah Omar, who evidently died in a Pakistan hospital. His replacement Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, “has... benefited from a powerful alliance with the Pakistani military spy agency, Inter-Services Intelligence, the original sponsor of the Afghan Taliban insurgency.” This new Taliban leader owns homes in several cities in Pakistan, one of which is located in “an enclave where he and some other Taliban leaders...have built homes.” Moreover, he travels frequently to the UAE where he also owns a

home and several businesses, including a cellphone company.²⁸

The Pakistani military and the U.S. drones have been allegedly attempting to destroy the “Haqqani Network” by relentless military and drone attacks for years killing hundreds of innocent people, destroying their homes and entire villages, and creating thousands of refugees in Waziristan—a mountainous region between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the head of that “network,” Jalaluddin Haqqani, lived comfortably in Pakistan and had dual Pakistan and Saudi citizenship and may have even died in a hospital in Saudi Arabia. The Haqqani network is also a product of the U.S.-Pakistani-Saudi collaboration to create jihadi armies in the 1980s.²⁹

U.S. military officials incited sectarian conflicts in Iraq after the U.S. invasion and occupation in 2003, by organizing and training Shia death squads that rent the country apart.

And now it has, through its Gulf minions—created the jihadi armies of sectarian mercenaries who are destroying Syria, Libya and beyond: It was reported on November 25, 2015, that mercenaries from Colombia are being recruited through the UAE to fight in Yemen.³⁰

Then, to allegedly destroy the very terrorist groups that it has created, the U.S. government launches a “war on terror” that can never end, a perpetual orgy of violence squandering vast resources and tens-of-millions of lives.

That is the world that capitalism has wrought by 2015.

The obvious goal of this destructive policy is to redraw the map of the region. In addition, it is aimed not only at “regime change,” but at insuring that—perhaps—there is no regime at all. The working classes of the targeted nations will never have a chance to overthrow the ruling tyrants there because the working class will be dispersed and degraded. In the process, the remnants of the working class will become refugees, fleeing to Europe

where they will be used to help the capitalists drive down the wages of all the workers and bust unions. The only powers that will be armed and “prepared to rule” the wretched remains of the targeted nation states will be gangs of mercenary lumpen, *déclassé* proletarians such as ISIS, who will have unlimited funding and support from imperialism and its agents.

In fact, John Bolton, a notorious defender of imperialism’s criminal behavior, welcomed such an option in an op-ed article in the *New York Times*. The destruction of Iraq and Syria should not be considered a problem at all, he maintained. The U.S. government should simply establish a new Sunni state in the ruins, to pacify the region.³¹

What is the U.S. Government’s response to the real supporters of terrorism?

The U.S. government is not issuing ultimatums to these Gulf regimes demanding they stop supporting terrorism “or else.” It is not bombing the Gulf regimes “to defeat terrorists” like it bombs Libya, Iraq, Syria, or Yemen. It is not even calling for economic sanctions against these regimes like it does against Russia or Iran.

Instead, the U.S. government is stepping up funding for and sending ever more weapons to these Gulf entities, strengthening their military might.

What the U.S. government is doing is rewarding these regimes for their cooperation, just like these regimes pay the “jihadi” mercenaries.

Who can save the world from chaos? Some problems

The only power—today as ever—that can stop imperialist lunacy is the working class. However, because of the dire conditions U.S. imperialism is creating in these foreign lands, the working class that must lead the way is the U.S. working class. Unfortunately, the U.S. working class has been virtually silent on the subject, hardly even

defending itself from capitalist assaults on its unions.

Throughout the vicious wars imperialism has been waging—particularly since the attack on Iraq in 2003—there has been no massive antiwar movement. Millions protested throughout the world and in the United States to try to prevent the U.S. government from launching that 2003 offensive against the Iraqi people. However, these protests failed to prevent that attack. Since then, there has been virtual silence. This is true despite the fact that it is common knowledge that U.S. government officials deliberately lied to justify that war and the multiple atrocities and crimes they have committed. Key known war criminals—such as George W. Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, and David Petraeus—write books, appear at public ceremonies, serve as “experts” on network TV, and live peaceful lives, in no way being held accountable.

The U.S. working class has been “sold a bill of goods,” as the saying used to go: It has been cheated, hoodwinked, lied to, fooled again, except for the fact that the really damaging “goods” in this picture are being produced right here by the U.S. working class itself.

One of the few sectors of the U.S. capitalist economy that has been doing very well during the latest world capitalist crises has been the war industry. Congress last year approved a war budget of over \$653 billion, according to the American Friends Service Committee. One reason Congress never says “No!” is because the key military contractors like Lockheed Martin engage in what is called “political engineering” to insure that the politicians will not vote “No.” This means that to produce one plane, say the white elephant F-35, Lockheed Martin spreads the work out through 1,400 contractors creating jobs in 46 states. Even though production of this plane should have

been canceled long ago for many reasons, Lockheed Martin's threat that this would "end jobs" helps justify repeated Congressional approval.³²

Lockheed Martin is not alone. All the war industry giants use the same "political engineering" to insure that they receive huge government handouts. Certainly, the war industry does create jobs, many of them high-paying union jobs. Moreover, these jobs include not only the direct production of the bombers and the bombs, but of all the components used in the production process and all the weapons, uniforms, equipment, parts, and ammunition plus all the electronics used in every phase of attack.

Furthermore, Pentagon money is often welcomed by research departments in today's underfunded universities, where our scientists misuse their expertise to develop and perfect ever-new weapons and instruments of war. Then, there are the transportation networks that move all the component parts to production plants and from the plants, to the Pentagon or to the Pentagon's customers. In addition, consider all the jobs that rely on the paychecks of the workers involved in everything listed above. We are talking about tens-of-millions of U.S. jobs that rely on a thriving U.S. imperialist war economy and the implementation of U.S. imperialism's plan to take over the entire globe and humanity's resources.

How must the workers organize to stop this war machine? What is to be done?

How can we even begin to take on and shut down such an incredible behemoth that is actually being created by our own working class, by ourselves, here in the "belly of the beast?" It seems impossible! Yet it is not, and it must be done. What is required?

Public protests: First, of course, the working class and its allies across the nation must organize serious public

demonstrations demanding that Washington stop funding jihadi armies, stop funding Arab terrorist monarchies, to stop funding Israel and stop the phony "War on Terror."

However, to really stop all this, to really shut down the entire imperialist war industry requires much more than street protests. What must be done includes:

A thorough public investigation by the workers themselves: First, we need to conduct a complete national and international analysis of what is going on around us. This can only be done by the workers themselves taking on the task of investigating the role of their labor and their plant, industry, and community in the war machine.

A national network of collaboration: This will require that we establish a national organization and collaboration network. Workers on the job can then in a coordinated way form committees to investigate and report on what is being produced in their own plants and locales. Through this process, we will probably learn that the tentacles of this war machine penetrate into every pore of this society, encompassing entire industries, cities, towns, and communities. Workers may otherwise not even be aware—but often they must be!—of the role their labor plays in facilitating this gigantic machine of death and destruction.

A national conference: All of the above work must be directed toward making completely public and understandable what is now arcane and secret. The process will have to be facilitated by workers in some key industrialized and union-organized sectors—say, for example, the airline industry—calling a national conference to discuss the implementation of this process and related issues with the goal of maximizing the participation of workers from as many war-industry sites as possible so everyone involved can have a voice and participate.

Formulating a new national plan:

The workers must then begin to formulate an alternative plan to build our economy anew, offering new jobs and using resources in ways that serve life and not death, human needs and not private profits.

While some industries will need to be completely eliminated, others may be converted relatively easily to useful and humane production. Where industries must be eliminated completely—such as those producing cluster bombs, for example—we will need to make sure that the workers whose livelihoods depend on such industries are able to live full and productive lives until the transformed economy provides better options.

Confiscation of the vast war profits of the "masters of war" and all their collaborators will be the first step toward achieving that last goal and many others.

The working-class revolution: The ruling class—these "masters of war"—of course, will not surrender and go home. Seeing this process through to completion will require that the working class take over the means of production and set up a new workers' government, *i.e.*, the proletarian revolution. Workers will also need to be able to defend ourselves and our gains from all the inevitable attacks from the capitalists and their state.

Genuine international solidarity: At the same time, we have the historic responsibility to help workers everywhere else make the working-class revolution in their countries and help those who have already become victims of U.S. imperialist aggression to rebuild their economies.

And, indispensable to achieving all the above, of course, is the need for an organization to lead the way, a revolutionary party, which must also be built. This is the only way we can begin to "Stop the Bombing" and all the other U.S. imperialist aggression that squander and ravage humanity and our resources.

Conclusion

This is not a matter of charity, pacifism or “good deeds.” It is a matter of survival. As Leon Trotsky put it simply in the *Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, “Under the menace of its own disintegration, the proletariat cannot permit the transformation of an increasing section of the workers into chronically unemployed paupers, living off the crumbs of a disintegrating society...”³³ This is the situation confronting us today. We are talking about the need for the working class to organize to take power. A socialist proletarian revolution is at the top of the agenda. As Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and other Marxists warned a century ago: Humanity faces a choice: It is either socialism or barbarism. Barbarism right now has the upper hand.

—Truthout, December 23, 2015

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Horrible Truths

Two versions of the U.S. destruction of a hospital in Afghanistan.

By LAURA GOTTESDIENER

When people ask me what my new job is like, I tell them that I wake up very early and count the dead. When I say “very early,” I mean a few minutes after four a.m., as the sky is just softening to the color of faded purple corduroy. By “the dead,” I mostly mean people across the world that my government has killed or helped another nation’s government kill while I was sleeping.

Once I was a freelance reporter, spending weeks or months covering a single story. Today, I’m a news producer at *Democracy Now!* and, from the moment I arrive at the office, I’m scouring the wire services for the latest casualties from Washington’s war zones. It’s a disconcerting job for someone used to reporting stories on the ground. As I cull through the headlines—“Suspected U.S. drone strike kills 4 militants in Pakistan;” “U.S. troops dispatched to Kunduz to help Afghan forces”—I’ve never felt so close to this country’s various combat zones. And yet I’m thousands of miles away.

Usually, I try to avoid talking about our wars once I leave the office. After all, what do I know? I wasn’t there when the American gunship began firing on that hospital Doctors Without Borders ran in Kunduz, and I didn’t get there afterwards either. Nor was I in Yemen’s Saada province a few weeks later when a Doctors Without Borders health clinic was bombed.

If you live here and don’t listen to *Democracy Now!*, odds are you didn’t even know that second strike happened. How is it possible, I think to myself, that bombing medical facilities isn’t front-page news? On that gutted clinic in Yemen, however, I can’t tell you much more. I know that the strike was carried out by U.S.-backed, Saudi-led forces,

and that it happened only a few days after the Obama administration approved an \$11.25 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia. But I don’t know what the air felt like that evening just before the missile hit the maternity ward.

Still, when your job is to chronicle these wars each morning, how can you not say something? How can you not start writing when our wars become all you think about, something you begin to dream about? How can you not respond when you realize, as I did recently, that the longest of them, the (second) U.S. war in Afghanistan, has stretched on for nearly half my life?

All this is my way of telling you that I need to talk to you about Kunduz.

A calm night in October

Like any good story, there’s what happened—and then there’s the version you’re asked to believe. Let’s start with the first one.

On Friday, October 2nd, staff members from the trauma center in Kunduz, Afghanistan, climbed to the roof of that hospital and laid out two large flags with the name of their organization:

M é d e c i n s
S a n s F r o n t i è r e s (Doctors Without Borders), the Nobel-Prize-winning medical-humanitarian aid organization best known by its French acronym MSF. This wasn’t something the workers could have done days earlier. The previous Monday, September 28th, Taliban fighters had unexpectedly seized control of the fifth largest city in Afghanistan, as up to 7,000 government troops and police fled. Over the next days, the Afghan government’s efforts to retake the city sparked intense fighting between the Taliban and government troops backed by U.S. Special Operations forces.

As that fighting grew closer to the hospital, stray bullets pierced the ceiling of the intensive care unit and MSF staff were instructed to sleep inside the hospital compound. If any of them left, it was feared, they might be unable to safely return to work the next day.

And there was plenty of work to be done. One hundred wounded patients arrived on Monday—36 of them in critical condition. The staff added 18 extra beds. Over the next four days, another 250 patients cycled through the emergency room alone. The building was so overcapacity that staff members put mattresses and pillows in corridors and administrative offices.

Fighter jets could be heard roaring overhead as the U.S. began launching airstrikes in support of the Afghan army’s haphazard efforts to retake the city. Most of the hospital’s staff refrained from even stepping outside.

By Friday, however, the fighting began to recede from the area around the hospital, and staff members felt safer climbing to the roof to spread out the flags in order to ensure that the facility would be identifiable from the air. The organization had also sent the hospital’s GPS coordinates to the U.S. Department of Defense, the Afghan Ministries of Interior and Defense, and the U.S. Army in Kabul four days earlier. The markers were just considered one more level of protection.

The hospital itself couldn’t be missed. Its lights blazed throughout Friday night and into the early hours of Saturday morning as doctors tried to tackle a “backlog of pending surgeries.” Outside the compound’s walls, the rest of the city, home to 270,000 inhabitants, was mostly dark. After a week of fighting, the hospital was one of the few buildings in the area that still had

running generators and so the power to light itself. It was a relatively calm night, slightly overcast and unseasonably warm for early October. The sound of gunfire had receded, and some staff members even dared to step outside for the first time in days.

“The single deadliest aircraft”

The explosions began just as staff members were putting patients under anesthesia in the operating room.

At 2:19 A.M., a representative of MSF in Kabul called the American-led NATO mission to Afghanistan to say that the hospital was being bombed. A minute later, an MSF representative called the Red Cross, then the United Nations. From New York, a member of MSF called the Pentagon.

We don't know what was happening inside the Pentagon that night. We do know that, back in Kunduz, a U.S. AC-130 gunship was circling above the hospital's main building.

The low-flying AC-130 is equipped with cannons and a 105-mm howitzer. It can fly at speeds of up to 300 miles per hour, but it's designed, above all, to circle close to the ground while firing at targets below. As an article in the *Washington Post* explained, “The AC-130 essentially loiters over a target at around 7,000 feet, flying in a circle and firing from weapons ports mounted on the aircraft's left side.”

The gunship is specially designed for night missions. The plane is equipped with infrared sensors, while its crew of 12 (or so) sport night-vision goggles. Manufactured by Lockheed Martin and Boeing, the older version of the plane, the AC-130H Spectre, cost \$110 million apiece, while the newer AC-130U Spooky version goes for \$210 million. One Special Operations Air Force captain described the gunship as “the single deadliest aircraft and flying squadron in the war on terrorism.” In 2002, this same type of gunship fired on a

wedding party in Afghanistan's Helmand province, killing more than 40 people.

Versions of the gunship have been in use by the U.S. military since the Vietnam War. An older model, which flew in Operation Desert Storm, the first Gulf War, is now on display at the National Museum of the United States Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. It was dubbed Azrael, which in both Hebrew and Arabic means the Angel of Death.

At 2:47 A.M., a representative from MSF in Kabul texted the American-led mission to Afghanistan that one of the Kunduz hospital's staff members had just died, that many were missing, and that the trauma center was still under repeated fire.

Five minutes later, someone from the mission texted back: “I'm sorry to hear that. I still do not know what happened.”

At this point, the U.S. gunship above had been firing on the hospital's main building on and off for more than 45 minutes. The strikes were, according to MSF Director of Operations Bart Janssens, very precise. “[The gunship] came four or five times over the hospital, and every time extremely precisely hit with a series of impacts on the main building of the hospital,” he told *Reuters*.

Surviving staff members recall that the first room to be attacked was the intensive care unit, which then held a number of patients, including two children. The strikes next hit the lab, the emergency room, the X-ray room, the mental health center, and the operating theaters, where two patients were lying on the operating tables. Both were killed.

Everyone capable of fleeing tried to do so: doctors, staff, patients. One man in a wheelchair was killed by flying shrapnel. Some people were on fire as they ran. One staff member was decapitated. As people fled the building, doctors and medical staff were hit

by fire from the plane. Some who survived had the impression, from the sound of the plane, that it was following them as they ran.

“A purpose to kill and destroy”

MSF's hospital had been a fixture in Kunduz since August 2011, the only medical facility in the region. A photo snapped a few months after its opening showed a large sign affixed to the front gate of the compound: “The MSF Trauma Centre will prioritize treatment for war-wounded and other seriously injured persons, without regard to their ethnicity or political affiliations, and determined solely by their medical needs. No fee charged.” Above the text was an image of an automatic rifle surrounded by a red circle with two thick lines through it, indicating the hospital's and the organization's strict no-weapons policy in its facilities.

Doctors Without Borders opened the facility two years after it returned to Afghanistan. In 2004, the organization had pulled out of the country after five of its workers were killed in a roadside ambush in Badghis Province. In 2009, the group returned and began supporting a hospital in Kabul. Upon its reentry, Michiel Hofman, then a director of the organization, told the German magazine *Der Spiegel* that he had been “shocked” to discover normal wartime rules of hospital neutrality didn't seem to apply in the ongoing conflict. “International forces and police,” he said, “would regularly go into hospitals to harass patients. Hospitals would be attacked. There is a dire record of respecting the neutrality of health structures.”

That same year, a Swedish aid group running a hospital in Wardak Province accused the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division of storming the facility and tying up hospital guards as the troops searched for members of the Taliban.

Nonetheless, the Kunduz hospital operated in relative peace until July 2015, when armed members of a U.S.-backed Afghan Special Operations

team raided it, forcing the facility to close temporarily. It soon reopened. By October 2015, the site was under increasingly close surveillance by U.S. Special Operations analysts who, it was later reported, believed there might have been a Pakistani intelligence operative working out of the facility. (MSF officials insist that there were only nine international staff members, none of whom were Pakistani, no less intelligence operatives.)

In the days before the attack, those analysts had put together a cache of information about the hospital—including maps with the facility circled.

At 2:56 A.M., on the morning of the attack, an MSF representative in Kabul again texted an official of the American-led mission, demanding an end to the strikes, which had lasted nearly an hour. By then, flames had overtaken the main building, with children still trapped inside. Abdul Manar, a caretaker at the hospital, recalled the sound of their cries. “I could hear them screaming for help inside the hospital while it was set ablaze by the bombing,” he told *Al Jazeera*.

“I’ll do my best,” the official responded. “Praying for you all.”

The strikes nonetheless continued. At 3:10 and 3:14, MSF again called the Pentagon. Finally, sometime around 3:15 A.M., the gunship flew off and the strikes were over.

With the operating rooms destroyed, surviving staff members turned an office desk into a makeshift operating table and attempted to treat a doctor whose leg had been blown off. Lajos Zoltan Jecs, a nurse, helped with the surgery. The doctor, he recalled, died atop that desk. “We did our best,” he wrote later, “but it wasn’t enough.”

The staff were in shock. Many were crying. Jecs and others went to check on the damage in the intensive care unit only to find six patients burning in their beds.

In all, 30 people died: 13 staff members, ten patients, and seven bodies so badly burned that, more than a month later, the remains have not yet been identified.

The hospital closed that same day. About two weeks later, a U.S. tank

rammed into the shell of the charred building, possibly destroying evidence of what that AC-130 had done. All told, MSF General Director Christopher Stokes concluded: “The view from inside the hospital is that this attack was conducted with a purpose to kill and destroy. But we don’t know why.”

Another version of the story

That’s one version of the story, based on a Doctors Without Borders preliminary report on the destruction of their hospital, released on November 5th, as well as on articles published by *Reuters*, the *Associated Press*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and *Al Jazeera*, the testimonies of medical staff published by MSF, and a *Democracy Now!* interview with the executive director of MSF USA.

Here’s the second version of the story, the one we in the United States are meant to believe. It’s far more confusing and lacking in details, but don’t worry, it’s much shorter.

On October 3rd, an American AC-130 gunship “mistakenly struck” a hospital run by Doctors Without



Borders in Kunduz. The attack was ordered by U.S. Special Operations forces, possibly at the behest of the Afghan army (or maybe not).

Earlier contradictory accounts, all issued within the span of four days, go as follows: (1) it may not have been an American air strike; (2) the U.S. launched airstrikes in the neighborhood of the hospital and the facility was hit by accident; (3) the hospital was hit because American Special Operations forces were under fire near the hospital and called in the strikes in their own defense; (4) the facility was hit because Afghan forces supported by that Special Ops unit “advised that they were taking fire from enemy positions and asked for air support from U.S. forces.”

As the story changed, culpability shifted back and forth. The Afghans, not the Americans, had called in the attack. No, the Afghans never directly called in the attack. The Americans called in the attack from within the U.S. chain of command.

In the end, the bottom line from Washington was: we’re conducting a full investigation and one of these days we’ll get back to you with the details.

This second version of the story (in its many iterations) came from commander of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan General John Campbell, White House spokesperson Josh Earnest, and Pentagon spokesperson Peter Cook. Unnamed sources added some colorful, although unsupported allegations about a Pakistani intelligence agent or armed Taliban fighters being inside the hospital—despite all evidence to the contrary.

Campbell offered his “deepest condolences.” President Obama called the head of MSF and personally apologized for the “tragic incident.” The Pentagon promised to make “condolence payments” to the families of those killed.

Several investigations into the “incident” were launched by the Pentagon and a joint Afghan-NATO team. However,

MSF’s repeated call for an independent investigation by the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission, established under the additional protocols to the Geneva Convention, have been ducked or ignored.

There is, at least, one aspect both accounts agree on: the timing.

It’s undisputed that the attack occurred on October 3, 2015—just over nine months after President Obama officially declared the ending of the U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan.

All the unknown deaths

In the mornings as I scan the news, I’m often overcome by the absurdity of writing about ongoing wars that have officially ended or a hospital that has been “mistakenly” struck with exceptional precision. The U.S. bombing of that trauma center in Kunduz was indisputably horrific, “one of the worst episodes of civilian casualties in the Afghan war,” as the *New York Times* described it. But its outrageousness comes, in part, because for once we have enough information to piece the story together since that AC-130 attacked a well-known, prize-winning, Western humanitarian organization.

To my mind, however, the truly disconcerting stories are the ones that arrive at my desk with so little information that it’s almost impossible to say or write anything with certainty. And so I can’t really tell you what happened on August 12th, when “a suspected U.S. drone strike in Yemen... killed five suspected al-Qaida militants,” as the *Associated Press* reported in the standard language used to obscure attacks for which we, in the United States, have essentially no real information whatsoever.

Who were these five people, I wonder, killed suddenly as they drove along a road somewhere to the east of the city of Mukalla? Statistically speaking, there’s a reasonable likelihood that they were innocent people. As the

Intercept recently reported, based on leaked secret documents, 90 percent of those killed during one recent period in the U.S. drone campaign in Afghanistan were not the sought-after targets. Without being there, however, I can’t tell you who those five Yemeni “militants” were, or what lives they led, or how many children they had, or even whether they were children themselves—and the odds are that neither can the Pentagon.

Nor can I tell you what happened when the U.S. launched its first drone strike in Syria on August 4th. I remember scouring different news sources over the following mornings for the most basic piece of information: how many people—if any—had been killed. That was, after all, what I was doing: waking up early and counting the death toll from America’s endless wars.

But in the days and weeks that followed, the Pentagon’s spokesman refused to offer specifics of any sort on this strike. It’s possible he didn’t have any. And so, to this day, even the number of deaths remains unknown.

Laura Gottesdiener is a freelance journalist and the author of A Dream Foreclosed: Black America and the Fight for a Place to Call Home, forthcoming from Zuccotti Park Press.

—AlterNet, November 15, 2015

<http://www.alternet.org/world/increasingly-horrible-truths-about-brutal-us-hospital-bombings?akid=13658.229473.r61DPS&rd=1&src=newsletter1045841&t=6>

**About two weeks later,
a U.S. tank rammed into
the shell of the charred
building, possibly
destroying evidence of
what that AC-130 had
done.**

“The Real Boko Haram”

BY GLEN FORD

December 16, 2015—Hammad Ibrahim, a soft-spoken, intelligent young man, accompanied his father, Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, the leader of Nigeria’s Shia Muslims, to a conference on Solidarity with Palestine, in Beirut, last week. I was there, along with other reporters and activists. Young Hammad told our group that Boko Haram, the Nigerian jihadists, are terrorist thugs who get their weapons and money from both Nigerian and foreign donors, just like the Islamic State, with which Boko Haram is aligned. Hammad’s father, Sheikh Zakzaky, is recognized as a force for reconciliation among the various religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria. But Zakzaky’s Shia followers have been targeted by both Boko Haram and the Nigerian military, which has long been suspected of manipulating Boko Haram to its own ends. The Nigerian army killed three of the Sheikh’s sons in 2009 during a march against the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem.

By this weekend, Hammad was also dead, killed by the Nigerian military shortly after he arrived back in the country, in a massacre of unarmed Shia Muslims that left his father with bullet wounds in both hands. The military claims the Sheikh’s followers were plotting to kill the army chief of staff when his motorcade was blocked by demonstrators. But, it was pure murder on a massive scale, with as many as 1,000 dead and two hundred bodies piled up at a morgue on the outskirts of town. The military then bulldozed a Shia shrine and Sheikh Zakzaky’s home. One of the Sheikh’s followers, Bukhari Muhammed Bello Jega, wrote on his Facebook page that “the REAL BOKO HARAM is now on the loose” in form of the Nigerian army, “bombing buildings and killing innocent civilians.” Soon after posting that message, Mr.

Bello Jega was also killed by soldiers, along with his wife and infant child.

It is not strange at all that the Nigerian military, which for years did little to halt the rise of Boko Haram terror, has unleashed a hell on earth for peaceful Shia Muslims. Saudi Arabia,

For the Saudis to be leading a war against terror is like the Pope leading a war against Catholicism. Everything the Saudis touch turns into terror and chaos.

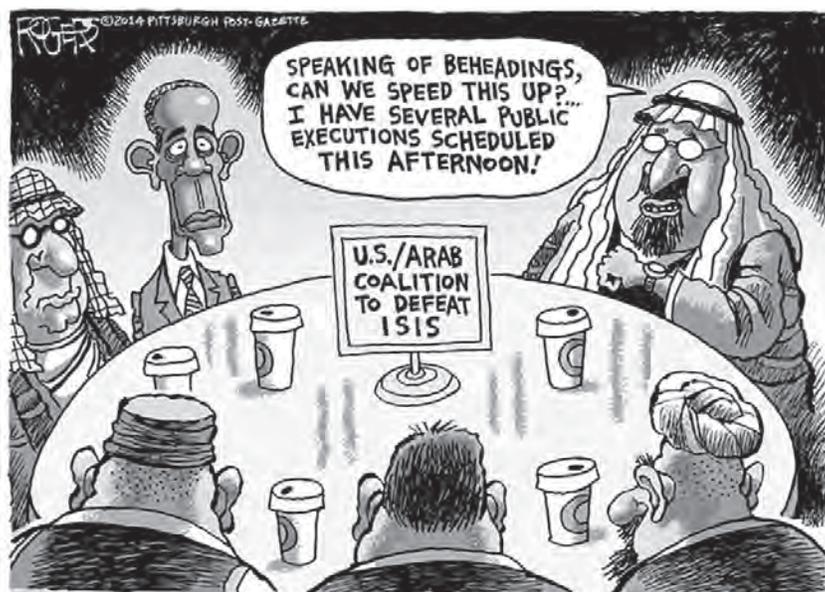
the fountainhead of funding for jihadists all over the world, has just formed its own bizarre coalition against terror, made up of 34 nations from Pakistan to sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria and its West African neighbors Chad, Togo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Gabon, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast. For the Saudis to be leading a war

against terror is like the Pope leading a war against Catholicism. Everything the Saudis touch turns into terror and chaos. The Saudi brand of Wahhabist Islam calls for the eradication of Shia Muslims and secular governments, worldwide—a crusade that the United States finds convenient to its own imperial purposes. When both Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton say that Arabs and Muslims must fight their own war against terror, they are actually endorsing Saudi Arabia’s leadership of the Muslim world and the spread of proxy jihadist armies throughout Africa and Asia.

West Africa is the next front in these jihadist wars, which have already claimed so many of Sheikh Zakzaky’s sons. The resulting chaos will be used to justify further U.S. military penetration of the African continent, under the pretext of putting out the fires that they themselves have set.

—Black Agenda Report, December 16, 2015

http://www.blackagendareport.com/nigerian_military_real_boko_haram



“I Want a World of Peace”

In exclusive interview UK Labor Head Jeremy Corbyn Opposes Bombing Syria

DEMOCRACY NOW! INTERVIEW WITH JEREMY CORBYN

We're broadcasting live from COP21, the U.N. climate summit in Paris, France. Three months ago, Jeremy Corbyn shocked the world when he was elected head of the Labor Party in Britain, becoming the country's opposition leader. Corbyn vowed to return the Labor Party to its socialist roots, championing the renationalization of public transportation, free university tuition, rent control and a national maximum wage to cap the salaries of high earners. Corbyn has been a longtime antiwar activist who once chaired the Stop the War Coalition.

Well, last week, he led the charge to vote against authorizing British Prime Minister David Cameron to begin bombing Syria. A day before the vote, Cameron accused Corbyn of being a “terrorist sympathizer” for opposing airstrikes. I sat down with Jeremy Corbyn last night in Paris in his first U.S. TV/radio interview since being elected Labor leader. —Amy Goodman

Amy Goodman: This is *Democracy Now!*, democracynow.org, The War and Peace Report. I'm Amy Goodman. We're in Paris, France, with the head of the Labor Party of Britain, the opposition party in Britain. He was just elected a few months ago. Jeremy Corbyn, it's great to have you with us.

Jeremy Corbyn: Happy to be with you, Amy.

Amy Goodman: So, how did you do it?

Jeremy Corbyn: Well, we launched a campaign for the leadership of the Labor Party after the general election defeat in May. We were all—obviously, all very sad at losing the general election. And I felt that we lost for a number of reasons. One was that we weren't offering a sufficiently radical alternative to the austerity agenda being put forward by the Conservative and

Liberal Democratic government. And I was asked by colleagues in Parliament and a number of people outside if I was prepared to contest the leadership election. I did. Initially, we were completely written off by the media. I don't know if you do gambling, but we were given odds of 200 to one. So it was a good investment.

And we launched our campaign by taking part in public debates in Hastings and then traveling around the country. And we did a hundred events in different towns and cities all over Britain. And a lot of people came together—young, old, all groups, everybody. And the support grew, because what we were offering was an opening up of politics in Britain. And the result, you know: We won with 60 percent of the vote, the highest-ever vote cast in a party election in Britain. And the membership of the Labor Party has now reached 400,000, which has more than doubled in six months. So it's been an interesting time.

Amy Goodman: Now, you've just had a major vote that you lost, and it was around the bombing of Syria. You were opposed. Other members of your party were for and against. And almost immediately, Britain started bombing Syria. Your thoughts on what this means?

Jeremy Corbyn: I've been in Parliament since 1983, and I've been involved in many issues over the time. Indeed, we first met when I was opposing the Iraq War in 2003. What happened in Paris was appalling, disgraceful, disgusting. And this afternoon I was at one of the cafés that was affected, and signed a remembrance book there. Is the response to that to start bombing Syria, or is the response to that to actually bring about and speed

up a political dialogue, which at the end of the day is the only thing that's going to bring about peace in Syria? I support the political dialogue, not the military intervention.

I realized this was going to be a difficult issue in the British Parliament, a difficult issue within my own party. And I'm a leader, not a dictator. I want to persuade people rather than threaten or control them. And so I decided that I would allow all our members of Parliament a free vote on the subject—they can make up their own minds on it—and also consult the public. And so, what I did was wrote an email to all 400,000 of our party members, and we got a huge response, which was 75 percent against bombing. And I invited members of my parliamentary group—you'd call it a caucus—to vote against, and three-quarters—well, 60 percent—of them did, and a smaller number voted for the bombing. And of my own Shadow Cabinet, a majority voted against the bombing. And I hope this will be seen as a sign that the Labor Party is looking to peaceful solutions to the world's problems. But above all, we're going to hold our government to account. I know the vote went the way I didn't want it to, and I know the bombing started a few hours later.

Amy Goodman: What would a diplomatic solution look like?

Jeremy Corbyn: A diplomatic solution would look like this. The Vienna process involves the Syrian government, all the neighboring governments—of Iran, of Iraq, of Turkey. It involves all of those—and Jordan, of course. In involves all the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. It involves Russia, involves the European Union. It involves the USA. It's not going to be easy, any of this. But are we

going to go into a proxy war between all those competing groups in already what is a four-way civil war in Syria, or can we bring enough of them together to get at least a ceasefire in the Syrian civil war and real isolation of ISIL for its money, for its arms and for the way it sells its oil?

Amy Goodman: Talk about the role of Saudi Arabia.

Jeremy Corbyn: Well, I've been concerned about the sale of weapons within the region, a massive sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia. And I've also raised, on a number of occasions, the issue of human rights in Saudi Arabia. And indeed, in my speech to our annual party conference in Brighton in September, I raised the issue of a British prison contract that was being sought in Saudi Arabia and also the question of the death penalty on Mohammed al-Nimr, a young man who was guilty of nothing more than going to a protest. That speech and the brilliant work of many, many, many other people—not just me—helped to ensure that Britain withdrew from the prison contract. And an older man, a British prisoner, who was in prison in Saudi Arabia, has been released, and others have not been executed. We've got to keep up the pressure.

But I'm also concerned about the issues of where the financial support for ISIL comes from. And so what I've done is asked our government, as indeed we ask all governments, look into your banks, look into your banking system. Who is laundering this money? Look at the manufacturers' labels on those weapons that are used by ISIL. They didn't all come from nowhere. Somebody's been selling those weapons. But also, look at the question of how we treat communities across the world, so that we isolate ISIL for what it is, but we don't blame people in the Muslim community or any other communities. Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism are all part of the

same degree of intolerance. We've got to oppose those and bring communities together.

Amy Goodman: Jeremy Corbyn, Prime Minister David Cameron called you a “terrorist sympathizer” for opposing the airstrikes. You've demanded an apology.

Jeremy Corbyn: He was asked many times to apologize. Indeed, I paused my own speech in Parliament to invite him, said, “Prime Minister, this is not a time for these kind of remarks. Can you please apologize now for it? Not just to me, but to all the people that maybe have the same kind of opinion that I do.” He declined to do so. People can judge for themselves. I want a world of peace. I'm not interested in bombs. I'm not interested in wars. I'm interested in peace. And I think it demeans his office to make remarks like that.

Amy Goodman: You occupy the same position that Tony Blair once did—Tony Blair, the prime minister who issued a kind of *mea culpa* around Iraq, the invasion of Iraq, by saying that—well, let's go to a clip:

Fareed Zakaria: When people look at the rise of ISIS, many people point to the invasion of Iraq as the principal cause. What do you say to that?

Tony Blair: I think there are elements of truth in that. But I think we've, again, got to be extremely careful; otherwise we'll misunderstand what's going on in Iraq and in Syria today. Of course, you can't say that those of us who removed Saddam in 2003 bear no responsibility for the situation in 2015.

Amy Goodman: That was Tony Blair responding to Fareed Zakaria's question on *CNN* whether in fact ISIS came out of the invasion of Iraq. Your response?

Jeremy Corbyn: I thought it was interesting. I fundamentally disagreed with Tony Blair, when he was leader of

my party and prime minister, on the question particularly of Iraq. And it's interesting that in his interview on *CNN* he did say that one of the effects of the war in Iraq has been the growth of irrational forces like ISIL. Indeed, President Obama said something broadly similar about his thoughts on the long-term effects of what had happened in the whole region since Iraq. And I think we have to remember not just Afghanistan and Iraq, but also think of Libya. The West went in to bomb Libya to protect the people of Benghazi against an apparent immediate threat from the forces led by Colonel Gaddafi. They then went on to a bombing campaign across the whole country. All of the state infrastructure was destroyed. All the system of government was destroyed. And we now have a huge country which is dominated by a series of competing factions and is an ever-present problem for everyone in the region, for Tunisia and other countries around there. Again, it was Western policy that decided on that, just as much as Western policy after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 went on the de-Baathification policy, which actually destroyed all civil—normal civil structures of society, which have taken more than ten years to rebuild, and they're not rebuilt yet.

Amy Goodman: According to *The Independent*, an unnamed general said the armed forces would stage a *coup* or mutiny if you became prime minister.

Jeremy Corbyn: Well, I've asked for the source of this remark. None has been forthcoming. I have written to the secretary of state for defense to ask him to remind everyone that we live in a democracy, where members of Parliament are elected, from which government is formed, and that government is elected to run the country with a democratic mandate. It is up to all those that work in the public sector to recognize that democratic mandate. That includes generals.

Amy Goodman: A lot of controversy around a *BBC* question whether you would drop a nuclear bomb, to which you said no. Can you expand on this?

Jeremy Corbyn: Well, I've spent my life opposing nuclear weapons, and I was asked if I would be prepared to use nuclear weapons, and I gave the answer I think everybody expected me to give. And so, that is my view.

Amy Goodman: How did it feel—for so many years you've been involved with the Stop the War Coalition, along with the late Tony Benn—that it was his son, Hilary Benn, who spoke out for the bombing of Syria in the Parliament?

Jeremy Corbyn: Tony Benn and I were very close, very close friends for 30, 40 years. We talked to each other a great deal, and we were great friends. And I was with him shortly before he died, talking about prospects of the world and prospects for peace. And I'm very sad that he's gone. He taught me a great deal. He taught an awful lot of other people a great deal. And he did something that I haven't done: He kept a good diary of everything he did and learned from it. So, perhaps I should do the same. I don't think one should ever start on the family connections one way or the other. Everybody makes their own mind up. Everybody makes their own decisions. And I would never involve myself in that sort of argument.

—*Democracy Now!*, December 8, 2015

http://www.democracynow.org/2015/12/8/i_want_a_world_of_peace

Checkpoint Violence: Blood and Occupation

BY VIJAY PRASHAD

On December 17, 2015, Naseer was driving from Nablus to Ramallah. Light rain fell as he approached the Israeli military's checkpoint at Huwwara. In front of him was another car, moving cautiously. About fifty meters before that car was an Israeli military vehicle. Caution is the order of the day in the vicinity of the Israeli military. No sense in provoking their ire. Naseer kept some distance between the cars. They were moving slowly.

Beside the road, on the grass off the sidewalk, a young boy walked in the same direction of the cars. Naseer observed that the boy seemed to be on the grass to avoid the puddles on the sidewalk.

The Israeli military vehicle braked. An order must have come from the soldiers. The boy put his hands up. Naseer did not hear them but saw him obey. The car in front of his began to go around the military vehicle. Naseer followed. He saw the boy with his hands up. The next minute, in his rear view mirror, Naseer saw the boy on the ground. All this happened in a split second. One minute the boy was standing with his hands up, and the next minute he was dead on the ground.

Naseer stopped his car, as did the driver of the car in front of him. The two men exchanged information. They had both witnessed an execution. There was no opportunity to approach the Israeli soldiers, who had already cordoned off the area.

Not long after, Israeli state media announced that their military had killed Abdullah Hussein Nasasra (age 15) from Beit Furik (near Nablus). The Israeli military said that Nasasra had "charged the forces while armed with a knife."

Naseer said that he saw no knife. Nor did he see Nasasra charge the mili-

tary men. They had guns trained on him. Why would he try to attack them with a knife?

Over the course of the past few weeks, Israeli military and security forces have used deadly force against a number of children whom they accuse of knife attacks. Israeli political leaders have given *carte blanche* to their military to kill anyone they see as a threat. Interior Security Minister Gilad Arden said, "Every terrorist should know that he will not survive the attack he is about to commit." Yair Lapid, former Minister of Finance in the Israeli government, concurred, "You have to shoot to kill anyone who pulls out a knife or a screwdriver." Since the Israeli military is the Judge, Executioner and Investigator of these incidents, there is no accountability for them.

When Kamal Badran Qabalan drove his ambulance to the scene, the Israelis blocked him from access to the body. There will be no independent investigation of this death. The miasma of Israeli propaganda—terrorist, knife—has already covered over the facts. Naseer says he is ready to testify against the Israeli military. But how does he do it? There will be no trial. The case will close quietly. Naseer is a distinguished man. His eyes are kind and honest. His voice is defiant as he tells me the story—"I saw them kill a boy," he says. But what can Naseer do? His body language bespeaks the Occupation. There is futility here beside the defiance.

No light at the end of the tunnel

The day before the Israeli military shot to death Nasasra at Huwwara, Samah Abdul-Mo'men (age 18) and her father drove toward that checkpoint. Israeli soldiers opened fire in the vicinity of her car, hitting her (she died in hospital later that day). Why did the Israeli military open fire at the cars

with civilians? They claim that they had come under attack from Alaa' Khalil al-Hashshash (age 16), from the Balata refugee camp in Nablus. He is said to have tried to stab Israeli soldiers, who then retaliated. Did al-Hashshash actually carry out a "knife attack?" If he did, why did the Israeli soldiers fire at all the cars in the vicinity, killing Abdul-Mo'men? The Israelis will take none of these questions up in seriousness. The questions are seen as an irritant.

In the evening of Friday, December 18, the road between Ramallah and Jerusalem—only ten kilometers—is congested. Qalandiya check point is virtually closed. We decide to go around—driving forty kilometers as detour around the illegal "separation wall." Later we learn that two young men attempted to drive their cars into military vehicles. These are known as "vehicular attacks." The men drove their cars futilely at the heavily armed checkpoints. The Israeli military easily shot Muhammed Abd al-Rahman Ayyad (age 21) to death. The other man, age 30, stumbled out of his car and was shot by the military. None posed any real threat to the checkpoint. Their bodies—weighed down by frustration—were no matches against the Israeli military.

Why did these men try to drive their cars into the checkpoints and why do the children use knives to attack the settlers? Why—in particular—given that their attacks are unsuccessful and that they lose their lives in the process? The Israelis have killed over a hundred and thirty Palestinians since October. Most of those shot have been children.

Some of these children have indeed attacked settlers in their streets. But not all of them. Nasasra had no knife in his hand, nor did Abdul-Mo'men. But others did. Why did these few others attack Israeli settlers with knives? UNICEF notes that it is the "existence and expansion of Israeli settlements including in East Jerusalem, illegal under international law, [that] have been a primary driver of protection threats against children." Palestinian children are exposed to violence early in their lives, which are constrained by the loss of their families' land and livelihood.

Lives lived encaged by the Occupation produce—says UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon—"fear, humiliation, frustration and mistrust. It has been fed by the wounds of decades of bloody conflict, which will take a long time to heal. Palestinian youth in particular are tired of broken

promises and they see no light at the end of the tunnel." Secretary Ban blamed the "settlement enterprise" for the tension in the region.

Frustration is the order of the day. I meet some young men from a camp near Ramallah. They see no outlet for their anger. Everyday they see their families and friends humiliated by the Occupation. This situation drives them to desperation—"we have to do something," says one young man. His eyes are tired. He looks older than his teenage years. He has lost his friends to Israeli violence. "We marched to Qalandiya last year," he says, "in a peaceful protest. They fired on us. My friend died." Colonial violence bears down on his spirit. Around him young children are eliminated by the Israeli military. His body twitches with anxiety and fear.

Vijay Prashad's most recent book is No Free Left: The Futures of Indian Communism (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2015).

—Counter Punch, December 29, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/12/29/checkpoint-violence-the-humiliation-of-occupation/>



Baltimore Bankers' Scheme To Expel Blacks

BY GLEN FORD

A new study of bank lending practices in Baltimore shows that whites get twice the number of mortgage loans as Blacks do, even though Blacks outnumber whites two to one in the city. Baltimore is 64 percent Black, with a quarter of its population living below the poverty line. However, the study found that the banks continue to issue mortgages in some low-income neighborhoods—the ones where white people live. Yes, Baltimore still has some poor neighborhoods where whites are the majority, and if you live in one of them, you are far more likely to get a mortgage from the bank. But, if you live in a neighborhood that's 80 percent Black or more, your chances for a mortgage are a much slimmer.

So, what are the Lords of Capital really up to? The data shows that the banks are willing to put money into low-income neighborhoods that still have large white populations, but will

do nothing to stabilize low-income communities where Blacks predominate. The implications are quite clear, but the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, which seeks to draw public and private investment into the cities, and which commissioned the study, doesn't seem to get it. They issued a statement, warning that failure to provide credit to prospective inner city homeowners will cause their neighborhoods to "continue to deteriorate"—as if the banks don't know that!

The bankers are perfectly aware of the consequences of their lending policies. Some neighborhoods will live, and some will die, to be born again as gentrified communities valued at many times the previous worth of the land and buildings. When Black neighborhoods are killed, the banks make a killing. The banks have other plans for Baltimore's remaining white low-income neighborhoods. White folks

always get different treatment; that's part of the privilege.

For the time being, the banks have decided to keep those poor white enclaves stable, through the magic of mortgage money. But, the bankers have condemned the Black sections of town to a death spiral of social and physical deterioration. They know exactly what they are doing: inflicting the maximum social pain on Black people, in anticipation of fantastic financial gains for bank shareholders after the Blacks are forced to disperse.

In a white supremacist society like the United States, the very presence of Black people lowers property values—not because of anything within Black people's control, but because of white people's behavior in the marketplace. The banks are the most important institutional participants in the white supremacist marketplace and profit the most from it. Baltimore is what it has become, mostly because of the banks, who also had a lot to do with deindustrialization and the collapse of the blue collar job market in the Baltimores of the nation.

There's a lesson here, but one that groups like the National Community Reinvestment Coalition will never learn. They spend much of their time trying to get bankers to do the right thing—which is an absolute impossibility—when the real task at hand is to get rid of the banking class and nationalize the banks so that we can make rational investments of the people's money in jobs and housing for the folks who live in places like Baltimore.

—*Black Agenda Report*, November 17, 2015

http://www.blackagendareport.com/baltimore_bankers_expel_blacks



"YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO ONE OF OUR LOAN OFFICERS!"

This Ain't Your Grandfather's Civil Rights Movement

BY GLEN FORD

Black Lives Matter activist Shaun King writes on his Facebook page that 2015 saw “the deadliest hate crime against Black folk in the past 75 years” in Charleston, and notes that “more unarmed Black folks have been killed by police this year than were lynched in any years since 1923.” He continues:

“Never, in the history of modern America, have we seen Black students in elementary, middle, and high school handcuffed and assaulted by police in school like we have seen this year. Black students, who pay tuition, are leaving the University of Missouri campus right now because of active death threats against their lives. If you ever wondered who you would be or what you would do if you lived during the Civil Rights Movement, stop. You are living in that time, right now.”

Evidence abounds that police and white supremacist violence is reaching a post-World War Two crescendo. Los Angeles is showcased as a model of so-called “community policing,” but the city’s cops are gunning down civilians at twice the rate of last year. It seems the first response of LA’s “first-responders” is shoot-to-kill. “Right now, police have a down-to-the-bone belief that they have to watch suspects’ hands, and if the hands move, they can shoot,” said civil rights lawyer Connie Rice.

In Ohio, prosecutor Timothy McGinty appeared to be channeling the ghost of Birmingham’s “Bull” Connor when he accused the family of Tamir Rice of having “economic motivations” for seeking justice in the police killing of the 12-year-old. A local judge ruled there was probable cause to arrest the two Cleveland cops on aggravated murder charges, but McGinty is setting the stage for a grand jury whitewash.

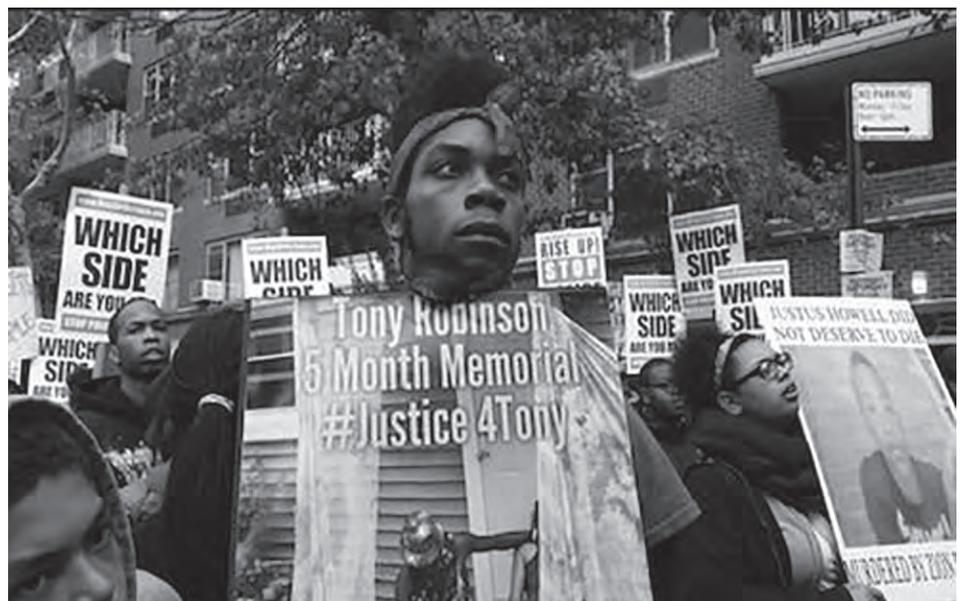
According to Shaun King, who was hired last month as senior justice writ-

er for the *New York Daily News* and whose Twitter account has 187,000 followers, today’s struggle is much like the “civil rights” period, in terms of violence directed against Blacks. He makes the historical comparison to motivate a new generation to rise to the occasion. However, it is critically important to understand that Black folks are not currently engaged in a repeat of the civil rights movement, which achieved almost complete success by 1965. The remainder of the Sixties was about “Black Power,” and how to get it. The U.S. government’s response was to declare war against the more radical elements of the Movement—which they succeeded in annihilating—and to begin creating the infrastructure of a new national policy to control and contain the entire African American population: mass Black incarceration.

Two generations later, the young people that Shaun King seeks to advise confront an entrenched Mass Black Incarceration regime that is far more formidable and ruthless than the local and state security structures—or the freelance white terrorists—of the civil

rights era. The modern mass incarceration regime, which Michelle Alexander calls “The New Jim Crow,” is more pervasive than southern segregation ever was, reaching into every aspect of Black life and warping each social relationship it touches. Its cumulative effects have been so catastrophic that one-out-of-every-eight prison inmates on the planet is an African American. The Mass Black Incarceration State killed Michael Brown and Tamir Rice and all the other martyrs of the current, incipient movement.

This regime is a profoundly post-civil rights phenomenon—a national project to re-impose state control over Black people after the victory of civil rights and the failed attempt to achieve some degree of Black self-determination. It is true that Blacks have been subjected to mass incarceration ever since Emancipation. Indeed, mass Black incarceration was the White South’s response to Emancipation, a primary tool, along with the lynch law, in enforcing the Old Jim Crow. However, the suppression of the awakened Black masses in the late 1960s would require a national project that



would coordinate, fund and vastly enlarge the various local and state police and prison agencies, under central direction. That process was begun with creation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1968, the first federal program to fund and equip local and state police forces. President Nixon gave the white backlash against the Black Movement a race-neutral national mobilizing project with his War on Drugs. For the first time in history, the U.S. had a truly national security infrastructure—a police state and gulag created specifically to keep the Blacks in check, by methodically criminalizing the entire African American population.

This ain't your grandfather's civil rights era. Rather than a potential protector of Black people, the federal government is the funder, equipper and coordinator of an integrated national structure of repression whose primary mission, for almost half-a-century, has been to contain and control Black people.

The Movement has no choice, therefore, but to seek the overthrow of the Mass Black Incarceration State, whose structures and ideology are embedded in the national government of the United States.

It's been a long time coming, but this is the big throwdown. Not "Mississippi Burning," but the whole damn country.

—*Black Agenda Report*, November 11, 2015

http://www.blackagendareport.com/not_your_grandfather_s_movement

“more unarmed Black folks have been killed by police this year than were lynched in any years since 1923.”

Middle Age White Male Die-Off

BY GLEN FORD

It appears that white middle aged men with no more than a high school education have not adjusted well to their declining economic and social status in the United States. That seems to be the logical conclusion that can be drawn from a study by two Nobel laureates in economics who found that the death rate for white men of lower educational attainment between the ages of 45 and 54 has been increasing, while every other racial, gender and economic group has been living longer. The study was conducted during the 15 years between 1999 and 2014. The findings came as a shock—not just because the life expectancy of non-college educated white middle aged males was going in the opposite direction than everyone else, but also because the heightened mortality rate of this particular cohort is not due to the most frequent killers, like heart disease and diabetes. Instead, these low-income white men are committing suicide or dying from the complications of substance abuse at previously unheard of rates. So many of this group are dying by their own hands, or from illnesses based on self-destructive behaviors, that they have dragged down the life expectancy of the entire white middle aged male population, regardless of education and income.

Clearly, we are looking at mass psychological problems, rooted in class, race, and gender at a particular point in history in the United States. These suddenly at-risk white men are by no means the most endangered U.S. demographic; Black and Hispanic men still die much younger than whites, but their life expectancies are gradually improving, while the opposite is true of

the at-risk white cohort. Even more intriguingly, white relatively uneducated males who are older or younger than the 45 to 54 group are not dying at such high rates from self-destructive behavior.

What the numbers are telling us, is that a generation of poorly educated white men who came of age in the Seventies and Eighties are suffering dramatic levels of psychological instability, so that they drink or drug themselves to death or kill themselves outright. The death rate for this group rose 22 percent during the study period. The researchers noted that the incomes of households headed by people with only a high school education fell by 19 percent during the same period. But, that's true for less educated households of all ethnic groups and both sexes, and only the white males of a certain age began dying at alarming rates—as if much of their group had been emotionally destabilized.

Working class people of all ethnicities have lost a great deal of economic ground under late stage capitalism in America, but the uneducated white males have also lost what they were led to expect was their special place in the racialized pecking order. Late in life, they find that white skin privilege can't buy security or serenity in the age of austerity—and their worlds fall apart.

You might say they died from a White Lie.

—*Black Agenda Report*, November 3, 2015

http://blackagendareport.com/when_skin_privilege_is_not_enough

Single Payer Healthcare

Still more popular than Obamacare

BY GLEN FORD

Boosters for the Obama administration claim that his Affordable Care Act is a legacy that qualifies Obama for permanent residence in the pantheon of progressive domestic policy presidents, like Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson. *Black Agenda Report* takes the opposite position: that, in 2009, newly-elected President Obama set the cause of universal healthcare back many years with his surprise endorsement of a Republican health insurance plan, hatched in the bowels of the Heritage Foundation in the 1980s and championed by GOP presidential candidate Bob Dole in 1996 and Massachusetts Republican Governor Mitt Romney shortly thereafter. Obama's bill was written by the health insurance and pharmaceutical corporations, and brutally imposed on the Left wing of the Democratic Party, whose members were threatened with loss of party campaign support if they resisted.

Cleveland Congressman Dennis Kucinich was the last holdout for the so-called Public Option, a scaled down alternative to Obama's corporate-based scheme that finally disappeared altogether—as did Representative Kucinich's seat in Congress, which was redistricted out from under him.

The White House justified its abandonment of Single Payer healthcare, claiming compromise was necessary in order to get Republican votes. But the Democrats controlled both Houses of Congress, and Obamacare passed without a single Republican vote.

As a consolation for the loss of the Public Option, Obama offered to create non-profit health insurance co-ops in the various states. However, more than half of these co-ops have gone out of business in an environment dominated by cutthroat healthcare capitalists.

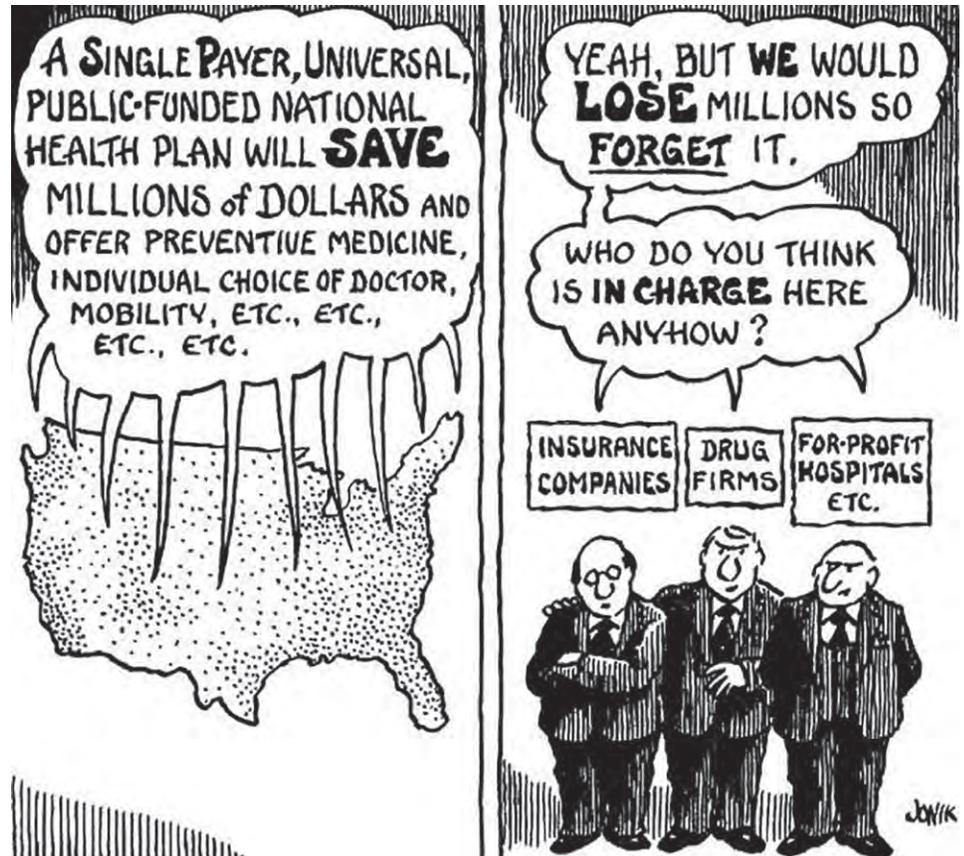
Our biggest concern seven years ago was that Obama was setting in concrete the corporate role in healthcare, planting the insurance and drug companies right smack in the middle of a multi-trillion dollar river of federal money—and that it would take decades to pry their profiteering hands loose. We still feel that way. With every year, more and more companies and jobs are tied directly to the cash flow of the privatized system Obama created. As Bruce Dixon has warned, conservative judges are increasingly likely to rule that rolling back corporate pillaging of healthcare would constitute an illegal “taking” and seizure of reasonably-expected profits. Under Obama's Trans Pacific Partnership trade rules treaty, the corporations would win.

Therefore, it is encouraging that majorities of Americans still support

Single Payer healthcare, in the form of Medicare for All. A new Kaiser Poll shows 58 percent of the public are in favor of Medicare for All, including 81 percent of Democrats. That's only slightly below the high mark of Single Payer support in the months before new President Barack Obama announced that he wasn't really talking about Single Payer when he used the term “universal coverage”—he meant universal payment to private corporations, under penalty of law. His plan, Obamacare, remains less popular than Medicare for All. Obama's legacy is that he has made it far more difficult to dislodge the corporations from their parasitic role in U.S. healthcare.

—*Black Agenda Report*, December 22, 2015

http://blackagendareport.com/single-payer_more_popular_than_obamacare



Americans are Poor

BY MARGARET KIMBERLEY

Americans are perhaps the most deluded people in the world. Facts are habitually ignored in favor of wishful thinking. Fantasies are created by white supremacy and the ruling classes in order to minimize the numbers of people willing to point out that the emperor has no clothes. One of the most pernicious false beliefs is the statement “America is a rich country.”

It is true that the United States Treasury has trillions of dollars. It is true that there are many wealthy people in this country. But Americans should accept the indisputable fact that as individuals, they are poor. Recent data released by the Social Security Administration revealed that 51 percent of all American workers earn less than \$30,000-per-year.

Even in those regions with a low cost of living, a single adult is struggling to live on only \$30,000-per-year. It is a poverty level income and if half of all workers fall below it they should be called poor. This nation has more poor children than any other country in the group that is referred to as “developed.” According to UNICEF the overall level of child well being in the United States ranks near the bottom alongside Lithuania, Latvia and Romania. Most Americans do not think of themselves as comparable in any way to these nations. Facing this inconvenient truth is quite painful.

People living in poverty are thought of as lazy or stupid or the victims of their own bad decision-making. It is easy for these stereotypes to persist because of a lack of class-consciousness and racism. Poverty is also synonymous with Blackness. In fact, that old stereotype has proven to be true in the Obama era. Black people are now the poorest group in the country. There

are more Black children in poverty than white children, an historic and awful turn of events.

Worship of the “middle class” ideal is a huge obstacle to class consciousness and political action. This meaningless term is embraced as if it actually prevents people from living in poverty. If ten people are asked to define the meaning of middle class, it is possible to get ten different definitions. It all boils down to separating oneself from the dreaded and lambasted poor instead of thinking of oneself as a worker. The result of these mental gymnastics is that millions of the poor never dare to speak up for themselves. Doing so would shatter the fantasy world where they reside.

Instead of the useless words middle class, Americans ought to speak of and fight for a living wage. Of course none of their politicians are really interested in providing one. The Republicans are consistently honest in opposing an increase of the minimum wage. The Democrats make believe that they want to raise it but only discuss doing so when they don’t control Congress and are unable to act. When they have the opportunity, as they did in 2009 and 2010, neither the Democratic president Barack Obama nor the Democratically-controlled House or Senate introduced minimum wage legislation. Instead, they wait to be out of power and then pretend that they would fight for working people. Their words are a sham meant to keep Democrats from thinking independently and ridding themselves once and for all of their useless political party.

The presidential election season should be an opportunity to make crystal clear demands on the candidates. Bernie Sanders says he wants

Americans to live like the Scandinavians who rank at the top of personal well being in the world. He has had a chance to act on that belief as a member of the United States Senate but he has so far refrained from doing so. He did introduce legislation to raise the minimum wage to \$15-per-hour, but not until July of this year. He had to first declare himself a presidential candidate and needed to look like the genuine article. Yet even this is sleight of hand. Under the Sanders plan the increase would be incremental and not reach \$15 until 2020. Sanders acts like other Democrats and acquiesces without complaint when a Democrat is in the White House but then pretends to fight for workers in an election year.

The Democrats warn against voting for a third, fourth or fifth party because doing so makes one a spoiler who helps the Republicans. But why is it bad to spoil the chances of a party that lies to its constituents year after year? The Democrats’ treachery creates a vicious cycle of apathy. The people who need the most help ignore the political process altogether because they gain nothing from it. Of course, if they don’t participate then it is business as usual in Washington.

The people who can only find low wage work, if they find it at all, need to be activated. But their activism must take an entirely new direction. Pushing them into the arms of the party that is consistently unfaithful isn’t the answer. In 2016 the word spoiler should be a badge of honor. Spoilers shouldn’t be ashamed and neither should poor people.

—*Black Agenda Report*, November 3, 2015

http://blackagendareport.com/freedom_rider_americans_are_poor

Cop Killings and Taxes

Tax loopholes for the rich and police brutality are inextricably linked.

BY KAREN DOLAN AND BOB LORD

An 18-year-old Mike Brown was walking to his grandmother's house one summer afternoon in Ferguson, Missouri. An officer stops him for jaywalking. He ends up lying dead in the road for four hours. Walter Scott is pulled over for a broken taillight in a high poverty area in South Carolina. He flees—presumably out of fear of back child support owed to the state. Minutes later, he is dead on the ground, shot in the back. A 16-year-old girl is thrown across a classroom by a school cop for failing to relinquish her cell phone. A 17-year-old boy with a small knife, walking away from officers, is shot 16 times—15 of those bullets pumped into his already dead body in the middle of the Chicago road.

The list of these tragic deaths is long. Over 1,000 deaths have occurred at the hands of law enforcement so far this year. Black males are 3.5 times more likely to become victims than their white counterparts.

Cell phone videos of police brutality have forced this country to confront the ways poverty and race play out in city after city, school after school, jail after jail. We know the factors underlying America's legacy of racism contribute to this crisis. But one factor largely has been overlooked.

When the U.S. Department of Justice investigated the shooting of Mike Brown, it found an excessive pursuit of revenue through over-aggressive policing of minor violations such as traffic and municipal code offenses. Further, it found racial bias on the part of authorities against the majority Black population in Ferguson.

The connection between police violence and the reliance on law enforcement to raise revenue, however, is but the last link in a chain of causation that begins with federal tax policy.

Any county, city, or town relies both on funding sources it can control and those it can't. The first category includes license fees, traffic tickets, and fines for violations of local ordinances, such as jaywalking. The second category consists of tax revenue that each state shares with its various subdivisions.

If revenue from state revenue-sharing decreases, a city, town or county faces pressure to increase revenue from sources under local control. Will there be pushback from citizens? Yes, but that pushback will be weakest in poor communities. Increasing the cost of licenses or building permits requires official action by local government leaders. That carries a stiff political cost. But increased code enforcement in poor communities? That just takes a phone call or lunch at a quiet restaurant.

Changes in revenue sharing by the states, then, are the link preceding reliance on law enforcement to raise revenue. There are exceptions, but in order to balance budgets, states typically have squeezed their counties and cities. Arizona, for example, recently balanced its budget on the backs of counties, cities and school districts. Arizona has one of the highest rates *per capita* of killings by

police. Phoenix, its capital and largest city, has been one of the country's most dangerous cities for police killings.

Tax cuts

So, why the shortfall in state tax revenue? Tax cuts. Over the past few decades, the states have engaged in a vicious race to the bottom, trying to lure businesses and wealthy individuals with low tax rates. That race originated with changes in federal tax policy that infected the politics of state tax policy.

Consider the federal estate tax. Prior to 2001, states shared in federal estate tax revenue simply by imposing an estate tax according to a federally established schedule. The tax cost their residents nothing, since a person's federal estate tax obligation was reduced, dollar-for-dollar, by the state-level estate tax he paid. Every state participated. Politically, it was free money.

The Bush tax cuts eliminated that revenue sharing structure, replacing it with one far less generous to the states. Consequently, 32 states have abandoned their estate tax—and the revenue derived from it.

The connection between federal and state income tax policy changes is less



Racism is a Trade Union Issue

BY CARL FINAMORE

obvious, but the impact is the same. The federal income tax benefit associated with state income taxes has fallen, thus increasing the real cost of those state income taxes to those who pay them. That opened the door for anti-tax ideologues, most noticeably the American Legislative Exchange Council, to push for reductions in state tax rates, with an associated reduction in revenues.

The bottom line: ill-conceived changes in federal tax policy contributed to local revenue problems and the fraught atmosphere in which a teenager was shot dead over what started as a jaywalking violation. Structural and cultural racism can't be addressed by tax policy alone. Nonetheless, because federal tax policy contributed to the increase in police violence, it also must play a role in reducing it.

Tax the rich

Millionaires and billionaires and the corporations they own must face higher nominal federal tax rates, with an offsetting federal tax reduction for state level taxes they pay. Generous federal subsidies will force the hands of state legislators to impose higher taxes, which in turn could be shared with cities and towns. That can create the space for a reduction in the number of confrontations between poor people and police that end tragically.

Unfortunately, no presidential candidate recognizes the link between federal tax policy and police violence. The tax plans of both Trump and Bush would reduce the portion of state income tax payments offset by a reduction in federal tax liabilities. Marco Rubio's plan is worse. It eliminates the federal deduction for state income tax altogether. Don't expect any better from the Democrats. They tend to treat the federal income tax deduction for state income tax as a loophole, so it's unlikely they'll seek to increase the value of that deduction to taxpayers.

Perhaps by 2020 our candidates will focus on this. Or maybe 2024. The

Note: Remarks by panelist Carl Finamore at the October 26, 2015 Black Lives Matter Forum sponsored by the San Francisco Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

The American working class is the most powerful in the world, is the most productive in the world and we operate the largest and most profitable economy in the world.

American workers are also represented by national unions that have the most resources, the biggest staffs and the largest bank accounts, greater than any other trade unions in the world.

Yet, without question, American labor is politically the weakest in the world among the large economies, largely because we remain so violently divided.

For example, no advanced industrial country on the planet matches our bloody record of police repression against the Black Community.

In 2011, six people were killed by cops in Australia, two in England and Wales, and six in Germany. In 2013, not one person was killed by police in England or in Germany. In 2014, one person was killed by cops in England.

By comparison, the British independent newspaper, *The Guardian*, has documented 940 police killings, and

question is: how many more Mike Browns who jaywalk on the way to Grandma's house will be left dead in the street before presidential candidates make addressing this toxic blend of racism and revenue pressures a priority?

—*Common Dreams*, December 9, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/12/09/will-any-presidential-candidate-connect-federal-tax-policy-and-police-killings>

counting, in the U.S. this year alone. And, unarmed Blacks are twice as likely to be murdered by cops than whites.

These totals more than double FBI statistics.

Of course, this begs the question, easily answered by those of us who claim institutional racism, of why it takes investigative reporters an ocean away to expose our homegrown bloodshed instead of U.S. government agencies or domestic media outlets.

In any case, our largely divided working class not only allows for more police repression, it also weakens us so thoroughly that it results in American unions having a vastly reduced overall political impact.

For example, American unions provide the least social benefits to our class when compared to other industrial countries where working people are more united and where they enjoy some expanded version of national healthcare, better access to education, extended maternity leave, longer vacations and earlier social security.

For those who believe unions should forgo social activism and narrowly confine ourselves to collective bargaining—representing members on the job and negotiating wages and benefits exclusively—I say this: It's not working and never has.

Even in wages and benefits, we measure a lowly 14th among the top 20 countries in the world.

In measuring almost every social and economic indicator, we register below those of our sisters and brothers in Europe.

Why?

The contrasts mentioned above have nothing to do with differences between the various ruling groups of each country. On the contrary, they are

largely the same greedy and callous bunch all over the globe.

In Europe, look at how the English rulers so cruelly dominated the Irish and how the French brutalized the Algerians, both examples only a few decades old. More recently, look at how European countries currently operate through NATO as war partners of the U.S. in the Middle East.

No, the explanation for disparities in living conditions between the two continents lies not at the top but at the bottom where the working classes were embedded from birth with vastly different political messages.

European trade unions were formed in the late 1800s, in many cases by mass Socialist parties conveying the concept of social solidarity and of defending the social and economic interests of the whole class broadly defined—as workers on the job and as citizens in the community.

This political commitment and subsequent unity in action resulted in the substantial social achievements I mentioned earlier.

Very importantly, this “unified wall of social solidarity” not only dramatically curbed the greed of the corporate elite by extracting enormous concessions, it also dramatically restrained their ability to unleash police violence against popular movements for reforms.

This enormously powerful social solidarity has, no doubt, been weakened in the last 25 years as union leaders in Europe have become more conservative and as the mostly white European working class has been challenged to embrace immigrants of color.

But, nonetheless, there is still a legacy of the power and effectiveness of 20th Century “Social Unionism” in Europe and it remains qualitatively superior to the history and experience of the largely conservative American unions who had racism deeply embedded into their late 19th century founding structures.

Of course, there are very honorable exceptions in our labor history but we are speaking here of the dominant trend of American unions.

Racism is our history

In 1902, shortly after our national unions formed, historian W.E.B. Du Bois documented 43 national unions that had no Black members with another 27 barring Black apprentices completely.

It got better with the rise of the CIO union federation in the 1930s when the steel and auto plants were organized, but this experience can be misleading.

Clearly, organizing auto and steel plants would have been impossible without the inclusion of Black workers who, when excluded from unions, were very successfully used by employers as scabs to break strikes.

This occurred on a massive scale with tens-of-thousands of Black and Mexican workers during the failed 1919 national steel strike.

Learning from this experience, steel and auto union organizers appealed in the 1930s to Black workers, for the first time in history, to join the new auto and steel industrial unions.

This newfound unity resulted in the largest growth spurt and most successful unionization campaigns in our history. There were 500,000 Black CIO members by 1945.

But, with great disappointment, I must admit this absolutely did not represent a fresh civil rights’ commitment by our unions.

For example, after the merger of the two national federations into the AFL-CIO in 1955, a powerhouse representing around 35 percent of American workers, the new federation caved to reactionary McCarthyite witch-hunt and Democratic party-Dixiecrat pressures, completely backing off the CIO post-war pledge to organize the south.

Thus, incredibly and tragically, at the same time as courageous civil rights activists were risking their lives confronting Jim Crow, our powerful and now united union federation walked away from the field of battle.

Worse yet, later in the 1960s, even the great former CIO union, the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), along with U.S. Steel owners themselves, were both successfully sued by civil rights organizations for enforcing systematic



exclusion of Blacks from promotions.

A federal court-enforced U.S. Steel Consent Decree remedy was established with civil-rights organizations challenging discriminatory corporate and union practices in other major industries as well.

It does not stop there.

During this same period of the 1960s, in Detroit, Black autoworkers formed union caucuses making very credible accusations against, again, a former, militant CIO union, the United Auto Workers (UAW), for both ignoring and tolerating racist discrimination by the auto companies.

As it stands today, no doubt, many improvements have been made in employment law and many advances in how unions earnestly defend the rights of all members on the job.

But, as far as the modern political record of our national unions, at a minimum, they can be characterized as either shunning the whole issue of racism or of evading any real involve-

ment, seldom going beyond just words on paper.

Most notably, retreat from the field of battle repeated itself with the failure of AFL-CIO leaders to appear in Ferguson, Missouri after the murder of Michael Brown last year.

We should have walked side by side with the besieged Black citizens of that community with our banners and battalions of members and professional staff who could have supplied needed logistical, press and political support to the otherwise politically isolated and personally victimized Black citizens of that city.

This was a conscious political act of cowardice by our national leaders who chose instead to issue press statements of concern.

United for justice

We cannot continue to ignore the deep prejudices of the white working class. Our divisions can only be breached by new political approaches that aggressively defend the social and economic interests of the Black com-

munity and all people of color and women.

These must be our principles boldly stated, defended and implemented.

It will not be easy reversing the whole previous backward trajectory of labor. But it is the only solution to end our political isolation from the working-class majority, people of color and women, and to become the vibrant, growing movement the CIO once was.

This includes addressing the enduring legacy of discrimination whereby over half of Black, Latino and women workers earn under \$15-an-hour.

A good start would be by embracing the millions of low-wage Fast-Food workers, Walmart workers and Home Care workers, who have been targeted for this super-exploitation by the bosses,

Only then will our lowly membership numbers stop plunging downward, languishing on the bottom along with our morals and principles.

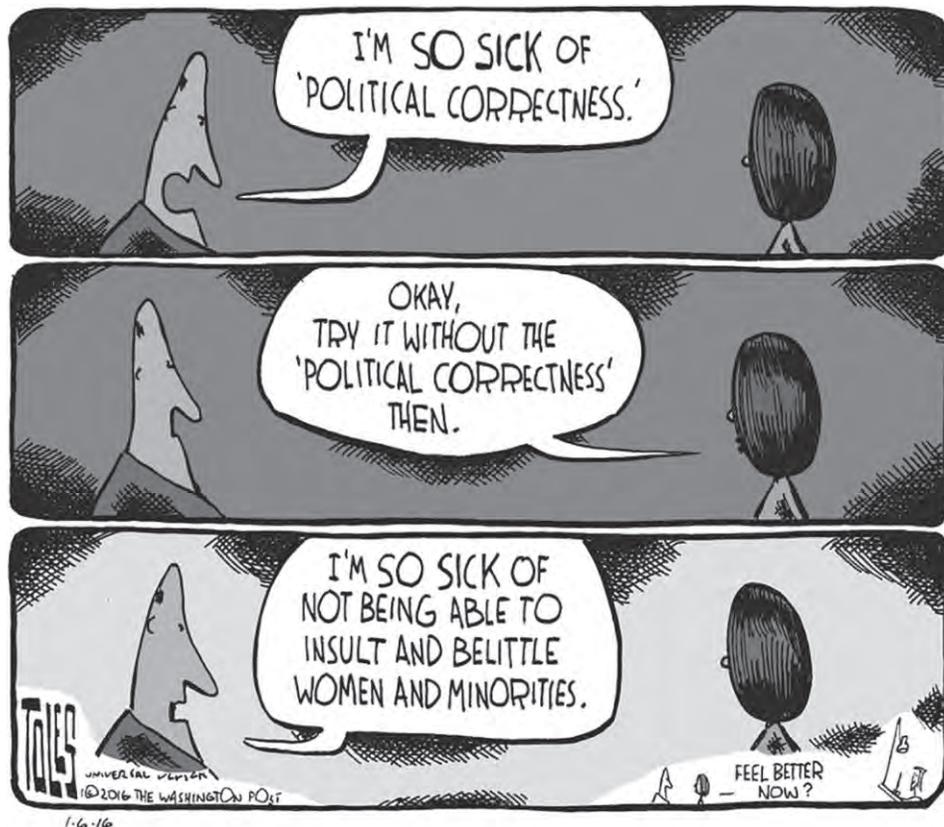
Note: After being invited by the Council to speak about the critically important Black Lives Movement, my Machinist Local Lodge 1781 membership meeting voted for me "to explain how and why Labor should oppose racism and discrimination and stand up for social justice, fairness and equality in the community every bit as much as we do for our members on the job."

This theme ran through my remarks but I am solely responsible for the presentation itself.

Carl Finamore is Machinist Lodge 1781 delegate, San Francisco Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

—CounterPunch, October 29, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/10/29/workers-of-america-unite-racism-is-a-trade-union-issue/>



Taking the Joy Out of Teaching and Learning

BY JESSE HAGOPIAN

In a stunning turn of events, President Obama announced last weekend that “unnecessary testing” is “consuming too much instructional time” and creating “undue stress for educators and students.” Rarely has a president so thoroughly repudiated such a defining aspect of his own public education policy. In a three-minute video announcing this reversal, Obama cracks jokes about how silly it is to over-test students, and recalls that the teachers who had the most influence on his life were not the ones who prepared him best for his standardized tests. Perhaps Obama hopes we will forget it was his own Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, who radically reorganized America’s education system around the almighty test score.

Obama’s statement comes in the wake of yet another study revealing the overwhelming number of standardized tests children are forced to take: The average student today is subjected to 112 standardized tests between pre-school and high school graduation. Because it’s what we have rewarded and required, America’s education system has become completely fixated on how well students perform on tests. Further, the highest concentration of these tests are in schools serving low-income students and students of color.

To be sure, Obama isn’t the only president to menace the education system with high-stakes exams. This thoroughly bi-partisan project was enabled by George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB became law in 2002 with overwhelming support from Republicans and Democrats alike.

Obama, instead of erasing the wrong answer choice of NCLB’s test-and-punish policy, decided to press ahead. Like a student filling in her entire Scantron sheet with answer

choice “D,” Duncan’s erroneous Race to the Top initiative was the incorrect solution for students. It did, however, make four corporations rich by assigning their tests as the law of the land. Desperate school districts, ravaged by the Great Recession, eagerly sought Race to the Top points by promulgating more and more tests.

The cry of the parents, students, educators and other stewards of education was loud and sorrowful as Obama moved to reduce the intellectual and emotional process of teaching and learning to a single score—one that would be used to close schools, fire teachers and deny students promotion or graduation. Take, for instance, this essay penned by Diane Ravitch in 2010. She countered Obama’s claim that Race to the Top (RttT) was his most important accomplishment:

“[RttT] will make the current standardized tests of basic skills more important than ever, and even more time and resources will be devoted to raising scores on these tests. The curriculum will be narrowed even more than under George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind, because of the link between wages and scores. There will be even less time available for the arts, science, history, civics, foreign language, even physical education. Teachers will teach to the test.”

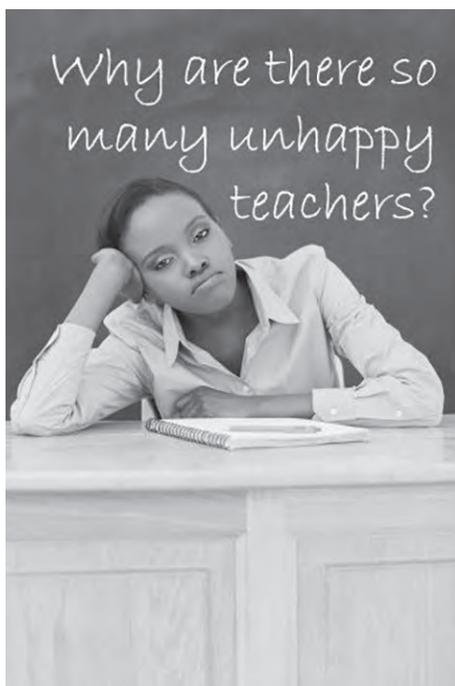
What Ravitch warned us about has come to pass, and Obama has now admitted as much without fully admitting to his direct role in promoting the tests. Duncan and Obama, with funding from the Gates Foundation, coupled Race to the Top with Common Core State Standards and the high-stakes tests that came shrink wrapped with them. Together these policies have orchestrated a radical seizure of power by what I call the “testocracy”—

The multibillion-dollar testing corporations, the billionaire philanthropists who promote their policies, and the politicians who write their policies into law.

These policies in turn have produced the largest uprising against high-stakes testing in U.S. history. To give you just a few highlights of the size and scope of this unprecedented struggle, students have staged walkouts of the tests in Portland, Chicago, Colorado, New Mexico, and beyond. Teachers from Seattle to Toledo to New York City have refused to administer the tests. And the parent movement to opt children out of tests has exploded into a mass social movement, including some 60,000 families in Washington State and more than 200,000 families in New York State. One of the sparks that helped ignite this uprising occurred at Garfield High School, where I teach, when the entire faculty voted unanimously to refuse to administer the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test. The boycott spread to several other schools in Seattle and then the superintendent threatened my colleagues with a ten-day suspension without pay. Because of the unanimous vote of the student government and the PTA in support of the boycott—and the solidarity we received from around the country—the superintendent backed off his threat and canceled the MAP test altogether at the high school level. Can you imagine the vindication that my colleagues feel today—after having risked their jobs to reduce testing—from hearing the president acknowledge there is too much testing in the schools? And it should be clear that this national uprising, this Education Spring, has forced the testocracy to retreat and is the reason that the Obama administration has come to its current understanding on testing in schools.

However, the testocracy, having amassed so much power and wealth, won't just slink quietly into the night. A Facebook video from Obama isn't going to convince the Pearson corporation to give up its \$9 billion in corporate profits from testing and textbooks. The tangle of tests promulgated by the federal government is now embedded at state and district levels.

More importantly, the President exposed just how halfhearted his change of heart was by declaring he will not reduce the current federal requirement to annually test all students in grades three through eight in math and reading, with high school students still tested at least once. A reauthorization of NCLB is in the works right now, and all versions preserve these harmful testing mandates. As well, Obama's call to reduce testing to two percent of the school year still requires students to take standardized tests for an outlandish twenty-four hours. And it isn't even all the time directly spent taking the tests that's the biggest problem. The real shame, which Obama never addressed, is that as long as there are high-stakes attached to the standard-



ized tests, test prep activities will continue to dominate instructional time. As long as the testocracy continues to demand that students' graduation and teachers' evaluation or pay are determined by these tests, test prep will continue to crowd out all the things that educators know are vital to teaching the whole child—critical thinking, imagination, the arts, recess, collaboration, problem based learning, and more.

Obama's main accomplice in proliferating costly testing, Arne Duncan, said, "It's important that we're all honest with ourselves. At the federal, state, and local level, we have all supported policies that have contributed to the problem in implementation."

Yes, let's all be honest with ourselves. Honesty would require acknowledgment that standardized test scores primarily demonstrate a student's family income level, not how well a teacher has coached how to fill in bubbles. Honesty would dictate that we recognize that the biggest obstacle to the success of our students is that politicians are not being held accountable for the fact that nearly half of the children in the public schools now live in poverty. As Congress debates the new iteration of federal education policy, they should focus on supporting programs to uplift disadvantaged children and leave the assessment policy to local educators. They have proven they don't understand how to best assess our students and now they have admitted as much. It's time to listen to those of us who have advocated for an end to the practice endlessly ranking and sorting our youth with high-stakes tests. It's time Congress repeal the requirement of standardized tests at every grade level. It's time to end the reign of the testocracy and allow parents, students, and educators to implement authentic assessments designed to help support student learning and nurture the whole child.

Jesse Hagopian teaches history and is the Black Student Union adviser at Garfield High School, the site of the his-



toric boycott of the MAP standardized test. Jesse is the editor and contributing author to the forthcoming book, More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing (Haymarket Books, 2014). Jesse an associate editor for Rethinking Schools magazine, a founding member of Social Equality Educators (SEE), and recipient of the 2013 "Secondary School Teacher of Year" award from the Academy of Education Arts and Sciences.

—CommonDreams, October 30, 2015

<http://commondreams.org/views/2015/10/30/obama-regrets-taking-joy-out-teaching-and-learning-too-much-testing>

**...the highest
concentration of
these tests are in
schools serving
low-income
students and
students of color**

Abortion by Wire Coat Hanger

It's not a thing of the past in America.

BY JESSICA VALENTI

For women who lived in the United States before abortion was made legal, there are few images more evocative and distressing than the wire coat hanger. Featured on protest signs for decades, the hanger represents the desperation and horror of a time when, lacking all other options, women took matters into their own hands. A time, it seems, that we are reliving today.

This past September in Tennessee, 31-year-old Anna Yocca allegedly got into her bathtub and tried to end her pregnancy using a wire hanger. When the bleeding became out of control, her boyfriend drove her to a nearby hospital. In a just world, this news would provoke empathetic outrage—Yocca's desperation and inability to obtain a safe abortion prove that we are shamefully failing women.

But we don't live in a just world. We live in a world, in a country, where women who want to end their pregnancies are considered contemptible. And so Yocca, after her 24-week fetus was delivered, was arrested for first-degree attempted murder.

In an interview with local media, police sergeant Kyle Evans—displaying an incredible amount of anti-abortion bias—said that Yocca “wanted to kill the child” and that she “made very incriminating statements...regarding wanting to end the child's life.” (Apparently wanting an abortion is criminal.)

He added: “the whole time she was concerned for her health and her safety, and never gave any attention to the health and safety of the unborn child.” As if a woman is selfish for not wanting to bleed to death in her bathtub.

Cherisse A. Scott, founder and CEO of SisterReach, a reproductive justice organization based in Memphis, said in

a statement that Evans' statements were “egregious and unprofessional.”

“Women are attempting to self-abort due to restrictive abortion and punitive fetal assault legislation. These acts of desperation will happen more frequently unless the Tennessee Legislature reconsiders its posture about both current and potential anti-abortion legislation.”

We've already seen what abortion restrictions are doing in Texas—a recent study showed that over 100,000 women in the state have attempted to self-abort. And we know that the restrictions are harsh in Tennessee as well—in addition to mandates like waiting periods, 96 percent of counties have no abortion provider and there are no providers in the state that perform abortions past 16 weeks of pregnancy.

Lynn Paltrow, executive director of National Advocates for Pregnant Women, points out that this case and others shows that anti-choice rhetoric claiming women will not be punished if Roe is overturned is simply false. Women are already being punished. “Enforcement of anti-abortion laws don't just affect doctors,” she says, “but women themselves.”

“We know whether abortion is legal or illegal, accessible or not, women will take the steps they believe are necessary for their lives and health,” Paltrow tells me.

That's why, she says, we saw such a dramatic improvement in both maternal and child health after Roe. “Because women who needed and wanted abortions could get them early, and because women weren't forced to carry pregnancies to term when they were unhealthy,” she says. “It averted a public health crisis.”

Before *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion, thousands of women died attempting to end their pregnancies—most of whom were poor or women of color. (90 percent of the women who died in New York City due to illegal abortions, for example, were Black or Latina.) So we know where this road leads, and we know that when we arrest women like Yocca, it won't make others less likely to self-abort—it will just make them less likely to seek help when they need it.

It's unclear what will happen in Yocca's case. Charges against a woman in Georgia who self-aborted were dropped because the state didn't allow for the prosecution of women who try to end their pregnancies, and in 2012 the ninth circuit court found that an Idaho law that allowed for the arrest of a woman who self-aborted was unconstitutional. But in Indiana, Purvi Patel was sentenced to 20 years for what the state says was her illegal abortion. I hope that the law treats Yocca with more empathy and fairness than the Tennessee police have.

No matter what happens, though, let's not forget that we have been here before. We know what restricting abortion does. We know how scared and desperate a woman needs to be to resort to sticking a household object up her vagina and into her uterus. I would like to write that we can't afford to go back to a time where this was commonplace, but it seems as if we are already there.

—*The Guardian*, December 15, 2015

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/15/wire-coat-hanger-abortion-stories-united-states>

Abortion Access Restrictions

BY ALEXA KOLBI-MOLINAS

At least you can say that Representative Henry Hyde was honest.

In 1997, the congressman from Illinois introduced what would forever become known as the Hyde Amendment, the federal law that withholds federal Medicaid coverage for abortion. He was completely open about his intentions:

“I certainly would like to prevent, if I could legally, anybody having an abortion, a rich woman, a middle-class woman, or a poor woman. Unfortunately, the only vehicle available is the Medicaid bill.”

While women of all economic and racial backgrounds have abortions, those most harmed by these bans are low-income women and women of color. It isn't rocket science: When you withhold much-needed funds for medical care from the women with the least money, many of them will be unable to get that care at all. Representative Hyde knew this, which is why the simple truth is that public insurance bans are, by design, abortion bans.

In the more than three decades since Hyde became law, multiple states followed suit with copycat bans. Today, 32 states and the District of Columbia exclude abortion coverage from otherwise comprehensive benefits programs. Seventeen states, however, provide abor-

tion coverage in their existing Medicaid plans with state funds (the Hyde Amendment is only a restriction on federal dollars.) In fact, 13 of those states were forced to restore coverage by court order under their state constitutions.

At the end of November, we filed a challenge against Maine's abortion coverage ban that will hopefully bring that number to 18.

Maine is the second poorest state in New England as well as geographically its largest. Some women, including those from Maine's poorest counties, have to travel over 200 miles each way just to get to their nearest abortion clinic. Their next closest option? Canada.

Without assistance, some women in Maine must make difficult and painful decisions about giving up the essentials, like food, rent, or heat for themselves and their families in order to save enough to have an abortion—not to mention to pay for travel costs, childcare, and to cover lost wages. To use these bans to play with healthcare, hoping that women who use Medicaid benefits won't be able to afford an abortion on their own, is unjust and immoral.

Somehow over the years, the true purpose of public insurance bans—which Hyde himself never intended to mask—has been concealed. Rather than come clean about what is really behind

these bans time and again, we hear the (hollow) refrain—“no taxpayer funding for abortion”—as if that somehow sets these bans apart from other laws designed to prevent a woman who has decided to have an abortion from having one, such as mandatory delay laws and sham laws that force clinics to shut down. As if there is something “neutral” about providing comprehensive coverage for pregnancy-related care when a woman continues her pregnancy, but not when she decides to have an abortion. As if there is something unbiased about a law that targets a woman with the least resources and deliberately coerces her into continuing a pregnancy against her will. As one judge recently put it, there is “no other context where Medicaid engages in such a relentlessly one-sided calculus.”

Public insurance bans are government-imposed barriers to abortion access, the same as any other restriction that makes it difficult or impossible for women to obtain abortions. A woman has a right to make her own decision about whether to end a pregnancy without politicians withholding the resources she might need to make that decision—like Medicaid funding, if she qualifies for it. Withholding the benefits we provide as a nation from the people who qualify for them and need them is dangerous and wrong.

A woman, not politicians, should make the decision about whether to have a baby or not—no matter how much money she makes.

Alexa Kolbi-Molinas is a staff attorney with the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project.

—Common Dreams, December 10, 2015

<http://www.commondreams.org/views/2015/12/10/abortion-access-no-matter-how-much-money-you-make>



Fun-Sized Terrorists

Life as a drone operator

BY ED PILKINGTON

When Michael Haas, a former senior airman with the U.S. air force, looks back on the missions he flew over Afghanistan and other conflict zones in a six-year career operating military drones, one of the things he remembers most vividly is the colorful language airmen would use to describe their targets. A team of three would be sitting, he recalls, in a ground control station in Creech air force base outside Las Vegas, staring at computer screens on to which images would be beamed back from high-powered sensors on Predator drones thousands of miles away.

Civilians have been killed and officials warn it will “weaken the rule of law,” yet the president’s actions indicate drone warfare won’t be going away anytime soon

The aim of the missions was to track, and when the conditions were deemed right, kill suspected insurgents. That’s not how they put it, though. They would talk about “cutting the grass before it grows out of control,” or “pulling the weeds before they overrun the lawn.”

And then there were the children. The airmen would be flying the Predators over a village in the tribal areas of Pakistan, say, when a series of smaller black shadows would appear across their screens—telling them that kids were at the scene.

They called them “fun-sized terrorists.”

Haas is one of four former air force drone operators and technicians who as a group have come forward to the *Guardian* to register their opposition to the ongoing reliance on the technology as the U.S. military’s modern weaponry of choice. Between them, the four men clocked up more than 20 years of direct experience at the coal-

face of lethal drone programs and were credited with having assisted in the targeted killings of hundreds of people in conflict zones—many of them almost certainly civilians.

As a senior airman in the 15th reconnaissance squadron and third special operations squadron from 2005 to 2011—a period straddling the presidencies of George W Bush and Barack Obama—Haas participated in targeted killing runs from his computer in Creech that terminated the lives of insurgents in Afghanistan almost 8,000 miles away. He was a sensor operator, controlling the cameras, lasers and other information-gathering equipment on Predator and Reaper drones as well as being responsible for guiding Hellfire missiles to their targets once the pilot sitting next to him had pulled the trigger.

Haas, a 29-year-old, in a Notre Dame baseball cap and Chicago Blackhawks ice hockey jersey, looks too youthful to be burdened by such enormous issues. Yet the existential sensation of killing someone by manipulating a computer joystick has left a deep and lasting impression on him. “Ever step on ants and never give it another thought? That’s what you are made to think of the targets—as just black blobs on a screen. You start to do these psychological gymnastics to make it easier to do what you have to do—they deserved it, they chose their side. You had to kill part of your conscience to keep doing your job every day—and ignore those voices telling you this wasn’t right.”

Haas was relatively lucky, in that his team directly launched only two missile strikes during his 5,000 hours of drone flying. The first of those incidents, in January 2011, involved a

group of insurgents in Helmand province, Afghanistan, who were exchanging gunfire with U.S. troops on the ground and were duly eviscerated. “No-doubters,” the targets were called in the cold vocabulary of the military drone business, indicating certainty about their enemy status. Such certainty rarely existed, Haas said.

He has also been spared the burden of knowing the overall number of killings in which he played a part as a cog in the wider machinery of drone warfare. When he left the air force, Haas was given a report card that revealed the tally, but he chose to ignore it.

“They handed me a closed envelope with the number in it, but I never opened it. I didn’t want anything to do with it,” he said.

Brandon Bryant, a staff sergeant who worked with U.S. air force Predator drones between 2005 and 2011 as a sensor operator and imagery analyst, did not get away so lightly. He knows for a fact—he saw it on his screen—that he was directly involved in the deaths of 13 people in five separate Hellfire strikes, one in Iraq and the rest in Afghanistan.

Bryant, 30, his head shaved and tattoos covering the backs of his hands, carries himself like a leader and seems to be driven by a determination to own a personal responsibility for the drone campaign he was involved in for five years and five days.

His first “shot,” as the former drone operators call the strikes, was in Afghanistan, where Bryant helped guide in F-16 fighter aircraft to kill three individuals who he was told were reinforcements coming to join anti-U.S. Taliban forces. But when he “got eyes” on the targets, it was obvious to him from their body movements—

they were hunkering down, gesturing, looking around—that they were terrified, suggesting to him that they were unlikely to be trained fighters.

After the strike was completed, when Bryant was back with his squadron, there were high-fives all round. He was celebrated for having “popped his cherry”—he had broken his drone virginity with a killing.

In the fourth of the Hellfire strikes in which Bryant directly participated, his team was called in to take out a group of five tribal individuals and their camel who were travelling through a pass from Pakistan to Afghanistan. They were said to be carrying explosives for use in attacks on U.S. troops.

Bryant, together with a pilot and mission coordinator who formed the other two members of his team, tracked the group for several hours from their computers outside Las Vegas. They flew the Predator drone out of sight and beyond earshot of the targets at about 20,000 feet and a distance of about four nautical miles from the group on the ground.

He was puzzled during that time, because there was no sign of any weapons on the men or in the baggage carried by the camel. The drone team patiently waited for the men to descend the valley and bed in for the night, before they let rip with the Hellfire. Even then, there were no secondary explosions, which made Bryant think that his hunch had probably been right—five men and a camel had been reduced to dust for no apparent reason.

“We waited for those men to settle down in their beds and then we killed them in their sleep. That was cowardly murder,” he said.

These direct incidents were harrowing enough for Bryant. But then, when he was honorably discharged from the air force in 2011, he made the mistake of doing what Haas had refused to do:

he opened the envelope with the report card in it that itemized the number of killings in which he had played some assisting role.

The number was 1,626.

The impact of such knowledge, and the myriad other stresses of sitting in a tin box in Nevada tracking individuals for potential assassination on the other side of the globe, has taken a heavy toll on Bryant and other drone operators. Studies have found similar levels of depression and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) among drone pilots working behind a bank of computers as among military personnel deployed to the battlefield.

The psychological effect can hit personnel in unexpected ways. Cian Westmoreland was a senior airman based at Kandahar Air Field in Afghanistan, working as a technician to set up the communications infrastructure that acts as the backbone of the drone system.

Though he never pulled the trigger or used a joystick to guide in missiles, the lethal nature of his work was driven home to him when his superior came to his unit one day and said: “We are killing bad guys now, boys.”

Westmoreland was troubled by the disclosure, and from 2009 to this day has been disturbed by recurring nightmares. “I’m in the radio unit flipping switches, with my boss yelling at me to get it up and running. Then all of a sudden it does start working and I realize with a jolt what I’ve done. I run out of the control station and now I’m in a village in Afghanistan and the whole place is burnt out and there’s a woman on the ground covered in soot and a child crying over her. I go up to help the child, but half of her face is blown off and there’s nothing I can do.”

The four former drone operators who talked to the *Guardian* described the various ways in which they and their peers would try to cope during

shifts of up to 12 hours. Airmen would show up to the control station drunk; others would sleep on the job, read comic books or play video games on their secure computers.

Despite the load they were carrying, they were disparaged within the wider air force. “We were looked down upon, because we were wearing flight suits but not sitting in the cockpit of an actual aircraft. Drones were like a joke in the military,” Bryant said.

Toward the end of his service, Haas switched to training new recruits in the technology of drone warfare. That shocked him anew, as he discovered that many of the younger intake were gung-ho about the power they wielded at their fingertips. “They just wanted to kill,” he said.

He remembers one training session with a student in which they were flying live over Afghanistan. The student said that a group of people on the ground looked suspicious.

Why? Haas asked. Because they look like they are up to no good, the student replied.

Would you act on that? the instructor asked. Sure, the student said.

Haas immediately pulled him from his seat, took over the mission himself, and promptly failed the student. “I tried to get the students to understand that preservation of innocent life had to take priority.”

Because he failed the student, Haas was later rebuked by senior officers. They told him that they were short of bodies to keep the drones flying, and they ordered him to pass students in future so that there would be a sufficient number trained and ready to go.

—*The Guardian*, November 18, 2015

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/18/life-as-a-drone-pilot-creech-air-force-base-nevada>

From Pol Pot to ISIS: the Blood Never Dried

BY JOHN PILGER

In transmitting President Richard Nixon's orders for a "massive" bombing of Cambodia in 1969, Henry Kissinger said, "Anything that flies on everything that moves." As Barack Obama wages his seventh war against the Muslim world since he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and François Hollande promises a "merciless" attack on that the rubble of Syria, the orchestrated hysteria and lies make one almost nostalgic for Kissinger's murderous honesty.

As a witness to the human consequences of aerial savagery—including the beheading of victims, their parts festooning trees and fields—I am not surprised by the disregard of memory and history, yet again. A telling example is the rise to power of Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge, who had much in common with today's Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They, too, were ruthless medievalists who began as a small sect. They, too, were the product of an American-made apocalypse, this time in Asia.

According to Pol Pot, his movement had consisted of "fewer than 5,000 poorly armed guerrillas uncertain about their strategy, tactics, loyalty and leaders." Once Nixon's and Kissinger's B-52 bombers had gone to work as part of "Operation Menu," the west's ultimate demon could not believe his luck. The Americans dropped the equivalent of five Hiroshimas on rural Cambodia during 1969-73. They leveled village after village, returning to bomb the rubble and corpses. The craters left giant necklaces of carnage, still visible from the air. The terror was unimaginable. A former Khmer Rouge official described how the survivors "froze up and they would wander around mute for three or four days. Terrified and half-crazy, the people were ready to believe what they were told... That was

what made it so easy for the Khmer Rouge to win the people over." A Finnish Government Commission of Inquiry estimated that 600,000 Cambodians died in the ensuing civil war and described the bombing as the "first stage in a decade of genocide." What Nixon and Kissinger began, Pol Pot, their beneficiary, completed. Under their bombs, the Khmer Rouge grew to a formidable army of 200,000.

ISIS has a similar past and present. By most scholarly measure, Bush and Blair's invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the deaths of at least 700,000 people—in a country that had no history of jihadism. The Kurds had done territorial and political deals; Sunni and Shia had class and sectarian differences, but they were at peace; intermarriage was common. Three years before the invasion, I drove the length of Iraq without fear. On the way I met people proud, above all, to be Iraqis, the heirs of a civilization that seemed, for them, a presence.

Bush and Blair blew all this to bits. Iraq is now a nest of jihadism. Al-Qaeda—like Pol Pot's "jihadists"—seized the opportunity provided by the onslaught of Shock and Awe and the civil war that followed. "Rebel" Syria offered even greater rewards; with CIA and Gulf state ratlines of weapons, logistics and money running through Turkey. The arrival of foreign recruits was inevitable. A former British ambassador, Oliver Miles, wrote, "The [Cameron] government seems to be following the example of Tony Blair, who ignored consistent advice from the Foreign Office, MI5 and MI6 that our Middle East policy—and in particular our Middle East wars—had been a principal driver in the recruitment of Muslims in Britain for terrorism here."

ISIS is the progeny of those in Washington, London and Paris who, in conspiring to destroy Iraq, Syria and Libya, committed an epic crime against humanity. Like Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, ISIS are the mutations of a western state terror dispensed by a venal imperial elite undeterred by the consequences of actions taken at great remove in distance and culture. Their culpability is unmentionable in "our" societies, making accomplices of those who suppress this critical truth.

Gulf War begins

It is 23 years since a holocaust enveloped Iraq, immediately after the first Gulf War, when the U.S. and Britain hijacked the United Nations Security Council and imposed punitive "sanctions" on the Iraqi population—ironically, reinforcing the domestic authority of Saddam Hussein. It was like a medieval siege. Almost everything that sustained a modern state was, in the jargon, "blocked"—from chlorine for making the water supply safe to school pencils, parts for X-ray machines, common painkillers and drugs to combat previously unknown cancers carried in the dust from the southern battlefields contaminated with Depleted Uranium. Just before Christmas 1999, the Department of Trade and Industry in London restricted the export of vaccines meant to protect Iraqi children against diphtheria and yellow fever. Kim Howells, parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in the Blair government, explained why. "The children's vaccines," he said, "were capable of being used in weapons of mass destruction." The British Government could get away with such an outrage because media reporting of Iraq—much of it manipulated by the Foreign Office—blamed Saddam Hussein for everything.

Under a bogus “humanitarian” Oil for Food Program, \$100 was allotted for each Iraqi to live on for a year. This figure had to pay for the entire society’s infrastructure and essential services, such as power and water. “Imagine,” the UN Assistant Secretary General, Hans Von Sponeck, told me, “setting that pittance against the lack of clean water, and the fact that the majority of sick people cannot afford treatment, and the sheer trauma of getting from day to day, and you have a glimpse of the nightmare. And make no mistake, this is deliberate. I have not in the past wanted to use the word genocide, but now it is unavoidable.” Disgusted, Von Sponeck resigned as UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq. His predecessor, Denis Halliday, an equally distinguished senior UN official, had also resigned. “I was instructed,” Halliday said, “to implement a policy that satisfies the definition of genocide: a deliberate policy that has effectively killed well over a million individuals, children and adults.”

A study by the United Nations Children’s Fund, Unicef, found that between 1991 and 1998, the height of the blockade, there were 500,000 “excess” deaths of Iraqi infants under the age of five. An American TV reporter put this to Madeleine Albright, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, asking her, “Is the price worth it?” Albright replied, “We think the price is worth it.”

In 2007, the senior British official responsible for the sanctions, Carne Ross, known as “Mr. Iraq,” told a parliamentary selection committee, “[The U.S. and UK governments] effectively denied the entire population a means to live.” When I interviewed Carne Ross three years later, he was consumed by regret and contrition. “I feel ashamed,” he said. He is today a rare truth-teller of how governments deceive and how a compliant media plays a critical role in disseminating and maintaining the deception. “We would feed [journal-

ists] factoids of sanitized intelligence,” he said, “or we’d freeze them out.” Last year, a not untypical headline in the *Guardian* read: “Faced with the horror of Isis we must act.” The “we must act” is a ghost risen, a warning of the suppression of informed memory, facts, lessons learned and regrets or shame. The author of the article was Peter Hain, the former Foreign Office minister responsible for Iraq under Blair. In 1998, when Denis Halliday revealed the extent of the suffering in Iraq for which the Blair Government shared primary responsibility, Hain abused him on the *BBC*’s “Newsnight” as an “apologist for Saddam.” In 2003, Hain backed Blair’s invasion of stricken Iraq on the basis of transparent lies. At a subsequent Labour Party conference, he dismissed the invasion as a “fringe issue.”

Here was Hain demanding “air strikes, drones, military equipment and other support” for those “facing genocide” in Iraq and Syria. This will further “the imperative of a political solution.” The day Hain’s article appeared, Denis Halliday and Hans Von Sponeck happened to be in London and came to visit me. They were not shocked by the lethal hypocrisy of a politician, but lamented the enduring, almost inexplicable absence of intelligent diplomacy in negotiating a semblance of truce. Across the world, from Northern Ireland to Nepal, those regarding each other as terrorists and heretics have faced each other across a table. Why not now in Iraq and Syria? Instead, there is a vapid, almost sociopathic verbosity from Cameron, Hollande, Obama and their “coalition of the willing” as they prescribe more violence delivered from 30,000 feet on places where the blood of previous adventures never dried. They seem to relish their own violence and stupidity so much they want it to overthrow their one potentially valuable ally, the government in Syria.

This is nothing new, as the following leaked UK-U.S. intelligence file

illustrates:

“In order to facilitate the action of liberative [sic] forces... a special effort should be made to eliminate certain key individuals [and] to proceed with internal disturbances in Syria. CIA is prepared, and SIS (MI6) will attempt to mount minor sabotage and *coup de main* [sic] incidents within Syria, working through contacts with individuals... a necessary degree of fear... frontier and [staged] border clashes [will] provide a pretext for intervention... the CIA and SIS should use... capabilities in both psychological and action fields to augment tension.”

That was written in 1957, although it could have been written yesterday. In the imperial world, nothing essentially changes. In 2013, the former French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas revealed that “two years before the Arab spring,” he was told in London that a war on Syria was planned. “I am going to tell you something,” he said in an interview with the French TV channel *LPC*, “I was in England two years before the violence in Syria on other business. I met top British officials, who confessed to me that they were preparing something in Syria... Britain was organizing an invasion of rebels into Syria. They even asked me, although I was no longer Minister for Foreign Affairs, if I would like to participate... This operation goes way back. It was prepared, preconceived and planned.”

The only effective opponents of ISIS are accredited demons of the west—Syria, Iran, Hezbollah and now Russia. The obstacle is Turkey, an “ally” and a member of NATO, which has conspired with the CIA, MI6 and the Gulf medievalists to channel support to the Syrian “rebels,” including those now calling themselves ISIS. Supporting Turkey in its long-held ambition for regional dominance by overthrowing the Assad government beckons a major conventional war and the horrific dismemberment of the most ethnically diverse state in the Middle East.

More Money to Kill

Will Obama give Israel even more American weapons and dollars to kill Palestinians?

BY ANN WRIGHT

A truce—however difficult to negotiate and achieve—is the only way out of this maze; otherwise, the atrocities in Paris and Beirut will be repeated. Together with a truce, the leading perpetrators and overseers of violence in the Middle East—the Americans and Europeans—must themselves “de-radicalize” and demonstrate a good faith to alienated Muslim communities everywhere, including those at home. There should be an immediate cessation of all shipments of war materials to Israel and recognition of the State of Palestine. The issue of Palestine is the region’s most festering open wound, and the oft-stated justification for the rise of Islamic extremism. Osama bin Laden made that clear. Palestine also offers hope. Give justice to the Palestinians and you begin to change the world around them.

More than 40 years ago, the Nixon-Kissinger bombing of Cambodia unleashed a torrent of suffering from which that country has never recovered. The same is true of the Blair-Bush crime in Iraq, and the NATO and “coalition” crimes in Libya and Syria. With impeccable timing, Henry Kissinger’s latest self-serving tome has been released with its satirical title, “World Order.” In one fawning review, Kissinger is described as a “key shaper of a world order that remained stable for a quarter of a century.” Tell that to the people of Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Chile, East Timor and all the other victims of his “statecraft.” Only when “we” recognize the war criminals in our midst and stop denying ourselves the truth will the blood begin to dry.

—*Counter Punch*, November 17, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/11/17/from-pol-pot-to-isis-the-blood-never-dried/>

President Obama met with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on November 9, 2015 in the White House and is considering the Israeli request to give a 50 percent increase of nearly \$1.5 billion in U.S. military funding bringing the U.S. donation to the killing of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza to \$4.5 billion-a-year.

As it stands now, more than half of the U.S. foreign military spending for 2016 goes to Israel. As in all things, Israel gets special treatment by the U.S. allowing Israel to spend 25 percent of its gift from the U.S. to pay itself for buying weapons from its own weapons industry!

According to a recent congressional report, Israel has received \$124.3 billion in military assistance from the U.S. since its founding in 1948.

The report states that,

“...strong congressional support for Israel has resulted in Israel receiving benefits not available to any other countries; for example, Israel can use U.S. military assistance both for research and development in the United States and for military purchases from Israeli manufacturers.

“In addition, U.S. assistance earmarked for Israel is generally delivered in the first 30 days of the fiscal year, while most other recipients normally receive aid in installments, and Israel (as is also the case with Egypt) is permitted to use cash flow financing for its U.S. arms purchases.

“In addition to receiving U.S. State Department-administered foreign assistance, Israel also receives funds from annual defense appropriations bills for rocket and missile defense programs. Israel pursues some of those programs jointly with the United States.”

As Obama was meeting Netanyahu, eight blocks away at the Palestine Center in Washington, DC, a surgeon from Norway who works on behalf of his university part of each year in al Shifa hospital in Gaza, told of the devastation, destruction and human suffering these American weapons and dollars cause.

Dr. Mads Gilbert spoke of 51 days of terror in Gaza in the summer of 2014 as the Israeli Attack forces brutalized the people of Gaza with Israeli and U.S. artillery, assassin drone ordnance, F16s, hellfire missiles and dense inert military explosives. Gilbert said that the 2014 Israeli attack on Gaza was 500 percent stronger than the 2009 attack. He was working at al Shifa hospital in 2009 when the IDF attacked Gaza. In 2014, the IDF fired 50,000 of those shells into Gaza and conducted over 6,000 airstrikes, destroying over 3,500 buildings in Gaza City alone including over 50 percent of the hospitals in Gaza.

At the end of the 51-day attack, 2250 Palestinians were dead, including 551 children and 299 women. Three-thousand-five-hundred Palestinian children were wounded and the one million children and youth who live in Gaza were all deeply affected by the attacks. Sixty percent of the 1.8 million who live in Gaza are under the age of 22.

Dr. Gilbert’s presentation included mind-searing photos of the carnage caused by Israeli attacks and the audio of the sounds of jets racing overhead, bombs exploding and buildings collapsing.

Citing the report of the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict, Gilbert said the IDF purposefully targeted the civilian population including entire families, that the IDF purpose-

fully targeted hospitals, ambulances and four UN shelter facilities.

The report stated that “Hundreds of Palestinian civilians were killed in their own homes, especially women and children. At least 142 families lost three or more members in an attack on a residential building during the summer of 2014, resulting in 742 deaths. The fact that Israel did not revise its practice of air-strikes, even after their dire effects on civilians became apparent, raises the question of whether this was part of a broader policy which was at least tacitly approved at the highest level of government.”

Additionally, “the commission is concerned about Israel’s extensive use of weapons with a wide kill and injury radius; though not illegal, their use in densely populated areas is highly likely to kill combatants and civilians indiscriminately. There appears also to be a pattern whereby the IDF issued warnings to people to leave a neighborhood and then automatically considered anyone remaining to be a fighter.” This practice makes attacks on civilians highly likely. During the Israeli ground incursion into Gaza that began in mid-July 2014, hundreds of people were killed and thousands of homes destroyed or damaged.

The commission report stated: “Palestinian armed groups fired 4,881

rockets and 1,753 mortars towards Israel in July and August 2014, killing six civilians, including one child and injuring at least 1,600.” Sixty-six Israeli soldiers were killed in military operations inside Gaza.

The commission also reported: “In the West Bank including East Jerusalem, 27 Palestinians were killed and 3,020 injured between June and August 2014. The number killed in these three months was equivalent to the total for the whole of 2013. The commission is concerned about what appears to be the increasing use of live ammunition for crowd control by the Israeli Security Forces, which raises the likelihood of death or serious injury.”

The commissioners wrote, “Impunity prevails across the board for violations allegedly committed by Israeli forces, both in Gaza and the West Bank. Israel must break with its lamentable track record in holding wrong doers accountable, and accountability on the Palestinian side is also woefully inadequate.”

Signaling further attacks on Gaza, during a November 10, 2015 talk at the Center for American Progress in Washington, Netanyahu said that Gaza has “become this poison thumb, this poison dagger that sends rockets” into Israel and that Israel must be prepared for a long period of tension.

This blind backing for whatever Israel does and providing the weapons to do it is dangerous for the United States and for Israel. As Israeli journalist Gideon Levy recently wrote concerning Hillary Clinton’s unwavering support for Israel, but can be expanded to the similar support given by both Republican and Democratic led U.S. administrations: “...support (for) the continued occupation is like a person who continues to buy drugs for an addicted relative. This is neither concern nor friendship; it is destruction... ‘false’ friends of Israel—have been one of the curses on this country for years.

Because of them, Israel can continue to act as wildly as it likes, thumbing its nose at the world and paying no price. Because of them, it can destroy itself unhindered.”

Israeli attacks on people in Gaza and the West Bank will end when we, the citizens of the U.S., force our government to stop its military and diplomatic backing of the State of Israel.

Ann Wright served in the U.S. Army/ Army Reserves for 29 years and retired as a Colonel. She also was a U.S. diplomat for 16 years and resigned in March 2003 in opposition to the war on Iraq. She has been arrested for challenging Bush and Obama administrations’ policies of illegal wars, torture, assassin drones and curtailment of civil liberties. She was a witness for the defendants in the Oak Ridge Transform Now Plowshares trial. She is the co-author of the book, Dissent: Voices of Conscience.

—Alternet, November 14, 2015

<http://www.alternet.org/world/will-obama-give-israel-even-more-american-weapons-and-dollars-kill-palestinians?akid=13656.229473.ZW017O&rd=1&src=newsletter1045707&t=16>



**more than half
of the U.S. foreign
military spending
for 2016 goes to
Israel**

Doctrine of 9/11 Anti-Immigration

BY VIJAY PRASHAD

Congressman Michael McCaul of Texas sponsored a bill (HR4038) to block Iraqi and Syrian refugees from entering into the United States. The bill is known as the American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act, which passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives. “We are a nation at war,” said Congressman McCaul. Given the name of the bill and the bellicose attitude of the Republicans and Democrats who voted for it, the enemies in that war are the refugees.

Who are these refugees, these families who have been uprooted from their homes in Iraq and Syria? They are victims of war and chaos. They are regime change refugees. It is this that pushes them out of their homes, makes them risk the turbulent Mediterranean Sea and the barbed wire borders. Refugees flee—they do not have a destination in mind. Their objective is to be out of the line of fire. Where they go is immaterial. Most want a piece of land where they can reconstruct the elements of normality. Camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey bristle with such desires. Flowers are planted outside the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) tents; cinder blocks become the desks for impromptu classrooms; amongst the slush, fires burn for warmth and for food. Wretchedness is intolerable. It is ameliorated by small gestures and great hopes.

UNHCR—the UN Refugees agency—is conservative with its figures. But even from the UN numbers, the scale of the crisis is remarkable. Iraq’s collapse began with Gulf War 1 in 1990-91 and continues unabated till today. Four million Iraqis have been displaced with about half-a-million additional Iraqis as registered refugees. Before the Syrian crisis, the Iraqis could flee to Iran, Jordan and Syria. Now the road to Syria is blocked and Jordan is satu-

rated with Iraqi and Syrian refugees.

Syria’s own crisis is gargantuan. Half the population is displaced, with the refugees numbering at least five million people. Eighty percent of the Syrian people now live in poverty, and life expectancy has fallen by twenty years. The human cost of this war has been astounding. What are the Syrians to do but to try and flee circumstances that are without parallel?

Neither Iraq nor Syria seems near peace. Flight is the best option for people who have lost the ability to imagine their homelands in a state of stability. But where should they fly?

Lebanon, Iran, Jordan and Turkey have taken in large numbers of refugees. Lebanon—a country with merely four million residents—has well over one million refugees. The financial situation in the country is in tatters. It has relied upon foreign aid and charity to help manage the refugee influx. At the major donor’s conferences, the Rich Powers arrive with smug looks of Benevolence on their faces. They pledge a great deal of money to the UN agencies. When it comes to fulfilling these pledges, their ink runs dry. The UN estimates that only about a quarter of the pledges for refugee relief are fulfilled.

Why are these funds essential? The UN’s last report on Syrian refugees showed that 86 percent of refugees in Jordan live below the poverty line, while almost half of those in Lebanon live in sub-standard shelters. Almost two million refugees will face this coming winter without fuel, shelter, insulation, blankets or warm clothes. “Refugees’ resources are depleted,” says the UNHCR, “They are becoming more impoverished and their vulnerabilities are on the rise.” Out of sheer desperation they seek something better—which is why they become vulner-

able to the siren song of “Europe” sold to them by smugglers.

Reading the June report from the UNHCR is sobering. There are now almost sixty million refugees in the world—that is one out of every 122 humans on the planet. Each day, last year, 42,500 people became refugees. Half of these refugees are children.

Where are these refugees being made? The top three countries, which account for half of the world’s refugees, reveal a trend—Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia. Each of these countries has been ruined by war, often wars initiated and fueled by the West. Like an angry dragon, the United States breathed fire from Afghanistan to Somalia in search of al-Qaeda. Already weakened, both these countries saw their politics dispensed for a U.S. project. In Afghanistan, the U.S. transformed one band of warlords into the national government. In Somalia, the U.S. refashioned local militias into the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism. In both cases, U.S. power enhanced the authority of brutal gunmen, which pushed sections of the population into the arms of their adversaries—the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia. Proxy wars and drone strikes ended the possibility for a stable life in these places. Refugees were born in the maw of these conflicts.

U.S. complicity in the production of the regime change refugees means little to those American politicians who hate immigrants and refugees. The word “refugee” has now come to stand in for “immigrant.”

These politicians do not see refugees as people who flee war. Their bibles are not books on U.S. foreign policy and wars. They have read deeply into that seam of American letters that fulmi-

nates against immigration of any kind—from Samuel Huntington’s *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* to Tom Tancred’s *In Mortal Danger* to Ann Coulter’s *Adios, America*. Hatred of immigrants has a long history in the U.S., as early as the movements of the 19th century against European Catholics and Jews in the Know Nothing Party of the 1850s and the Immigration Restriction League of the 1890s. Anti-immigration was always closely linked to anti-Black racism. Fredrick Douglass saw this in 1869 in his speech to defend Chinese and Japanese immigration. “I know of no rights of race superior to the rights of humanity,” said Douglass, “and when there is a supposed conflict between human and national rights, it is safe to go to the side of humanity.” Douglass spoke for the soul. He was not heeded. He would be little heeded today.

The Right’s anti-immigrant rhetoric has alienated Latino and Asian voters. It has made the Right’s electoral calculus shudder. There is no turning away

from the hideous rhetoric, rooted deeply in the sensibility of white privilege. The refugee has given the Right an opportunity. The Syrian refugee debate has allowed the Right to properly turn what is a human story into a one about security. Not the security of the people who are migrating from dangerous zones, but the security of the United States—which lives in a fantasy of insecurity. This is the doctrine of 9/11 anti-immigration. There is no point discussing the technicalities of refugee transfer, the way in which the ten thousand refugees slated for entry into the U.S. have gone through two years of screening by the UN and the U.S. This does not matter to the xenophobe. Their coin is not reason. It is fear.

Ann Coulter, who is part of Donald Trump’s campaign for President writes in her book, “Sending undesirable immigrants to an enemy nation is a war tactic.” What are the refugees in this addled imagination? Not human beings fleeing wars set in motion by the West, but ISIS agents ready to strike inside the United States. No such thing.

The Paris attackers were not refugees. The 9/11 attackers did not come to the U.S. as refugees. Refugees have not been the author of these attacks.

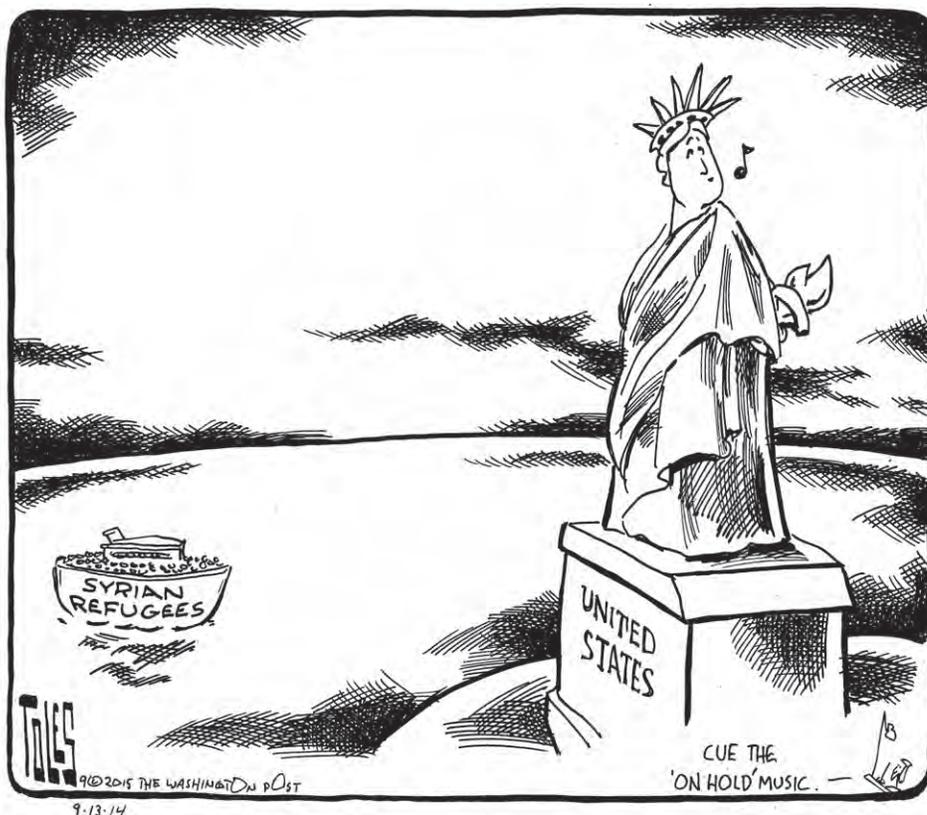
Countries are being wiped off the map by wars initiated by the West and driven by its allies. Passports wither, hopes die. Adults sit in refugee camps as the cold winds blow and their children watch the days go by, little hope of learning to read and write. They don’t know Congressman McCaul or HR4038. They do, however, know that the United States has taken in less than two thousand Syrian refugees over the past four years. That’s less than the daily number that flees from Syria. America is far from the dreams of the refugees. They would like the war to end. They would like shelter. They would like to be treated as human beings.

Vijay Prashad, director of International Studies at Trinity College, is the editor of Letters to Palestine (Verso).

—*Counter Punch*, November 23, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/11/23/the-doctrine-of-911-anti-immigration/>

**Refugees flee—
they do not have a
destination in mind.
Their objective
is to be out of
the line of fire.**



Countless Children Poisoned in Michigan

BY ANDREW EMETT

Flint, Michigan—After filing a FOIA request, a Virginia Tech professor recently discovered Michigan state officials knew the city of Flint’s water supply was giving children lead poisoning while falsely assuring residents that the water was safe. Although the government had been aware of the increased levels of lead poisoning since July, they continued to lie to the public until a Flint pediatrician published a study in September that found lead exposure in children had doubled citywide and nearly tripled in high-risk areas.

Agreeing to temporarily switch from Detroit’s water supply to the Flint River in April 2014, residents in the city of Flint immediately noticed their tap water appeared cloudy while emitting a pungent odor. After testing the water supply on August 14, 2014, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) discovered the water tested positive for fecal coliform bacteria, also known as *E. coli*. Although the city issued several boil advisories to kill the bacteria, the CDC has found that heating or boiling water only increases the lead concentration in the water.

In an interview with *Michigan Radio* on September 6, Virginia Tech Professor Marc Edwards warned that preliminary tests revealed serious levels of lead in Flint’s water supply. Refuting the university’s findings, MDEQ spokesman Brad Wurfel stated, “The samples don’t match the testing that we’ve been doing in the same kind of neighborhoods all over the city for the past year. With these kind of numbers, we would have expected to be seeing a spike somewhere else in the other lead monitoring that goes on in the community.”

State officials continued telling the public that the water supply was safe until a team of researchers led by Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha reported an alarming increase in childhood lead poisoning later that month. But on Monday, December 21, 2015 Professor Edwards revealed that government officials had known the water supply was contaminated since July. According to a series of memos and emails obtained through a FOIA request, Edwards revealed the director of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the office of

Although the city issued several boil advisories to kill the bacteria, the CDC has found that heating or boiling water only increases the lead concentration in the water.

Governor Rick Snyder both received data between July and September documenting the recent spike in kids suffering from lead poisoning.

According to the World Health Organization, “lead affects children’s brain development resulting in reduced intelligence quotient (IQ), behavioral changes such as shortening of attention span and increased antisocial behavior, and reduced educational attainment. Lead exposure also causes anemia, hypertension, renal impairment, immunotoxicity and toxicity to the reproductive organs. The neurological and behavioral effects of lead are believed to be irreversible.”

Earlier this week, Edwards wrote, “After missing warning signs of spiking childhood lead poisoning that occurred a few months after switching to a corrosive river water source in 2014, outside pressure forced officials at the DHHS to closely scrutinize their data in July 2015. They discovered scientifically conclusive evidence of an anomalous increase in childhood lead poisoning in summer 2014 immediately after the switch in water sources, but stood by silently as Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) officials repeatedly and falsely stated that no spike in blood lead levels (BLL) of children had occurred.”

Although Flint finally reconnected to Detroit’s water supply on October 16, Flint Mayor Karen Weaver declared a state of emergency on December 14. Referring to the contamination as a “manmade disaster,” Mayor Weaver expressed concern that the increased levels of lead poisoning in Flint’s children will result in “learning disabilities and the need for special education and mental health services and an increase in the juvenile justice system.”

Instead of keeping children safe from toxic chemicals, Michigan officials repeatedly lied about the safety of their drinking water even though they knew it was poisoned. Last month, the parents of these children and other Flint residents filed a class-action lawsuit against the governor and over a dozen other public officials responsible for failing an entire city. Unfortunately, no amount of money can compensate for the needless loss of a child’s developmental abilities.

—AlterNet, December 25, 2015

<http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/foia-request-shows-govt-lied-about-lead-water-knowingly-poisoning-countless?akid=13812.229473.PevXNV&rd=1&src=newsletter1047977&t=18>

Green Struggle

Transitions to new forms of energy have always been rooted in class struggle. Renewable energy will be no different.

BY BRENT RYAN BELLAMY AND DAVID THOMAS

Struggles over climate change in recent decades have conventionally been framed as a conflict between the fossil-fuel industries—and other advocates of “business-as-usual”—and activists and ecologists who insist that “another world is possible.”

But in the years since the alter-globalization¹ movement, some of the prime movers in the global logistics and cybernetics industries have begun to trumpet their green ambitions. And partisans from across the political spectrum now agree on the need to develop an infrastructure that accommodates advanced technologies without relying on fossil fuels.

Activists have to adapt new strategies to fit this new reality. It is not enough to disavow “bad” forms of energy or to support particular alternatives. We need to start with a better understanding of energy and capitalism.

From the earliest days of industrialization, capitalists used fossil-fuel technologies to erode the working class’s capacity for self-determination, and today is no different—capital’s development of renewable energy sites will play out in accordance with the same exploitative logic.

The history of previous energy transitions suggests that we should be wary of allowing industrial capital, however “green,” to once again consolidate its control of global energy flows. As tech giants and venture capitalists increasingly cordon off and develop key renewable energy sites, the struggle against the inequitable distribution of the world’s natural wealth must be renewed and restructured.

The turn to coal

In a recently published article on the turn to coal power, Andreas Malm

directs our attention to Charles Babbage’s 1835 treatise *On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures*. Among the many virtues of the machine, Babbage was most enamored of “the check, which it affords against the inattention, the idleness, or the dishonesty of human agents.”

Babbage’s particular form of technological boosterism was highly influential, especially among British industrialists. Indeed, it was the prospect of a more disciplined and pliant workforce that finally weaned British industrialists off the water mill, hitherto the primary driver of rotary motion in the manufacturing sector.

Malm observes that steam supplanted water “in spite of water being abundant, at least as powerful, and decidedly cheaper.” The only economically coherent explanation for this otherwise baffling transition, Malm argues, is that coal-powered cotton mills enabled the relocation of production to densely populated urban areas, where competition for work was much greater.

Thus, the key technological advance that coal offered over water—in the early days of the transition—was not greater power, but greater mobility. It was only because of their ability to facilitate “capital flight” that fossil fuels first emerged as a viable industrial commodity.

It is one of the great ironies of the history of class struggle that the turn to coal power did not result in the mechanically domesticated hive of workers in Babbage’s reveries. Instead, as the coal industry became indispensable to the functioning of industrial capital, coal miners learned to make political use of their crucial position in the commodity chain.

Once fossil-fuel energy had been incorporated into the daily diet of

industrial capital, shortfalls in its supply introduced a new set of strategic opportunities. At the time, these opportunities tilted the axis of power back in favor of the industrial working class. Absent coal, the engines of industrial capital would cease to function.

As miners learned the instrumental power of the energy commodity, workers’ councils began to shift the center of gravity of British politics. The welfarist concessions of the social-democratic age increasingly appear to have been the unlikely result of an uneasy truce accomplished through labor’s control over crucial energy flows.

Coal workers’ power, Timothy Mitchell argues, “derived not just from the organizations they formed [or] the ideas they began to share or the political alliances that they built, but from the extraordinary quantities of carbon energy that could be used to assemble political agency, by employing the ability to slow, disrupt, or cut off its supply.” This field of conditions was something new in the history of industrial capital, and was premised on the ways in which energy had been re-conceptualized as a commodity.

Energy was no longer seen as a natural force that one passively harnessed, but as a commodity that one actively produced and traded in the marketplace. And while this energy transformation initially militated against the working class, in subsequent decades coal miners learned to leverage their essential role in the subterranean abodes of the real economy.

The oil advantage

The success of the trade union movement shocked British elites, forcing them into a defensive posture. In the face of a rising tide of industrial

unrest, and following a series of disquieting political defeats, Winston Churchill, then lord of the admiralty, grew worried about the dependence of Britain's naval fleet on British coal. That dependence gave miners the ability to disrupt the military wing of Britain's global empire.

So Churchill began advocating that the naval fleet transition to oil. While an untried source of energy, oil was produced outside the UK, where labor movements were not as strong or experienced, and it could also be transported through pipelines and other methods less susceptible to blockage.

Although the original architects of the transition to oil could hardly have anticipated the long-term success of their somewhat desperate gambit, its effects were felt fairly rapidly. At the same time workers pressed home the strategic advantages of their power over coal flows, emerging oil infrastructures began to subtly undermine coal's instrumental role in class struggle.

Under Margaret Thatcher's government, Britain's oil transition neared completion, as they ramped up development of dual core-power stations in the run-up to the landmark 1984–85 miners' strike. Capable of running on coal or oil, the new stations were designed to circumvent the British miners' control over coal.

Though only a handful of such plants were operational by the time of the strike, the long-term ramifications of the technology were obvious: the miners could be rendered superfluous to the functioning of industrial capital. They had been decisively out-manuevered.

The sheer difficulty of producing and distributing Victorian-age coal remains relevant today. It required many hours of skilled labor in the pits, and on the rails. In contrast, oil was initially relatively easy to access, and in many cases still easier to distribute; it could be produced by a handful of workers at the derrick, and moved—

where possible—via pipeline, with minimal labor inputs. Once pipelines became subterranean, it was even harder to disrupt the flow of oil. One could not, as in the heyday of coal, blockade rails to impede its movement, and as such oil has proven much less vulnerable to industrial action.

In the transition from water to coal and then from coal to oil, elites had a consistent goal: the weakening of workers' strategic position. In the first instance, coal-powered capital flight suppressed wages; in the second, the oil-powered engine was mainlined as a means of pushing back an insurgent trade unionism that had secured control over crucial coal flows.

The renewable energy transformation

With the prospect of a wholesale turn to "renewable" energy, the wheel appears to have spun full circle. Some aspects of the current moment, such as the rise of wind and solar power, appear to offer a path to a more egalitarian future, in which a finely calibrated respect for the Earth's complex ecological structures prevails.

But a clear-eyed, historically-informed assessment of the ongoing turn to renewables is essential.

In the renewable energy projects pioneered by Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon, electrical output still operates as a commodity to be bought and sold on the market.

As these projects get off the ground, they establish a precedent by which tech companies and other speculators lay claim to renewable-rich sites, buying up locations in which the forces of wind, water, or solar energy are most effectively captured. Allowing private industry to develop and own these sites cedes capital the strategic ground once again.

The rule of private property allows industrialists and "green" technology companies to extract energy at a relatively low cost before rerouting it to

densely populated areas, where it's sold for whatever price an increasingly desperate market will pay.

Given contemporary metropolises' dependence on electrical current, it's easy to see how control over the energy supply—even renewable energy—would enable producers to grossly inflate energy prices, receiving a king's ransom for the electrical current on which the reproduction of life is now contingent.

In short, in the context of a capitalist economy, the turn to wind, solar, and water-power risks reproducing the inequities that marked the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the political tug-of-war that defined those periods, labor's gains under coal were undermined by the sly and circuitous politics of oil.

Delivered through decentralized electrical grids, electrical power is arguably even more difficult to disrupt than oil's liquid gush. The multiplicity of potential circuits, the sheer number of ways that current can be rapidly rerouted, and the near-instantaneous speed with which it travels make it hard to effectively contain.

To paraphrase *The Invisible Committee* collective, the key strategic problem here is that labor now struggles to consolidate itself as a force. Instead of being concentrated in key sites of energy production and distribution, labor now sees itself being used to "plug the holes of what has not yet been mechanized."

Workers increasingly find themselves confined to the system's periphery, scraping by on a meager wage and performing the kind of service work—burger flipping, caring for children, and house cleaning—where the impact of a strike is less instantaneously felt and less immediately crippling to the process of capital accumulation.

Unable to shut down the flow of energy, the working class has found it increasingly difficult to assert its inter-

ests or, crucially, to grasp the scale of its potential power. In place of the obstinate bloc of trade unionists that rose to resist capital in the age of the steam engine—workers that had grown to know themselves as skilled, indispensable, and capable of effective organization—data-managed contemporary workforces prove willing to concede to levels of top-down orchestration that Babbage only dreamed of.

New structures, new struggles

Writing in the immediate aftermath of the 1970s energy crises, George Caffentzis grasped the enormous implications of the nascent transformation.

“A ‘society’ built on autos is not like a ‘society’ built on computers, McDonalds, and nukes, where by ‘society’ we mean the entire reproduction process. The new form of life dictated by the primacy of the energy/information sectors, like the struggles against it, is only beginning to be formed.”

In response to dwindling energy reserves and shrinking profit margins, Caffentzis predicted, capital would double down on “its own self-conscious, scientific analysis: scientific

management.” He was right. Investors and policymakers threw their weight behind information technology, hoping it would rectify energy exhaustion by expelling “inefficiencies” from the production process.

Today, in the face of climate change, tech behemoths have extended and refined this strategy so it unfolds with intensifying velocity. From the various forms of “hot desking” that now structure office space to the circulatory labor of internet merchants’ warehouses to the modes of just-in-time production that prevail in the manufacturing sector, electrical current now acts as the near-universal material medium of the workplace’s algorithmic discipline.

Energy does not replace labor as the ur-commodity of the capitalist system, but it does stave off encroaching crises. Energy becomes a kind of stopgap solution for the capitalist that facilitates worker exploitation and capital accumulation.

In struggling against the political consequences of the cybernetic industry’s ongoing ascendance, it is important to apprehend the full dimensions of its double-fronted, data-driven offensive against both climate change

and the working class. One of the challenges here is that the strides tech giants are making on the renewable energy front threaten to obscure the incursions they make on the working class’s capacity for self-determination.

And while an energy transition has begun, the apparatus of oil still structures life at every level—and will do so for decades to come. As Kate Gordon argues, “Even if they’re now, finally, cost-competitive at the point of sale, low-carbon technologies are still working within an infrastructure—a utility regulatory system, a power grid, a highway system, a combustion engine-centric fueling system—built for a world powered by fossil fuels.”

Absent the means to impede energy flows, there appear to be few other options than to ramp up political pressure on courts and policymakers. To be sure, this is hardly an attractive option. History demonstrates that elites are rarely swayed by appeals to their better natures, and the increasingly technocratic nature of governance almost makes such exhortations seem little more than anachronistic romanticism.

But here the strategic successes of fossil-fuel activists offer some guidance about the most prudent approaches. In assessing how to confront capital as the transition to renewables quickens, the first task is to identify the sites that renewable energy developers will target for appropriation.

Drawing on their struggles against the fossil-fuel industry, James Marriot and Mika Minio-Paluello write:

“People have learned from the . . . experience of BTC and the Isken coal plant that battles must be fought early on. New projects need to be challenged before they are approved, financed, and planned on hard drives and flipcharts in far-off capitals.”

Because the development of energy infrastructure entails massive economic, engineering, industrial, and political efforts, the only way to get ahead of the



energy transition is to do so literally: to take preemptive action, to map before the mappers.

From their careful attention to the experiences of people living on the Baku-Tbilisi-Cehan pipeline—which runs from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oil field in the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea—to their mapping of BP’s enormous influence on art and politics, Marriot and Minio-Plauello’s work points to how activists can identify and intervene in the flows of oil infrastructure in ways that help locate crucial starting points for the struggle against renewable energy monopolization.

It is only by piecing together the big picture that the Left can hope to understand its place in a rapidly changing field of play. In this renewable environment, the goal is not—as it is now with oil—to obstruct development, but rather to deny private interests the legal right to own the future sites of humanity’s common sustenance.

A long, hot, dirty goodbye

Writing in Volume three of *Capital*, Marx laid out the ethos that will define political struggles in the age of renewable energy.

“From the standpoint of a higher economic formation, the private property of particular individuals in the Earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men. Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the Earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations as *boni patres familias* [good heads of households.]”

Yet in the struggle to achieve such a world there is no prospect of outgunning or outspending capital—the Left is increasingly unable to even imagine what taking control of the means of production would entail. New strategies are in order.

As capital sheds labor, and as the forces of production become less pliable in the hands of workers, renewable energy-rich sites will emerge as key battlefields—arenas where activists, lawyers, workers, and indigenous communities must forcefully contest capital’s private claims to common wealth and call into question the state’s enforcement of private property rights. Because ultimately, the key impediment to another world is not our fossil-fuel dependency, but our subjection to the logic of the commodity form itself.

From the earliest days of industrialization, capitalists used fossil-fuel technologies to erode the working class’s capacity for self-determination, and today is no different—capital’s development of renewable energy sites will play out in accordance with the same exploitative logic.

As we begin to bid fossil fuels a long, hot, dirty goodbye, and as we attempt to discern how class struggle will unfold in a post-fossil-fuel economy, we can draw upon the diverse legacies of the labor movement and fossil-fuel activism to construct a new set of political strategies adequate to the particularities of our own moment.

This will be an arduous process. But for those of us that dream not only of an end to the fossil-fuel economy, but of an end to the tyranny of class oppression itself, the promise of a viable

renewable energy infrastructure extends beyond mere survival.

On a good day, one can imagine solar panels and wind farms powering the kind of utopian life that Marx once sketched with such epigrammatic haste.

—Jacobin, October 27, 2015

<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/10/fossil-fuels-renewables-capitalism/>

1 The alter-globalization movement is a cooperative movement designed to protest the direction and perceived negative economic, political, social, cultural and ecological consequences of neoliberal globalization.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alter-globalization>



Fukushima Gets A Lot Uglier

BY ROBERT HUNZIKER

As time passes, a *bona fide* message emerges from within the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster scenario, and that message is that once a nuclear power plant loses it, the unraveling only gets worse and worse until it's at its worst, and still, there's no stopping it. Similar to opening Pandora's box, there's no stopping a ferocious atom-splitting insanity that knows no end.

Four years of experience with Fukushima provides considerable evidence that splitting atoms to boil water is outright unmitigated madness. After all, nuclear power plants are built to boil water; yes, to boil water; it's as simple as that, but yet at the same time it's also extraordinarily complex. Conversely, solar and wind do not boil water and are not complex and never deadly (Germany knows).

As it unfolds, the Fukushima story grows more convoluted and way more chilling. For example, according to *The Japan Times*, October 30th Edition: "Extremely high radiation levels and the inability to grasp the details about melted nuclear fuel make it impossible for the utility to chart the course of its planned decommissioning of the reactors at the plant."

Thereby, the bitter truth behind a major nuclear meltdown shows its true colors: "Impossible for the utility to chart the course of its planned decommissioning..." is very definitive, divulging the weak underbelly of the fission-to-heat process; only one slip-up, and it's deadly dangerous and likely out of control!

Not only that, but the entire Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant complex is subject to recurring mishaps and setbacks, as well as various technical tribulations, something different going wrong on any given

day. And, it's always big, never small.

For example, according to *The Japan Times*, October 30th Edition: "Deadly 9.4 Sieverts Detected Outside Fukushima Reactor 2 Containment Vessel; Checks Stop."

TEPCO also detected deadly radiation levels outside of reactor No. 1. According to a direct quote from the article: "People exposed to the maximum radiation dose for some 45 minutes will die." Death in 45 minutes!

The potency contained within 9.4 Sieverts (Sv) is enormous. One Sievert, which is a measure of the health effect of radiation on the human body, is normally considered a massive dose, causing immediate radiation sickness. But, since levels beyond one Sievert are rarely, if ever, encountered in the normal course of everyday life, the industry standard uses millisieverts (mSv = 1/1000th) or microsieverts (uSv = one millionth of a Sievert) when measuring radiation.

Miserably, eight Sieverts causes severe vomiting, severe headache, severe fever, incapacitation, and a 100 percent death rate over a period of time greater than ten minutes within 48 hours (Radiation Survival Guide.)

Chernobyl is a prime example of the potency of radiation. Immediately after the explosion (1986), radiation levels in the control room reached 300 Sv/hr, resulting in the deaths of the operators of the plant. Thirty years later, radiation levels in the same control room run approximately 8-10 mSv/hr.

It's little wonder TEPCO finds it impossible to plan decommissioning of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which begs the question of if, and when, decommissioning will be possible. Who knows, if ever?

Furthermore, according to *The Japan Times'* article: TEPCO planned to start

checking inside the containment vessel in August by use of a remote-controlled robot but "high radiation levels have stalled the examination."

Unfortunately, not only is radiation sizzling outside of reactor No. 1, but a pipe connection at reactor No. 2 also shows extremely high radiation levels. Reactor No. 2 is where the hot melted radioactive core (corium) still has not been located. But, then again, with so much hot stuff sizzling throughout the entire Fukushima complex, how are workers expected to locate a melted nuclear core that may have already penetrated the steel-reinforced concrete containment vessel, entering the earth?

If total meltdown occurred/occurs, nobody has any idea of what to do next. There is no playbook. It's likely impossible to do anything remedial once a melted nuclear core has burrowed into the ground because deadly isotopes uncontrollably spread erratically, ubiquitously into the surrounding underground soil and water. Then what?

In the final analysis, there is a distinct probability that Fukushima has no final analysis. Reports out of Japan indicate that Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant cleanup and decommissioning is severely restricted by extremely high radiation levels and the inability to grasp the details about melted nuclear fuel. What could be worse?

Footnote: China plans on building 400 nuclear plants "fast and cheap" over the next few decades. (Source: Oliver Tickell, "Does China's Nuclear Boom Threaten Global Catastrophe?" CounterPunch, October 30th.)

—CounterPunch, November 3, 2015

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2015/11/03/fukushima-gets-a-lot-uglier/>

Mumia's Fight for Medical Treatment

Mumia Abu-Jamal's legal fight for medical treatment to stay alive in prison

BY RACHEL WOLKENSTEIN

A remarkable and legally historic evidentiary hearing in *Mumia Abu-Jamal v. Kerestes* took place over three days in late December 2015 in the U.S. federal district court in Scranton, Pennsylvania. The amended lawsuit filed August 3, 2015 by attorneys Bret Grote of the Abolitionist Law Project and Robert Boyle is an action for damages, injunctive relief and a declaration of the unconstitutional denial of medical treatment to Mumia Abu-Jamal. The immediate question is whether Judge Robert Mariani will grant Mumia a preliminary injunction and rule that the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) has been deliberately indifferent to Mumia Abu-Jamal's medical condition in violation of the Eighth Amendment's proscription against cruel and unusual punishment and order the DOC to immediately treat Mumia's active Hepatitis-C with the new antiviral medications.

A brief summary of the legal case

The legal brief filed August 17, 2015 in support of the Motion for Preliminary Injunction succinctly summarizes Mumia's case:

"Mumia Abu-Jamal is suffering severe and chronic symptoms from untreated, active Hepatitis-C. In the past several months he has experienced diabetic shock, a painful and pruritic [extremely itchy] rash affecting his entire body, edema, skin lesions, anemia, and likely fibrosis of the liver. Scientific advances in the treatment of Hepatitis-C have established a new standard of care that could cure Abu-Jamal of his Hepatitis-C and alleviate the painful symptoms within 8-12 weeks without significant side effects through daily administration of a single pill. DOC

defendants, however, are refusing to provide Abu-Jamal with this medically necessary, life-saving treatment."

In riveting testimony, Mumia's doctor, Dr. Joseph Harris, fully described how over the past two years these new antiviral drugs (marketed as Salvadi and Harvoni) have "revolutionized" the treatment of Hepatitis-C (HCV) with a 90-95 percent cure rate. Immediate treatment for all those with active Hepatitis-C is now the recommended standard of care by the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD) and the Infectious Disease Society of America (IDSA) and is endorsed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The World Health Organization added these new medications to its essential medicines list. In curing HCV, the "extra-hepatic" secondary symptoms including fatigue, itchy rashes, arthritis and muscle pain will also be cured. But the cost in the United States is \$1000 per pill, making a course of treatment approximately \$90,000.

Medicine for profit in capitalist America means there is no equal access, let alone free access, to this new cure. As for other medical care, insurance coverage depends on the scope and cost of the medical insurance itself. While there is growing public outcry over the high costs, neither Medicare nor Medicaid currently pays for this treatment unless the disease has progressed to severe liver damage.

At the close of the intensive evidentiary hearing on December 23 after the testimony of Dr. Harris, two DOC expert specialists, the DOC's chief medical officer and the SCI Mahanoy chief medical officer, the following was not in dispute:

- Mumia Abu-Jamal has active chronic Hepatitis-C, stage-two fibrosis with a 63 percent probability of cirrhosis of the liver.
- Mumia has "anemia of chronic disease."
- Mumia's severe itchy skin rash is not resolved despite months of intensive treatment.
- Severely itchy skin is often a secondary symptom of HCV.
- There is no medical reason for Mumia not to be treated with the new antivirals for Hepatitis-C.

The dispute is clearly not a medical or scientific one. It is social, one of cost and, in regard to prisoners, one of peneological purpose. This was the proverbial "elephant in the room" that the DOC witnesses would not directly address. Instead, the DOC tried to explain the difference between "correctional and institutional standards" and "community standards." The DOC maintains that this is simply a case of doctors with differing opinions of treatment. That argument was exploded by the DOC expert witness on Hepatitis-C treatment, Dr. Jay Cowan, who responded to attorney Robert Boyle's question, that "yes he would recommend the new antivirals to anyone who had Hepatitis-C who could pay the \$90,000 cost."

The DOC's new "Interim Hepatitis-C Protocol," secretly issued on November 12, 2015 does not take any account of the new drugs' potential to cure Hepatitis-C and stop its deadly progression and alleviate painful and debilitating symptoms suffered by a significant portion of the prison population. Rather this is a protocol to deny

this new treatment to Pennsylvania prisoners. According to the testimony of the head of DOC medical services, Dr. Peter Noel, only five out of some 6000 prisoners with active HCV are getting treatment.

The DOC protocol does not allow treatment to be considered until the prisoner is close to death, with severe complications from cirrhosis of the liver. The protocol has a tortuous and Kafkaesque stratification of who should be considered for treatment. There are numerous “reasons” for exclusions from treatment, including misconduct and not following medical regimens. The last hurdle before treatment may be considered by the Hepatitis-C Treatment Committee is an endoscopy that shows the prisoner has “*esophageal varices*.” This is a condition in which the “blood vessels in the esophagus may leak blood or even rupture, causing life-threatening bleeding.” If there are no “*esophageal varices*,” the prisoner is set for another endoscopy in “two to three years.” And then, depending, treatment will be considered.

The DOC lawyers and doctors, from the medical specialist “experts” to the head of its medical services, laid bare the reality of medicine for profit in capitalist America and the function of prisons as repressive punitive institutions without a modicum of care for the medical well-being of prisoners. The court evidentiary hearing unfolded with rare public display of the DOC’s mendacity and utter contempt for its own laws and rules: the suppression and then attempt to keep its Hepatitis-C Treatment Protocol “confidential;” submission to court of a false declaration from its chief of DOC health services; and its expert witnesses testimony that withheld information from Mumia’s medical records that contradicted their opinions. In cross-examination Mumia’s lawyers successfully discredited the DOC’s presentation of false or misleading evidence.

At the close of the evidentiary hearing Judge Mariani set January 13, 2016 as the date that all parties would get

transcripts of the hearing, and that written briefs were due by both Mumia and the DOC by February 3, 2016. The judge said he would decide as quickly as possible, making this case his priority.

The implications and scope of Mumia’s lawsuit

While this lawsuit is based on the “deliberate indifference” of the DOC to treat Mumia Abu-Jamal specifically, focusing on the horrific history of his medical mistreatment, this case presents an historic testing of all prisoners’ right under the Eighth Amendment to medical treatment—in fact a cure—of the deadly Hepatitis-C virus that infects 13-25 percent of prisoners. The DOC is seeking dismissal of a class action lawsuit brought in federal district court in Philadelphia on behalf of some 10,000 Pennsylvania prisoners, *Chimenti v. Department of Corrections*.

In the United States there is no constitutional right to medical care, except that under the Eighth Amendment prison officials have an “obligation to provide medical care for those whom it is punishing by incarceration.” *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 103 (1976). That obligation is determined by a serious medical need and the state’s acts or omissions that indicate a “deliberate indifference” to that need. Case law holds that deprivation of treatment for reason of cost is deliberate indifference under the Eighth Amendment and therefore unconstitutional.

But if “the law” really was “the law” Mumia would have been immediately granted the Hep-C cure. The DOC would have administered the new antiviral medicine to him without the compulsion of a lawsuit—and done the same for the thousands of other prisoners suffering from Hepatitis-C.

Instead, Mumia has been subjected to over a year of medical mistreatment—the state’s latest attempt to silence and kill him. The DOC has resisted and challenged any diagnosis and medical treatment for Mumia’s

skin condition and now refuses to treat his active Hepatitis-C. A fellow prisoner, Major Tillery, confronted prison Superintendent John Kerestes, warning him that Mumia might die unless he was hospitalized immediately. For that act of solidarity, Tillery was transferred to another prison and set-up on a false misconduct charge and spent over four months in the “hole.” An international campaign of protest was launched after Mumia’s near-death from diabetic shock demanding medical treatment and Mumia’s release from prison. Without that campaign, including this legal action to save Mumia’s life, the DOC would have not given him any medical care.

We will see what this court decides and how this case proceeds on appeal. Any court decisions in Mumia’s favor, however small, will be challenged by the DOC, and likely the FOP (Fraternal Order of Police), in the appellate courts and in the public arena. At stake is keeping Mumia alive, striking a blow for medical care for prisoners throughout the country, and expanding the campaign in an international struggle for Mumia’s freedom.

Mumia’s court testimony

On the first day of the court hearing, December 18, Mumia testified *via* videoconference from SCI Mahanoy; his first court testimony since his 1982 trial. As Mumia’s wife, Wadiya Jamal, stated in her December 18 message, “This rotten-ass system has made many attempts on my husband’s life. Mumia is innocent of the murder of police officer Daniel Faulkner on December 9, 1981 and the cops on the scene all knew that. His Hep-C is from the blood transfusions 34 years ago when he survived a cop’s gunshot to his chest through his lungs to his liver.” Blood transfusions prior to 1992 are a major source of HCV because blood was not thoroughly screened until then.

In an understated manner Mumia described in court the ravages to his

body and mind from this year of pain and near death from diabetic shock. All of Mumia's medical records from the prison and his hospitalizations were admitted into evidence.

Mumia explained the progression of the severe itchy skin condition that began in August 2014 in small patches and spread over most of his body. In the prison infirmary he was first given topical creams but then treated with steroids and had a catastrophic allergic reaction, a swelling of his whole body such that he could barely breathe. He had rapid extreme weight loss dropping from around 260 pounds down to around 180 in a month's time. He was fatigued; he couldn't sleep for all the itching; he was driven to scratch himself bloody at night. Without recognizing it himself he was losing coherence and couldn't concentrate on his work.

Early morning on March 30, 2015 he collapsed in the prison infirmary, was rushed to a hospital and put into the ICU to treat diabetic shock and a glucose level of close to 600. He testified, "On April 2nd, after being in the ICU near death, and back at SCI Mahanoy I was in the infirmary unable to walk one step. I could not lift my arms, I was too weak to pull myself up off the floor." Mumia's prison medical records of blood tests taken on March 6, three weeks earlier showed his glucose level had spiked to deadly dangerous 419. This was ignored by the prison doctors.

In April Mumia's skin condition worsened, with 70 percent of his body covered in thick scales from head to toe, his skin described alternatively as looking like elephant hide, or reptilian, and also with flaking skin and lesions on his legs too numerous to count. In court Mumia was asked to identify photos taken of him during visits on April 9 and April 26, 2015 with his wife Wadiya Jamal (and myself) showing the scabbing on his arms and the side head shot showing his scaling and peeling skin, a lesion over his ear and folds

in his neck. Over the DOC's objection that these photos were "inflammatory and prejudicial," Judge Mariani admitted the photos into evidence.

Mumia further described that while taking a shower one morning in early May blisters erupted on his lower legs and he was taken to Geisinger Medical Center for five days of intensive treatment of his skin. He was also given a battery of tests to determine if he had various cancers or other diseases that might be the cause of his skin condition. The doctors and nurses said they had never seen anything like this before. Mumia was wrapped like a mummy every four hours with topical steroid creams and Vaseline for days. This was continued when Mumia returned to the infirmary at SCI Mahanoy.

The tests for cancer were negative. Geisinger doctors recommended in the discharge summary that Mumia should have follow-up gastroenterology consultation for Hepatitis-C treatment. Mumia was found to have an "irregular-appearing liver" and anemia of chronic disease.

Since April, until recently, Mumia had been housed in the SCI Mahanoy infirmary. Since May he has Vaseline wraps several times a week as well as baths and for the past month phototherapy was added to ameliorate his skin condition. The DOC infectious disease specialist, Dr. Ramon Gadea, examined Mumia and his medical records in September. Mumia specifically asked him if he had reviewed Dr. Harris' report that Mumia's skin condition was likely secondary to his Hep-C. Dr. Gadea told Mumia he agreed with that diagnosis and would recommend Mumia be treated for his Hepatitis-C but he thought the prison would refuse because of costs.

On cross-examination DOC counsel Laura Neals tried to establish that Mumia is better now after all the skin treatment. He testified that although his skin condition is better than before,

it still itches terribly and he has difficulty sleeping. He was asked by Neals why he had refused a test for Hep-C in 2011, to which he replied, "I never agreed to blood tests while I was on death row, because I didn't trust the doctors." It was in January 2012 when Mumia was being transferred from death row into general population that Mumia had an extensive blood work up and he showed positive for the Hep-C virus. On redirect, Mumia's attorney, Bret Grote asked: "Would you accept Hepatitis-C treatment?" Mumia answered: "Yes, with it I can live; without it I may die."

Dr. Suzanne Ross, a clinical psychologist and International Representative of International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal and Prof. Johanna Fernandez, of the Campaign to Bring Mumia Home, testified for Mumia providing more detail and emotion on Mumia's drastic changes in physical appearance, energy and concentration over the past months while suffering from the severe skin condition and aftermath of the diabetic shock and hospitalizations.

Mumia's doctor, Joseph Harris

Dr. Joseph Harris is a Board Certified Diplomate in Internal Medicine licensed in New York State. He has extensively treated Hep-C and HIV patients and spent a year as a Village Physician with Doctors Without Borders in Valle de Cauca Columbia. He also practiced in Rwanda.

Dr. Harris began serving as a consultant for Mumia's attorneys in May 2015 and began monthly visits with Mumia in July. Because the DOC would not grant Dr. Harris any entry as a physician, not even to bring in a pen and pad to make notes, Dr. Harris visited with Mumia as a regular visitor in the visiting room. Nonetheless Dr. Harris was able to take a medical history and personally observe Mumia's skin and portions of his lower extremities.

Dr. Harris testified that he had treated 100 people with active Hepatitis-C over a recent two-year period of time and the 31 people (including himself) for whom he was able to obtain the new antivirals were totally cured within the 12 week course of treatment. In depth and with clarity for laymen, Dr. Harris described the impact of the new antiviral Hepatitis-C drugs and how quickly the standard of care has changed. Just a year ago, the AASLD protocols still had a prioritization subset to its “treat everyone” recommendation. Mumia, he testified, even under last years’ protocol is in the category of most priority treatment needed because of the numerous secondary effects of Hepatitis-C that he is suffering, particularly the painful skin rash and the chronic anemia.

Mumia’s unique and severe skin condition was diagnosed by Dr. Harris as Necrolytic Acral Erythema (NAE) a rare condition that “typically involves a Black patient with a pruritic [itchy] and/or painful rash that has a minimal response to usual treatments. It is a cutaneous [skin] marker of Hepatitis-C.” He testified that Mumia’s skin condition was not simply eczema and/or psoriasis. Mumia had been treated with the “big guns” of dermatological treatment and his skin condition continues. So long as Mumia’s HCV continues to advance, his severe skin condition will come and go. The intensive skin treatments provided by the prison doctors have reduced but not resolved Mumia’s skin rash. He made it abundantly clear to all—treat Mumia’s Hepatitis-C and his skin rash will resolve.

Another critical point of Dr. Harris’ testimony was the medicine and science in determining whether a person has active chronic Hepatitis-C. A simple blood test determines whether the virus is present. The determining issue is whether there is a “viral load.” But the number—high or low—of that viral load is totally irrelevant as to how much liver damage the virus has caused.

The DOC Expert Witnesses

The DOC’s hired gun as their expert on Hepatitis-C was Dr. Jay Cowan, a Diplomate Board Certified Gastroenterologist, president of Correctional Medical Associates, a subsidiary of Corizon, a Tennessee company that provides medical services to prisons in many states and counties, including in New York and Pennsylvania. At the time he testified, Dr. Cowan was completing his tenure as Medical Director of Rikers Island prison. Corizon, as of December 31, 2015 was terminated as the medical provider for Rikers Island after investigation by the New York City Council. According to a report in *CounterPunch*, “Abu-Jamal Gets Federal Court Hearing Seeking Order to Treat His Hepatitis-C Infection,” by David Lindorff, December 19, 2015:

“During New York City Council hearings into Corizon’s contract with Rikers, which ultimately led to termination of the company’s contract, Cowan was accused of being callous towards the prison deaths attributable to his company’s neglect, incompetence and malpractice, and with being ‘evasive’ in responding to questioning by city councilmembers.”

Unfortunately Judge Mariani stopped Mumia’s attorney Robert Boyle’s cross-examination of Dr. Cowan’s medical oversight of Rikers Island jail and work with Corizon.

Dr. Cowan testified he was retained by the Pennsylvania DOC to sit on its Hepatitis-C Treatment Review Committee, the existence of which was first disclosed by the DOC during the hearing. He was part of the group that on December 17 (the day before the hearing) denied Mumia the Hep-C treatment. Dr. Cowan is an “expert witness,” which means he frequently testified in court proceedings and is expert at *not* directly answering questions. He spent considerable time testifying on the means to determine how

much liver damage a person with HCV has. He simultaneously acknowledged that new American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) and the CDC Hepatitis-C guidelines established a standard of treatment that “everyone should be treated,” while insisting that the “correctional setting guideline” was the “same” as the “community setting,” with one caveat, “risk stratification.” In other words he supported the view that, in the “correctional setting” a prioritization that precluded treatment until someone is close to dying of liver disease. He was not familiar with all the CT scans and sonograms that showed damage and irregularities in Mumia’s liver.

Dr. Cowan disputed Dr. Harris’ diagnosis of NAE and any correlation between Mumia’s skin rash and his Hepatitis-C based in part on his false understanding that Mumia’s skin condition was “completely resolved.” He testified he had no information that the DOC’s infectious disease expert Dr. Gadea had recommended Hep-C treatment for Mumia on the basis that his skin rash might be secondary to his HCV.

Nonetheless Dr. Jay Cowan, the DOC Hepatitis-C expert was compelled to acknowledge that Mumia has Stage Two liver disease, with “significant probability of fibrosis.”

Dr. Schleicher, the DOC Board Certified Dermatologist, works for an outside medical contractor. He examined Mumia solely *via* “tele-med,” a form of video conferencing. Questioned by DOC counsel, Dr. Schleicher diagnosed Mumia’s skin condition as a “cross between psoriasis and eczema” with an unlikely connection to Mumia’s Hep-C. But on cross-examination he admitted he knew little about Hep-C, and stated he was unaware that Geisinger Medical Center recommended Hepatitis-C follow-up and treatment for Mumia in May 2015. Additionally Dr. Schleicher testified that he, like Dr. Cowan, was not aware that the infectious disease specialist hired by the DOC, Dr. Ramon Gadea, stated there

might be a correlation between Mumia's skin rash and his Hep-C.

The DOC had suppressed its new protocol for Hepatitis-C treatment—and then wanted Mumia's attorneys to agree to confidentiality

John Steinhart, R.N., the SCI Mahanoy Chief Medical Health Administrator, whose job description is to provide the medical oversight of prisoners in that institution, testified that he had no medical responsibility for Mumia's care. Nonetheless it was Mr. Steinhart who was the DOC witness to first testify that Mumia was being treated and monitored in something called the "Liver Disease Chronic Care Clinic," an entity previously unknown to Mumia, Mumia's lawyers or Dr. Harris.

And it was John Steinhart who first testified to the existence of the new DOC Protocol for Hepatitis-C Treatment, issued in November. From the outset of this lawsuit Mumia and his lawyers had been told there was no existing DOC protocol, and hadn't been for the past two years since the suspension of the prior means of treating Hepatitis-C with interferon. This issue of whether the DOC had treatment guidelines is "only" a core of the entire lawsuit—whether under the DOC's Protocol Mumia would be treated for his active Hepatitis-C and if not, what was the DOC process for making that determination.

Moreover, the DOC at first argued against this Protocol being introduced into evidence as an open court record. They wanted Mumia and his attorneys to agree to keep the Protocol "confidential." A specific reason for the secrecy was to prevent the lawyers representing the class action on behalf of all Pennsylvania prisoners with HCV from obtaining a copy,

This was not agreed to and the next day the Protocol was introduced into evidence and became a public docu-

ment. Prison Radio made a request for the release of the Protocol under the Right to Know Law and that legal office made it clear the Protocol was not a confidential document.

The last act of the DOC—the false sworn declaration of Dr. Peter Noel

The DOC's position in this lawsuit is medically and morally unconscionable. It is no surprise then that the DOC engaged in repeated misconduct in court beginning with presenting expert medical witnesses who professed lack of knowledge about key parts of Mumia's medical record—records that contradicted or undermined their "expert opinions." The withholding, attempting to suppress, and keep secret the new Hepatitis-C Treatment Protocol was yet more evidence of the DOC's unscrupulousness.

And then came the testimony of Dr. Paul Noel, a Board Certified Family Practice doctor who is the DOC Chief of Clinical Services, the person who is in charge of the DOC medical services. He was the DOC's last witness for the hearing. His importance to the DOC case cannot be understated. Among other responsibilities, Dr. Noel coordinated with outside medical providers and generally worked to insure that the prison doctors followed specialists' instructions. He held forth about Mumia's extensive medical treatment under DOC care, his knowledge of the new AALDS guidelines to treat chronic Hep-C patients and his work on the new DOC Protocol, taking into account the guidelines developed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons as well as the Veterans Administration.

Dr. Noel estimated that of those Pennsylvania prisoners who are positive for the Hep-C virus, some 6-7000 likely have chronic Hepatitis-C and will be eventually evaluated under the new Protocol. He went through platelet counts and other factors the DOC will use to measure the seriousness of liver disease, using a test called the

Halt-C to determine the onset of end stage liver disease.

Dr. Noel testified that Mumia's Halt-C score is 63 percent, greater than the 60 percent level set by the DOC as the breakpoint of cirrhosis of the liver. However, Dr. Noel testified that the DOC treatment review committee determined that based on other factors, Mumia would not be considered for treatment.

Robert Boyle cross-examined Dr. Noel challenging the basis in which the DOC committee determined whether those with chronic Hep-C in general and Mumia in particular would or would not get the new antiviral medicines. When Boyle asked Dr. Noel to identify his sworn declaration, filed in opposition to Mumia's Motion for a Preliminary Injunction, Dr. Noel immediately recoiled and testified that the signature on the document was his signature but it was NOT his statement.

The next minutes in the courtroom were unusual to say the least. DOC counsel, Laura Neal proceeded to "explain," asserting that the false statement in the declaration submitted in Dr. Noel's name was not really important and that Dr. Noel had OK'd it after a likely "clerical error" left a false paragraph being included in a sworn document filed in court. Judge Mariani cautioned Laura Neal to stop, advising her that she was at risk of impeaching her own witness.

Under further cross-examination by Robert Boyle, Dr. Noel testified that the declaration as submitted with his signature wrongly claims that a measure of the severity of liver disease is the viral load number. That is not medically or scientifically correct and Dr. Noel testified he had instructed that paragraph of his declaration be changed before submission to court. But it wasn't. Moreover, as attorney Bret Grote brought forward, Laura Neal cited this misrepresentation of the measure of liver damage in Dr. Noel's

declaration as medical evidence in opposing Mumia's motion for a preliminary injunction. The U.S. Magistrate then denied the motion citing this falsehood as one of the medical reasons to deny Mumia treatment. The case then went to Judge Mariani who proceeded to re-consider the motion and hold this evidentiary hearing.

In further cross-examination, Dr. Noel admitted that there were substantive errors in other parts of his declaration, including that Mumia had a normal ultrasound, which was not correct and falsely stating that the infectious disease specialist, Dr. Ramon Gadea had ruled out Hepatitis-C as a cause of Mumia's skin rash.

DOC's position of keeping prisoners from "running to court"

To conclude this legal report it is useful to recall the legal argument that took place before the evidentiary hearing began, which the DOC will likely pursue as an appeal issue. The DOC demanded the judge dismiss the lawsuit claiming that Mumia had not completed the prison grievance and appeals process because he hadn't specifically asked for Hep-C treatment. In legal parlance this is "exhaustion of administrative remedies." In response to the judge's questions about putting

"form over substance," Laura Neal, a lawyer for the DOC insisted this was a "matter of principle..."discouraging inmates from running into court."

After an hour of legal argument and a two-hour break in proceedings for the judge to review the case law and facts he returned to court and read his ruling upholding the decision to go forward with the evidentiary hearing. In a legally and factually detailed ruling, Judge Mariani said, "in May of

Case law holds that deprivation of treatment for reason of cost is deliberate indifference under the Eighth Amendment and therefore unconstitutional.

2015 [the DOC had] all the information at [their] fingertips in terms of his health issues." Judge Mariani ruled that it would have been impossible for Mumia to cite Hepatitis-C, as he had not yet received a proper diagnosis to

determine his Hepatitis-C was the cause of his conditions. Judge Mariani told the DOC, "That's a tortured view of what is required of an inmate in a grievance."

We need a full mobilization to fight for Mumia's life and his freedom

This was a "good day in court." And Mumia has not had many of these. But just as Mumia wouldn't have gotten into court on this case without international protest and publicity, medical treatment to keep Mumia alive and for those other thousands suffering from Hepatitis-C won't be won relying on the courthouse or the state legislatures. While fighting hard in the courts, there can be no illusion in obtaining justice there. The state, its cops, its prisons are intent on silencing Mumia and what we are dealing with now is state execution by medical mistreatment. The state won't stop; the only way Mumia will survive is if he is freed. It will take a broad international campaign that calls for agitation, publicity and demonstrations building the broadest possible support demanding Mumia's freedom as a central demand. In addition to town hall meetings, we need to obtain the concrete support of more organizations and build on the critical and successful work that's been done so far to get resolutions from trade union organizations, such as the largest union in the UK, UNITE, San Francisco Labor Council, New York Metro Local 10 for the American Postal Workers Union, the United Steelworkers Union Local 8751 in Boston.

A postscript to acknowledge and thank all those who wrote reports on the hearing or whose public statements I have borrowed from. Although I was there in its entirety, writing a report like this is difficult without a transcript or having the use of a tape recorder. Any errors made are of course my own. — Rachel Wolkenstein

—December 30, 2015





Mumia Abu-Jamal

When a Child Dies

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Newsbreak: Cleveland officials announce no charges to be filed in the police killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice.

There is something shattering about the death, the killing, of a child. When a child dies the natural order is torn, the stars weep and the earth quakes. We have become so accustomed to this system we suppose it is natural instead of a human imposition. Politicians in the pocket of so called police unions bow before bags of silver and blink away the death of a child—especially if a black child.

What man-made institution is more precious than a child? What job? What so called profession? What office? What state? When a child dies, adults don't deserve to breathe their stolen air. When a child dies, the living must not rest until they have purged the poison that dared harm such a one. When a child dies, time runs backward and attempts to right such a wrong.

This should inspire movements worldwide to fight like never before. For something vile has happened before our eyes. A child has been killed,

and in America—because it's a black child—it means next to nothing.

—*Prison Radio*, December 29, 2015

<http://fsrn.org/2015/12/mumia-abu-jamal-when-a-child-dies/>

Wages of Fear

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

In the wake of the carnage in Paris, and the subsequent events in San Bernardino, California, a wave of fear has swept through France and the U.S.

In America, prominent politicians have been trying to outdo each other in the most outrageous fashion, from attacking the families of suspected ISIS people, to planning for caging Syrian refugees in internment camps.

In a matter of days, American minds have echoed the same xenophobic themes that sent over a hundred-thousand Japanese—mostly Japanese-Americans, I might add—to U.S. concentration camps—men, women and children back in the 1940s.

In the succeeding decades, American presidents have apologized for these injustices, and reparations (albeit of modest amounts) have been paid to survivors.

But today, the sons and grandsons of those who clamored for Japanese internments now clamor for Syrian and Arab internments, proving the apologies and reparations were but yesterday's crocodile tears—empty as salt water.

For politicians, exploiting fear is as common as shells along the seashore. They can't help themselves.

After over a decade of failed and pointless war, why is there more (not less) fear?

What's wrong with this picture?

The politicians who are selling the toxin of fear for their own selfish ambi-

tions are leading the nation down the yellow-brick road of disaster.

No good can come from this.

—*Prison Radio*, December 6, 2015

<http://www.prisonradio.org/>

Disturbing the Peace

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

The video is stunning.

A muscular cop leans over a skinny schoolgirl, flips the chair in which she sits, sending her to a hard fall to floor on her back.

Before she can disentangle herself from the desk-chair, she is seized and thrown across the room, like a ragdoll. She is immediately handcuffed and arrested, for “disturbing” her classroom.

According to published accounts, she was said to have been a non-participant in class, and ordered to leave the classroom. When she refused to leave, the schools so-called “resource” officer was notified.

When policeman Ben Fields arrived at the classroom, he went into Rambo mode on the child!!

The rest is infamy.

Several months ago, a video showed a mad “Robocop” assaulting a young teenaged girl in a bikini.

This latest police attack on a young girl is almost identical—except it happened in a classroom.

Consider this: the girl in the class never assaulted anyone, she merely refused to leave. Was this more “disturbing” than the madcap cop response, which looked more at home in a WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) ring than a classroom?

It tells us the nature of public schools, and more ominously, the nature of

police. Are cops there to protect the students, or the staff from the students?

What is the function of teachers, to teach obedience—or to teach freedom?

Events such as these show us an ugly, unpopular, uncomfortable truth about American schools, and how they interact in the lives of children, especially Black children.

The imagery of a beefy Black cop throwing a white teenaged girl across a classroom would've evoked an immediate response.

That this has not, speaks volumes about the degraded value of the lives and well-being of Black children in America today.

—*PrisonRadio.org*, November 4, 2015

Write to Mumia at:

Mumia Abu-Jamal AM-8335
SCI-Mahanoy
301 Morea Road
Frackville, PA 17932

A Tale of Two Men

BY MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Sometimes, events occur, which although separate in locality have features in common, or when compared, reveal a clarity that they would not possess apart.

Cases in point:

A: A Young man, reportedly for the high crime of possessing a three-inch knife, gets shot repeatedly until dead. His alleged offense? Causing fear in a cop.

B: A middle-aged man, armed as if about to engage in war, drives to a Colorado Springs abortion clinic and engages in an hours-long rampage, shooting nine and killing three, before quitting his tantrum and submitting to arrest. Upon arrest he is neither beaten nor kicked nor stomped nor shot.



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I am of course referring to the cases of Laquan McDonald, 17, late of Chicago Illinois and of Robert L. Dear, 57 of Colorado Springs, site of a Planned Parenthood clinic.

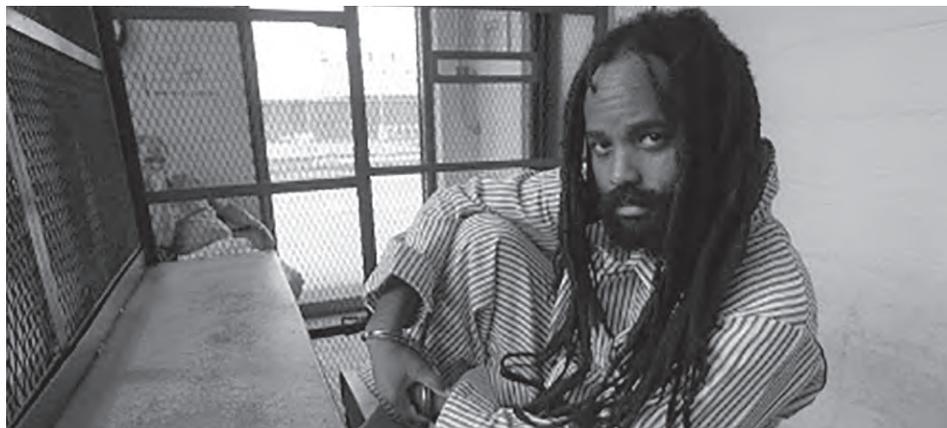
One, it must be said, Black men receive hyper-attention when in the presence of cops, so much so that white guys fade into the background of normality, unseen, unchallenged, even when they are carrying arsenals.

Again, as in Dear's case, he drove to the clinic then carried arms into the site of Planned Parenthood.

One man was virtually invisible, another man was hyper-visible. In such cases as these, both paths lead to disaster.

—*Prison Radio*, December 6, 2015

<http://www.prisonradio.org/media/audio/mumia/tale-two-men-204-mumia-abu-jamal>



FREE MUMIA ABU-JAMAL

Abuse Knows No Holidays in U.S. Prisons

BY KEVIN “RASHID” JOHNSON

As yet another year changes over, I am reminded how little the world knows of the truly inhumane conditions and treatments that pervade U.S. prisons. Yet Amerika’s rulers constantly pontificate self-righteously about other societies’ human rights violations and promote the U.S. Empire as a supposed bastion of democracy. What they never mention, however, is that the U.S. operates the world’s largest domestic prison system that also constitutes the world’s largest prevailing system of modern slavery, in defiance of international law—institutions that are the antithesis of democracy.¹

For many on the outside, the season surrounding the New Year is one of festive and joyful gatherings; sentiments that do not in any real sense enter into oppressive U.S. prison life, where abuse knows no holidays. In fact, for many of us, holidays are reminders not of happy occasions, but rather, of abuses and indignities we’ve suffered or witnessed on those occasions. I have many such remembrances, like, for example, New Years Day, 2015, when I witnessed a mob of body-armored white guards beat a Mexican prisoner bloody.

The incident occurred in the segregation unit of the Clements Unit Prison in Amarillo, Texas where I’m confined. It began when a nurse distributing medications to prisoners in our housing unit did not deliver to the victim, Daniel Garza, his prescribed medications.

Garza in turn protested to have a ranking guard come to the pod to address and resolve the problem. Only ranking guards are allowed to contact medical staff to convey a prisoner’s immediate medical needs, which means line-level guards working a pod must relay any such medical issues to their ranking officer, who then decides

if or if not medical staff will be notified or summoned. Otherwise, the prisoner must submit a written sick call request to the medical department, which takes several days to be received, processed and addressed by medical staff. Garza’s situation obviously called for immediate medical resolution.

Only because he persisted to have a ranking guard summoned, did one—a sergeant Jerod Orlds—finally come to his cell, but not to address his medical issue. Instead, Orlds, under the supervision of one of Clements Unit’s most notoriously racist and abusive guards—lieutenant Janon Broom—then confronted Garza with a group of guards, had him handcuffed from behind and taken out of the pod to a holding cell. Whereupon other guards packed all of his personal belongings up and proceeded to confiscate most of it for bogus reasons.

Their intentions were obviously to retaliate against him for persisting in having a ranking guard summoned to the pod, and to provoke Garza to act out or otherwise create a pretext to set him up for a use of force; both of which are illegal.²

After all of his property was removed from the cell, Garza was brought back still handcuffed behind by a mob of guards dressed in full body riot armor, with a nurse Humper following behind them with an audio-video camera filming the situation—a blatant violation of prison security policy. Only trained security staff is to operate video equipment, especially in situations of potential or actual uses of force by guards.

As the nurse remained off to the side of the cell where he could not see or film inside the cell, the mob of guards took Garza into the back of the empty cell and had him lay face down on the floor. They proceeded to take

off his handcuffs and instructed him not to get up until all the guards had backed out of the cell and the cell door was locked, lest force be used to “control” him. This was yet another violation of Texas Department of Criminal Justice [sic!] policy (BP—03.46. Use of Force Standards), which specifically forbids guards removing a segregated prisoner’s restraints inside the cell in this manner unless they cannot be removed in the usual manner—through the hatch in the cell door—because the prisoner is combative and preventing it, which was not the case. Garza was fully compliant and calm.

The guards obviously hoped that Garza, incensed by the unjustified removal and confiscation—or literal theft—of his property, would indeed get up from the floor unrestrained and try to fight them. But, even if he didn’t, they intended to say he had. This is a common tactic used by Texas guards to speciously justify attacking prisoners, often while they’re still handcuffed. I’ve written about two such incidents. One, where a still handcuffed prisoner, Joe Laws, was stomped, beaten and literally had his teeth kicked out, and another, Dante Roberts, was beaten and stomped bloody, although he was at all times unconscious.³

After several of the guards backed out of Garza’s cell, they began yelling that he was getting up, whereupon they rushed back into the cell. What followed were clear sounds of a beating, as several guards bodily blocked the view into the cell, and the nurse stood well out of range with the camera, which was supposed to be kept trained on the prisoner at all times—indeed this is the very purpose of its presence during actual or potential uses of force.

A few minutes later Garza was brought out of the cell, handcuffed

from behind and bleeding profusely from the face and head. Surrounded by the mob of guards, he was taken out of the pod.

I and several other prisoners spoke out in protest of the assault and requested witness statements so we could record what we witnessed, to be used by Garza should he file a complaint on the abuse of force, which most prisoners don't do since nothing comes of such complaints, and abuses are covered up and condoned at all levels of authority. However, I recognize the value of creating a record of such abuses, which may be summoned for future purposes and uses in litigation, outside inquiries or investigations, etc.

After several failed attempts to threaten and intimidate us into silence, a lieutenant Quintin Wankel brought me and two other prisoners the requested witness forms, at which point Lt. Broom loudly remarked, "It won't go anywhere."

Immediately after Garza was brought out of the cell, a prisoner worker was brought in to clean and mop up the puddles of blood from the cell floor, removing the evidence of his substantial blood loss inside the cell.

It should be noted, at a time when world attention is being brought to bear on the plague of violent abuses of people of color by U.S. so-called law enforcement officials, the response of officials is that these abuses are the acts of only a handful of rogue officers and are not practiced or condoned by the overall establishment. It's a lie. Not only are such abuses common to the establishment, but the overall culture enforces the silence of those who might otherwise speak out through collectively enforced fear and retaliation. The "Blue Line."

In fact physical abuse and beatings of Texas prisoners by guards is so common that the federal courts have found a "culture of sadistic and malicious

violence" exists that involves "the seeming inability of correctional officers to keep their hands off prisoners."⁴ What's worse is since these findings, the media has reported that Texas guards "are using 'major' force against inmates more often..."⁵ In the face of such findings, on October 1, 2014 the TDCJ modified its prisoner grievance procedure to bar prisoners from filing grievances on "excessive or unnecessary" uses of force if the involved staff do not themselves first report having used such force [!].⁶ This clearly reflects not abusive conditions attributable to a handful of "dirty" guards, but a system-wide "culture" with formal policies implemented to block prisoners' ability to even file complaints that would ultimately go nowhere anyway, by officials at the highest levels of power.

What must be understood, is the police and prisons are a joint institution and body of the U.S. executive, or "law enforcement" branch of government. They practice a common culture of sadism, terrorism and brutal violence against communities of color and the poor, and share tactics between themselves. The same value system and culture that has them beating and murdering prisoners is the very one that has them doing the same on the streets to people of color and the poor. The struggle to expose and end police violence must also extend to prison abuses where this terror knows no holidays.

Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win!

All Power to the People!

Kevin Rashid Johnson's writings and artwork have been widely circulated. He is the author of a new book, *Panther Vision: Essential Party Writings and Art of Kevin "Rashid" Johnson*, Minister of Defense, New Afrikan Black Panther Party, (*Kersplebedeb*, 2010).

Write or email:

Kevin Johnson, TDCI # 01859887

Clements Unit 9601 Spur 591

Amarillo, TX 79107

krj.nabpppc@gmail.com

1 The 1948 U. N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights states at Article 4, "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms." Ironically, the U.S. drafted and ratified this treaty, yet upholds and enforces the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which authorizes slavery as criminal punishment. It states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." As to the blatant practice of slavery by the U.S. prison system, see my prior articles, "No Incarceration or Taxation Without Representation: Amerikan Slavery in the 21st Century." <http://rashidmod.com/?p=963>.

It should be noted also that the above treaty banning slavery is part of the "Supreme Law of the Land," where approved by the U.S. Senate under Article 6 of the U.S. Constitution, and otherwise under the Nuremburg Doctrine.

2 A prisoner has a protected right to receive prescribed medical care, and retaliations for seeking to have such rights protected is unlawful. See, e.g., *Thaddeus-X v. Blatter*, 175 F. 3d 378, 394 (6th Cir. 1999). Also it is a violation of the 8th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution when prison officials deliberately "provoke an incident so as to allow" them to attack a prisoner "under the guise of maintaining order or defending" themselves. *Miller v. Leathers*, 913 F. 2d 1085, 1088 (4th Cir. 1990).

3 See, Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, "The Texas Department of Cowboy Justice: A Case of Lawless Law Enforcement." <http://rashidmod.com/?p=856>, and "California Ends Solitary for Gang Validation, Texas Prisons Persist in the Abusive Practice." <http://rashidmod.com/?p=1333>

4 *Ruiz v. Johnson*, 154 F. Supp. 2d 925, 986 (S. D. Tex. 2001)

5 "Force Against Texas Inmates On the Rise," *Texas Tribune*, <http://texastribune.org/2014/04/03/force-against-texas-inmates-rise/>

6 In the TDCJ's prisoner newspaper *The Echo*, Vol. 86, No. 9 (November 2014), p. 5 it was announced that the TDCJ's Offender Grievance Operations Manual was reorganized effective October 1, 2014 in several respects, including adding that:

"Grievances that do not describe a reported use of force that was excessive or unnecessary do not warrant any further action and shall be considered not grievable."

Pick Up the Confetti

The battle to abolish solitary confinement has only begun

By JOSE H. VILLARREAL

On September 30, 2015, I was moved out of California's Pelican Bay State Prison Security Housing Unit (SHU) after nine years in the hole. My "release" from the SHU was due to the United Front that California prisoners forged in our anti-torture struggle. This relocation however has been no celebration to say the least. Solitary confinement still exists as does the unlawful dehumanization, which continues to plague the captives held in California's SHUs.

Did DRB free the slaves?

One of the things that came out of the prison struggles was that the California Department of Corrections (CDC) created a Department Review Board (DRB) which was comprised of CDC big wigs who went to the prisons in a committee to review a prisoner's file (they have since done away with the DRB), and decide if a prisoner should stay or leave the SHU.

When I went to my DRB hearing, the Director of California's Division of Adult Institutions, Susan Hubbard, began notifying me of why I was being held in the SHU (a confidential informant accused me of wrongdoing) and nonchalantly stated, "That's hearsay, so we won't use it," and let me know I was going to general population. Now, of course, I was delighted to be leaving the slave quarters behind, but it felt like I was kicked in the gut when she stated "that's hearsay," and moved on as if she was in the produce aisle of Trader Joe's and spotted baby spinach that was a bit spotty and not quite right for the day's brunch. I sat there wanting to vomit as I processed what was just said. Hearsay.

So, the near-decade that I had spent in solitary was on hearsay and this torture that I endured for nine years of my

life did not end with a "sorry," no handshake, not a shrug of embarrassment, the woman didn't even blink!

I sat there in awkward silence, almost like a session of unsatisfied sex, like showing up at a rally and I'm the only one there. Having thought that I had seen it all, being raised in California's school-to-prison pipeline, I was shocked. Before I was able to figuratively pull up my pants, I was hurried out of the room and hauled off in shackles.

As I hobbled down Pelican Bay's cold stone hallways, chains rattling around my waist, I thought of Lincoln's so-called "freeing" the slaves. Did DRB see themselves as "freeing" us SHU prisoners I thought? Upon arriving to my windowless cell I concluded that we have much in common with those newly "freed" slaves of old because now our subjugation and oppression would simply transform—change in form but not in essence.

Meet the "Security Threat Group"

The state simply changed the wording of our state sanctioned oppression. They say they did away with how they handle "prison gangs." Now they simply call gangs "Security Threat Groups." There is still SHU and solitary confinement, only now they have to use it—in most cases—in stints of five years. Most doctors agree that after ten days it amounts to cruel and unusual punishment. But what do they know?

What the doctors, bourgeois politicians, and even some activists or reformers are not talking about is how so-called "gangs" are simply a by-product of capitalism. These are youth clubs that materialize as a reaction to their own oppression. It is a defense reaction to come together with others

in the face of poverty and despair in an effort to survive. Even those who do not study political economy in a way that Marx did, to define the productive forces and class struggle, understand that they do indeed have empty hands. They realize that to survive it will take uniting with others (however their efforts are motivated by the subjective.) How could they not be when all of their lives have been saturated in capitalist propaganda, which defines what is important, what is appealing, what one should act like or whose skin we should worship?

So what is often left out of this discussion is that those of us on the bottom of the totem pole, the Chican@, the new Afrikan, the First Nations, the migrant youth survival groups are being criminalized for the social reality that capitalist Amerika has created! It's like raising a pit bull to eat raw meat all of its life and then putting it down when it bites someone. In such a situation is freedom really obtainable? If so, at what cost?



So now we're categorized as "Security Threat Groups." In today's U.S. hyper-militarized Homeland Security culture the state needs to keep the larger population feeling threatened. It's kind of like the '50s and '60s when people were scared into building bomb shelters in their homes and school kids were indoctrinated *via* crawling under their desks. Today the state uses "terrorism" and Security Threat Groups to get the larger population to sympathize with the ruling class agenda. But who do prisoners really threaten? I guess when you're brutalizing people all their lives it makes sense not wanting to go to sleep around them. But torture?

Struggle continues

I have been reading that some people are cheering for some victory concerning the struggle to end solitary confinement and close the SHUs. We

have made a step forward, but so long as one person continues to be tortured in solitary, there is no victory. Just because I was released from solitary, does not mean our struggle or my struggle, is over because we still have a SHU and many are still being tortured in those tombs. Instead of being tortured for 40-plus years, now people will be tortured for five year intervals. Should we celebrate that? It would be like a socialist saying we should celebrate because now the capitalist is only exploiting 80 percent instead of 90 percent of our labor power.

Our hunger strike of 2013 was only a small sample of where we prisoners are heading as a class. Our class struggle continues according to the natural laws of development. Our relationship as captive, tortured, exploited or oppressed people within the U.S. prison camps cannot survive without the

antagonism of classes, prisoners *vs.* the oppressor state.

Through our collective struggle in the form of the hunger strike we learned much about the importance of knowing the oppressor and we perceive that a class struggle can only be successful through unity, despite our varied political line of internal contradictions. The cadre at the helm of this beautiful current of imprisoned resistance understands that despite the many contradictions that we face, in order to nurture these lumpen developments we had to understand the difference between principle contradictions and secondary contradictions. For even the "politically enlightened" outside of prison this is easier said than done. But, in order to push forward and overcome obstacles that ultimately help imperialism, this must be done. For us castaways of capitalist society with little or no formal education and deadly histories, we were able to put our perception of this into practice.

Regardless if some of us are let out of the SHU—even the most vocal SHU writers, artists, jailhouse lawyers, *etc.*—we will not be content with *our* release. Raising awareness about SHU torture will continue to be built around the dehumanization of people by the use of solitary confinement. It is wrong in California or any other state. It is wrong for ten days or five years, and the United Front and mobilization will *not* stop until solitary confinement no longer exists!

Write to:

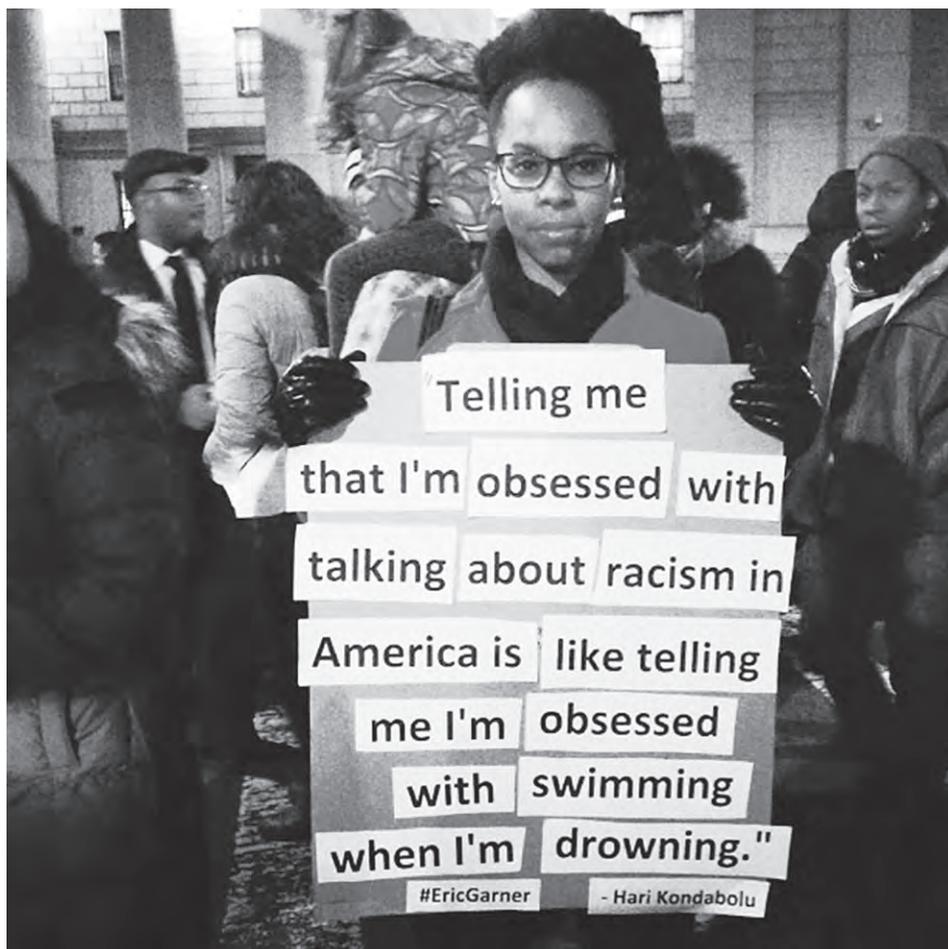
Jose H. Villarreal #H84098

PBSP – B4 - 210

P.O. Box 7500

Crescent City, CA 95532-7500

Jh Villarreal.com



Kevin Cooper Wrongly Convicted

Organization of American States human rights report calls for new examination of Cooper death row case

On September 23, 2015, attorneys for Death Row inmate Kevin Cooper announced that they will ask Governor Jerry Brown to take action to grant a new trial for Cooper in the wake of a newly released report from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). The report found multiple violations of Cooper's human rights during his prosecution, conviction and sentencing.

The 32-page IACHR report found eight separate instances of the denial of Cooper's right to due process during his trial and subsequent appeals, including evidence mishandling, evidence destruction and evidence tampering by law enforcement and the prosecution.

The IACHR also found ineffective assistance by Cooper's trial counsel, and held that Cooper was the victim of racism during evidence gathering, in his prosecution and in the imposition of the death penalty.

The report recommends that, in light of the violations, the United States "grant Kevin Cooper effective relief, including a review of his trial and sentence in accordance with the guarantees of due process and a fair trial..."

Cooper's lawyers at Orrick, Herrington and Sutcliffe LLP intend to petition Brown to grant Cooper a new trial, which will include forensic testing that has not yet been allowed by the state. Cooper was convicted of four murders in Chino Hills, but much of the evidence presented in that trial has been questioned. His case has received national attention, from newspaper editorials to a recent episode of *CNN's* "Death Row Stories."

"Before an innocent man is executed, we urge Governor Brown to take

the steps that the IACHR recommends: to review Mr. Cooper's trial and sentence," said Norman Hile, Senior Litigation Counsel at Orrick. "Mr. Cooper deserves the chance to prove that he is innocent."

Opponents of the death penalty said the IACHR findings are yet another example of the problems with the death verdict.

"These findings show how it is possible for someone to spend 30 years on California's death row longing for justice but being denied a fair hearing," said Mike Farrell, who served for ten years as Co-Chair of the California Committee of Human Rights Watch and has served more than 20 years as President of Death Penalty Focus. Farrell is an actor widely known as a star of the iconic television series *M*A*S*H*.

The IACHR's findings corroborate the conclusions of 11 judges of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in 2009, who signed dissenting opinions to the denial of Cooper's appeals. The appellate judges said that U.S. courts denied Cooper a fair opportunity to prove his innocence. The principle dissent was a lengthy opinion by federal appellate Judge William Fletcher that began: "The State of California may be about to execute an innocent man."

Legal scholars said the IACHR findings should be respected.

"It is important to the United States' credibility in North and South America, as well as to our moral and legal commitment to avoid executing an innocent person, to respect the IACHR's recommendations to grant effective relief, including a full review of Mr. Cooper's trial and sentence," said Professor Linda Carter, a criminal law

scholar and death penalty expert who teaches at University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law. "Limitations in the U.S. judicial process have precluded a full examination of these violations on Mr. Cooper's human rights."

In making its recommendations, the IACHR criticized the limitations created by a U.S. statute, the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, which according to an opinion written in Cooper's case by Ninth Circuit Judge Margaret McKeown in 2007, prevents federal judges from fully considering whether Cooper is factually innocent.

"The idea that it takes an international court to fully examine the facts of Kevin Cooper's case and demand justice for him is appalling; the fact that Kevin Cooper has been deprived of justice for three decades is an embarrassment to our courts, the State of California and our nation," Farrell added.

The IACHR report comes after a formal proceeding that lasted more than four years and included an extensive review of evidence, a full briefing by Cooper and government lawyers and a hearing before four IACHR commissioners in Washington, D.C., in October 2013.

A copy of the IACHR report can be found on line here:

<http://bit.ly/1QYdR33>

Kevin Cooper is an innocent man on San Quentin's Death Row in California. He continues to struggle for exoneration and to abolish the death penalty in the whole U.S.

Write to Kevin Cooper at:

Kevin Cooper C-65304, 4 EB 82

San Quentin State Prison

San Quentin, CA 94974

www.freekevincooper.com

Pinkney Still Behind Bars

Political prisoner Reverend Edward Pinkney marks year behind bars.

BY GERALDINE MATTHEWS

On December 14th, civil rights leader and political prisoner Reverend Edward Pinkney will have spent a year in Michigan state prison. An all-white jury convicted him of five felony counts of forgery for changing dates next to signatures on a petition drive for a recall election, though no evidence of guilt was presented. The trial was distinguished mainly by its outrageous violations of due process and constitutional rights. Judge Sterling Schrock sentenced him to 30 months to ten years and denied bond pending appeal, despite Pinkney posing no flight risk and despite the near-certainty that his conviction will be overturned on appeal. While Pinkney's appeal proceeds slowly through the grinding gears of the judicial system, he remains in the clutches of the state.

Over the past two months, the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) has attempted to intimidate him into silence and to gradually isolate him from family, friends, and supporters. This turn of events began shortly after his defense team filed his appeal brief. The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan has also filed an *amicus* brief in support of overturning the conviction. It is probably not a coincidence that Pinkney has recently endured a sudden escalation of harassment and mistreatment, now that the likely success of his appeal is apparent.

The details of Pinkney's case give us some insight into the methods by which correctional systems abuse prisoners in general, and political prisoners in particular. Indeed, in this era of racist and mass incarceration, all imprisonment is arguably political. Prisoners who engage in outspoken activism before or during incarceration are among those singled out for especially abusive treatment.

This high-profile case also demonstrates how MDOC responds to demands for truth and accountability from Pinkney supporters: typically through stonewalling and stubbornly relying on an assumption of a gullible public. While lying to the public may be the *modus operandi* for bureaucrats speaking on everything from climate change to police brutality, corrections officials seem especially prone to this strategy. By isolating prisoners and inhibiting their communication with supporters, prison officials can easily manipulate situations to avoid scrutiny and deny culpability. One MDOC official, without speaking with Pinkney, claimed to know "the facts" of the situation because she had reports in front of her—written, of course, by her colleagues in the correctional system.

Pinkney himself wrote from prison:

"I have been an eye-witness to at least five incidents where prisoners were beaten by corrections officers. The Michigan Department of Corrections has been able to dismiss the majority of allegations of abuse and misconduct by claiming that inmates lie and the correctional department always tells the truth. The privileged public believes that the prison system is doing its best to protect them. In the eyes of the public, law enforcement and corrections do not lie."

In 2013, Pinkney and fellow community organizers began a petition seeking to recall Mayor James Hightower of Benton Harbor, Michigan, who opposed an income tax that would have raised revenue from corporations for the extremely financially distressed city. In 2010, Benton Harbor became the first city in Michigan to undergo the dictatorial rule of an Emergency Financial

Manager, appointed by former Democratic governor Jennifer Granholm. Over 90 percent of Benton Harbor's residents are Black and nearly 50 percent live in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau.) Appliance giant Whirlpool Corporation is headquartered in Benton Harbor and announced record-breaking third quarter sales.

At trial in November 2014, Berrien County Prosecutor Mike Sepic failed to present any direct evidence that a crime was committed, much less that Pinkney committed a crime. Only the defense summoned testimony that a crime was committed: three witnesses testified that they saw someone else, not Pinkney, change the dates without Pinkney's knowledge. Indeed, Sepic failed to come up with even circumstantial evidence of Pinkney's guilt. Instead, Judge Sterling Schrock permitted Sepic to question Pinkney and other witnesses about their constitutionally-protected political and community organizing activities, supposedly to point towards a motive for changing the dates. It is important to note that the petition drive had sufficient signatures without the five in question, but an appellate court cancelled the recall election altogether as a result of the unresolved charges against Pinkney.

Politically motivated transfers

There can be no doubt that the prosecution was politically-motivated, intended to both derail the recall of the mayor and to intimidate Pinkney, along with all Benton Harbor activists, from engaging in legal political activity. As an attempt at further intimidation, the warrant for Pinkney's arrest on non-violent charges was delivered to his home by a SWAT team and multiple police cars driving through his

neighborhood—even though his attorney had already informed the city that Pinkney would turn himself in if warranted.

After an initial few weeks at Marquette Branch Prison in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Reverend Pinkney was housed for nearly nine months at Lakeland Correctional Facility in southern Michigan. While there, he was considered a model prisoner and was popular with many other prisoners as a prisoner rights advocate and faith leader. On September 21st, Pinkney's defense team filed for appeal of the unjust conviction, charging that his constitutional and due process rights had been violated. Two weeks later, a new order of Kafka-*esque* mistreatment began.

Pinkney was transferred from Lakeland back to Marquette Branch Prison, 480 miles from his home. Marquette is well-known among veterans of the Michigan prison system as a hardship assignment for prisoners due to its dictatorial warden (Robert Napel,) cruel guards, cold and unhealthy environmental conditions, and the domination of the prison hierarchy by white supremacist groups. Pinkney is a Black community activist who has led a David and Goliath battle against racism and corruption in the judicial and political systems of Berrien County.

After Pinkney's transfer, supporters began a call-in campaign from around the state and country to MDOC headquarters in Lansing. MDOC officials' explanations for the transfer shifted over time and strained credulity. First, they claimed the transfer was because Pinkney belonged in a "safer," lower-security, Level I facility, and so he was only temporarily housed in Level II at Lakeland. However, there are at least five other Level I facilities in southern Michigan, closer to Pinkney's wife, attorney, and supporters. What's more, Pinkney waived his right to a Level I

facility in writing because he felt much safer at Lakeland.

MDOC next claimed that Pinkney had only been housed at Lakeland for purposes of proximity to his court hearings, but as his *writ* was now finished, he was returned to Marquette where "they saved a bed for him" (as if he might fear they hadn't.) However, Pinkney had not appeared at a court hearing since April, whereas oral arguments for his appeal may be scheduled as soon as three months from now. Granted, MDOC officials do not legally need a rationale for any prisoner transfer—one more capricious form of prisoner harassment that can also place a great burden on prisoners' families.

While MDOC officials continued to obfuscate, another source with no reason to lie revealed the actual reason for Pinkney's transfer to a more remote and more dangerous location. Before the transfer, a sympathetic staff member told Pinkney that he had recently overheard other staff discussing the impending transfer. Among the phrases overheard were "we don't have any trouble with him, but they must really hate him." "We" in this context refers to the local MDOC staff. It cannot be proven exactly to whom "they" refers. However, a likely suspect would be someone who hates Pinkney to such a degree that they are willing to use political influence to exile him to Marquette for special mistreatment.

The chilling implication is that this particular transfer was politically motivated, executed by MDOC officials in Lansing but directed by the powerful political-corporate elite, driven by Whirlpool Corp., who dominate politics in southwestern Michigan. "They" do hate Pinkney with a passion. Indeed, at a county Republican meeting the county clerk and sheriff received standing ovations when they announced Pinkney's conviction. This latest conviction is not the first time Pinkney has been framed and railroaded in Berrien

County. In 2007, an all-white jury convicted him in a second trial (after a mistrial due to a hung jury) on charges related to another ballot petition. Sentenced first to house arrest, Pinkney ultimately spent a year in prison on a parole violation charge for quoting the Bible before the ludicrous charge was overturned on appeal.

It requires little imagination to picture someone in Berrien County making a back door contact with the Republican state administration and arranging for Pinkney's expedited punitive transfer to a distant prison before his appeal succeeds. However, to hear MDOC officials talk, one would think no official has ever done anything untoward in the history of Michigan corrections.

Mold exposure

On the way to Marquette, Pinkney was held in shackles that abraded his ankles until they bled. MDOC officials claim his medical record indicates no abrasions. On arrival at Marquette, he was housed in a cell so moldy he experienced dizziness, difficulty breathing, and nausea. The mold may have been toxic black mold which can cause severe, sometimes permanent health problems. While MDOC officials continue to minimize the mold issue, supporters have heard accounts of other prisoners whose health has been ruined by exposure to black mold at MDOC facilities in northern Michigan.

To be clear, Lakeland was no picnic either, but compared to Marquette, Pinkney had some measure of physical security and freedom. Other Lakeland prisoners made sure to escort him to and from the library where he helped prisoners with legal research. Soon after arrival at Marquette, prison guards began publicly belittling Pinkney in order to undermine his reputation with other prisoners. A prisoner recommended him to preach at Marquette, and the assignment was revoked at the last minute without

explanation. Guards began ridiculing him and trying to provoke him into reacting, a common strategy to give them an excuse to attack a prisoner. One guard loaned him a rule book, and then another guard accused him of stealing it. Pinkney suspects that those who hate him have placed a hit on him within the prison system and that his life is in danger.

Communication impeded, health threatened

After the transfer, Pinkney remained in daily communication with his wife and reported that the public support helped pressure officials to move him out of the moldy sleeping quarters. However, on October 23 Pinkney's phone privileges were abruptly cut without due process. He was accused of making three-way phone calls, which are a technical impossibility from prison phones, and of soliciting funds for a "business enterprise." This appears to be yet another politically-motivated frame up, since what Pinkney had actually been discussing shortly before phone privileges were

revoked was the idea of a public protest outside MDOC headquarters. Pinkney and his supporters are within their constitutional rights to plan a public protest against the agency (which happened in Lansing on November 2nd.) Prisoners also have the right to solicit funds for their own legal defense and for items for their well-being, such as food and phone calls. Pinkney continues to fight these charges while his phone use is suspended until July 2016.

On October 27th, Pinkney celebrated his 67th birthday in prison, cut off from communication with family and friends except for postal mail (he was prohibited from using the prison email system until November 26 as part of his "punishment.") For a period of time, he was confined to his cell at all times, except for meals and visitors. He alleges that even mail from his attorney was tampered with, a serious violation of attorney-client privilege. The ACLU of Michigan put MDOC on alert with a letter dated November 5th.

This steady shrinking of Pinkney's rights and liberties culminated in soli-

tary confinement in Level V (maximum security) on November 20th. Even in MDOC's biased administrative hearing system, in which prisoners fight allegations by prison staff without recourse to legal representation or other resources, the charges against Pinkney were soon thrown out. On November 25th, MDOC transferred him back to Level I, to the same sleeping quarters with black mold that impaired his health when he first arrived. He now has diagnosed high blood pressure, which he did not have before his transfer to Marquette. MDOC medical staff check his blood pressure once weekly.

What were these charges, allegedly so serious that Pinkney had to be segregated from the prison population in maximum security and isolated from all visitors? A supporter, David Sole, visited him on the evening of the 20th and took notes in order to remember details about steps for publicizing Pinkney's case and building public support. A guard kept close watch on the conversation (other prisoners and visitors were not so closely monitored.) As he was exiting the prison, a guard confiscated Sole's notes. Pinkney was arrested and segregated in solitary confinement. When Sole attempted to visit the next evening, he was confronted in the parking lot by an Officer Johnson and informed that Pinkney could receive no visitors due to allegedly attempting to "smuggle information to his wife." When Sole pointed out that it was he who had written the notes and pocketed them, not Pinkney, Johnson shouted at him to leave prison property immediately. Johnson refused to disclose his badge number.

On his release, Pinkney called the punishment "a power move" by MDOC. Perhaps it was in retribution for the press conference Sole organized with local media earlier on the 20th, including an interview that aired on TV news. MDOC officials claimed to the media that Pinkney had filed no



Reverend Pinkney

grievances and was subject to the same rules and treatment as other prisoners. In actuality, Pinkney filed a step I grievance protesting the suspension of his phone privileges and when that grievance was denied, MDOC disallowed him from filing a step II grievance. Pinkney calls the grievance process “a joke.”

Some of Pinkney’s treatment by MDOC falls within the picture of the arbitrary and casual cruelty inflicted on all prisoners. Pinkney himself stresses this point. In the early 1990s, he led a campaign against mistreatment of Black inmates in the city jail in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In 1999, he served several months in prison for a flimsy embezzlement conviction involving less than \$150 (Pinkney claimed innocence, but was manipulated by his attorney into pleading guilty.) In prison, he underwent a spiritual experience and emerged an aspiring pastor and an even more dedicated activist for racial and social justice in his home community of Benton Harbor. He organized his community to target racism and oppression in police, judicial, economic, and political systems. For over a decade, he served as court watcher nearly every day Berrien County court was in session, witnessing and documenting injustice and leading a weekly march on the courthouse.

Even from prison, he helps fellow prisoners with legal research, helps them voice their causes through BANCO’s (Black Autonomy Network Community Organization of Benton Harbor, Michigan) blog¹, and organizes for prisoners’ basic rights and dignity. He frequently reminds his supporters, “We have to keep fighting, because this is bigger than me. This is about what they can do to all prisoners.”

In this era of mass incarceration, where the United States houses white prisoners at rates two to six times the total rates in Western European countries, and six times as many Black pris-

oners as whites, all prisons, all imprisonment, and all prisoners are political. Prison serves multiple roles in this politico-economy, including low- or no-cost labor, diversion of masses of unemployed people, pork-barrel employment projects for white rural communities where many prisons are housed, profit for privately-owned prison service industries, and, last but not least, intimidation and social control through fear, violence, and repression.

in this era of racist and mass incarceration, all imprisonment is arguably political. Prisoners who engage in outspoken activism before or during incarceration are among those singled out for especially abusive treatment.

Those imprisoned for their political activity are victims of counter-insurgency strategies specifically intended to crush organized efforts to fight back against the political, economic, social, law enforcement, and judicial systems that already trap so many Black, brown, and poor people. In the U.S., the dominant narrative claims that there are no political prisoners here; that they only exist in countries like China, countries, which should be sternly reprimanded for their human rights violations. In reality, the U.S. has many imprisoned for their political activity, most famously Mumia Abu-Jamal and Leonard Peltier, both people of color, both framed for murder, both decades into life sentences, and both suffering health problems.

Reverend Pinkney stands as the most glaring example of imprisonment for political activity in Michigan, and possibly in the Midwest. As civil rights attorney Hugh “Buck” Davis put it, “Given the thousands of irregularities in election petitions in Michigan every year, it’s clear that this is political prosecution in retaliation for successful community and electoral organizing. Two-and-a-half to ten years? He’s a political prisoner.” With a false conviction and denial of bond pending appeal, his legal case represents a miscarriage of justice. The harassment and abuse he continues to suffer in MDOC custody reflects the kind of torture to which many prisoners are routinely subjected in the U.S.

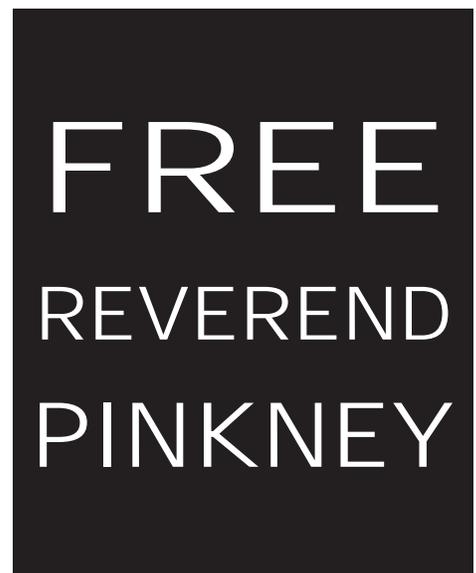
And the indomitable Pinkney’s latest message? “I am doing great. WE ARE WINNING THIS BATTLE.”

Geraldine Matthews is an activist in Michigan.

—*Black Agenda Report*, December 21, 2015

http://blackagendareport.com/rev_edward_pinkney_political_prisoner

¹ <http://www.bhbanco.org/>



The Refugee Crisis

We must not let ISIS's crimes dictate how we address the refugee crisis—or privacy.

BY CHELSEA E MANNING

Following the horrific attacks by ISIS terrorists in Paris and Beirut, we have rapidly seen blatant pandering to xenophobia on a disturbing scale and scope. Leaders throughout the U.S. and Europe have demanded that authorities stifle the flow of migrants seeking asylum, and to increase the size and depths of intelligence and law enforcement powers in the U.S. and Europe.

I don't have all the answers—but I do know that blaming minority groups, refugees and immigrants, investing in gigantic surveillance platforms and calling for expansive legal authority and the creation of a neo-Gestapo and panopticon-style police state aren't one of them.

Even in the weeks and months before the attacks, rightwing parties in Europe—most notably the National Front in France—have attempted to exploit a rising xenophobic sentiment following this year's influx of migrants seeking refuge from Syria, Iraq and other parts of the Middle East. Immediately following the attacks such fears have “gone viral” in a way that is disturbing and frightening.

In Canada, the plans to exclude unaccompanied male refugees from resettlement make me fear—in addition to the broader problems of severing young people from their existing support systems—for those queer and transgender folk who are fleeing from being hunted down and murdered indiscriminately.

In the U.S., federal lawmakers and dozens of state governors have called for the U.S. to stem the flow of those seeking asylum from Syria, culminating in the quick passage of legislation in the U.S. House making the approval of Syrian refugees into the U.S. administratively difficult, if not impossible—

even though approvals of such refugees numbered less than 1,700 in 2014.

The CIA director, James Brennan, described the ongoing controversy over the intelligence communities' mass surveillance and bulk record collection of U.S. citizens and non-citizens as “a lot of hand-wringing over the government's role in the effort to try to uncover these terrorists.”

However, what the intelligence community and law enforcement authorities in the United States and Europe failed to acknowledge is the fact that even before and following the attacks in Paris and Beirut, none of their agencies had lost any of the capabilities that they had previously or that the reformed USA Freedom Act had not even taken effect.

The demands for more power by the powerful were described by Naomi's Klein “Shock Doctrine” principle: people and organizations often exploit crises in order to justify seizures of power to meet their own political and economic ends. The inevitable xenophobic and pro-surveillance responses of the U.S., EU and Canadian governments were likely, as other analysts have pointed out, part of the strategy calculated by the very organization (ISIS) that perpetrated the ghastly atrocities.

The leaders of ISIS are canny strategists with a solid understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the west. They expect politicians and military leaders in the U.S. and Europe—particularly in the case of France and the United Kingdom—to overreact in response to successful attacks in the U.S. and Europe and territorial gains in Iraq and Syria, and they use those responses to recruit Europeans and Americans in their call to arms.

Like many other attacks, the attacks in Paris were tragic, horrific and coldly calculated. They may or may not have been preventable—it's simply far too soon to know, assuming that we ever will. However, stoking the fears about a shadowy wave of terrorists coming from everywhere that there is warfare and strife is a disturbing, alienating and disproportionate response.

The people of France were the ones who delivered the Statue of Liberty to the U.S. nearly a century-and-a-half ago. Beside the statue for many years was a massive immigration station on Ellis Island. Describing the site of the statue as it was erected, the American poet Emma Lazarus wrote that the statue silently demands:

Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

It is a poem that defines America—and we and the EU would do well to remember it, especially in such turbulent times.

—*The Guardian*, November 25, 2015

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/25/dot-let-isis-crimes-dictate-how-address-refugee-crisis-privacy>

FREE
CHELSEA
MANNING

Overtured

After 25 years, John Hincapie is freed

BY LORENZO JOHNSON

The nightmare that John Hincapie had to endure lasted for a quarter century. It all started when he was 17-years-old, when the police beat a false confession out of him regarding a high-profile murder that took place in a New York City subway. The victim was a tourist from Utah by the name of Brian Watkins.

I came to know about Mr. Hincapie's injustice through a mutual friend and exoneree, Jeffrey Deskovic. Our families met at rallies against wrongful convictions where they were advocating for our release. Hincapie's mother, father, brother, and the rest of his family never gave up on their fight to prove his innocence. Wrongful convictions are a plague that has been eating away at our judicial system for a long time. The problem needs to be eradicated from top to bottom.

There are many different ways that people fight wrongful convictions. We all know that one place to fight is in the courtroom. Only a judge can vacate a false conviction or order a new trial. Besides the courtroom, we now bring our nightmares to the attention of society, through rallies, documentaries, books, social media, and other avenues. Some people disagree with these tactics—especially the prosecutors who don't want these injustices brought to light. But members of the judicial system should not be outraged that we are speaking out. Instead, they should be outraged about what went wrong with the system in the first place. This is a topic that many do not want to talk about.

Upon Mr. Hincapie's request, The Jeffrey Deskovic Foundation for Justice agreed to assist him. During a chance meeting when Deskovic was the keynote speaker at the Hudson Link College Graduation at Fishkill

Correctional Facility, Mr. Hincapie explained that he already had attorney Ron Kuby representing him and that he had retired N.Y. Parole Commissioner Bob Dennison and William Hughes doing the investigation work, but needed some help on peripheral matters. Undoing a wrongful conviction takes a total team effort, and all levels of assistance make a difference.

The Deskovic Foundation assisted by getting additional media coverage, frequently enabling Hincapie's mother to speak at press conferences and rallies pertaining to wrongful convictions. They also arranged side interviews and mobilized supporters to attend court hearings, which demonstrated that society was paying attention to the case. Deskovic himself attended hearings as a visual reminder of wrongful convictions: Deskovic and Hincapie were both teenage victims of police fabricated confessions.

On October 6, 2015, after a quarter of a century, Mr. Hincapie had his day in court—this time with the proper representation and support system in place. His attorney, Mr. Kuby, was able to present the new evidence that supported Hincapie's innocence and to present witnesses who could expose what the police had long suppressed—the truth. The prosecution tried to discredit Hincapie's claims but, on this day, his stars were finally aligned. The judge stated that Mr. Hincapie deserves a new trial and ordered his release from prison.

I placed a call to Jeffrey Deskovic, who was present with the Hincapie family. He passed the phone to John Hincapie's father, Carlos, who knew about my wrongful conviction from meeting my wife and family at prior rallies. I congratulated him and his family on their long-overdue win. Mr. Carlos said to me: "It's been a long

time coming, today is a good day. Lorenzo, your time is coming."

As he was telling me this, tears of joy ran from my eyes for him and his family. I had a lump in my throat with a heavy heart. Why? I was living out a victory through John Hincapie. When one innocent prisoner is released, we all rejoice in it, hoping that we will be next.

John Hincapie was released from prison on Tuesday, October 6, 2015, at around 6:40 in the evening. He said: "Shame on those individuals who did this to me. But, I forgive them."

This is just another testament to the record number of exonerated prisoners—a number, which is still climbing. With all the exonerations that have been taking place in New York, you would think that the police departments would be required to videotape interrogations, but this is not the case. Currently, New York state law does not require video-recorded police interviews, and there is no plan to change that. How long do innocent prisoners and our families have to suffer before change comes? Or is change ever going to come?

—Free Lorenzo Johnson, November 24, 2015

FreeLorenzoJohnson.org

Write to:

Lorenzo Johnson DF 1036

SCI Mahanoy

301 Morea Road

Frackville, PA 17932

LorenzoJohnson17932@gmail.com

www.FreeLorenzoJohnson.org

Sign his petition and learn more at:

<http://www.freelorenzojohnson.org/sign-the-petition.html>

www.twitter.com/FreeRenz

Contribute to Lorenzo Johnson's campaign for freedom through JPAY.com code: Lorenzo Johnson DF 1036 PA DOC

Truthdig, and Socialist Viewpoint

Reply to Chris Hedges, "What it Means to be a Socialist." *Socialist Viewpoint*, Vol. 15, No. 6

Dear Comrades,

Amidst Chris Hedges' many best-selling books and numerous articles, we have his "What It Means to be a Socialist," on *Truthdig* and in *Socialist Viewpoint* for November-December 2015. Here we have a perspective on Hedges' philosophy and perspective as a socialist. This is an important contribution among the many radical muckrakers and leftist critics and journalists who currently expose the crimes and contradictions of capitalism and imperialism. Hedges is in the forefront of these efforts.

Problem is however, Hedges' claims to be presenting a socialist analysis of how to change the system fall way short, and exhibit contradictions.

Hedges' article focuses primarily on what it truly means to be a socialist, with an antiwar perspective front and center. I was thrown off at first by his initial statement that, "all socialists are unequivocal anti-militarists and anti-imperialists," which flies in the face of reality. Soon, however, Hedges clarifies this, and waxes eloquent on why "socialists," such as Bernie Sanders, for instance, are not real socialists, due to, in Sanders' case, his support for the Obama administration's wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. "You cannot be a socialist and an imperialist," counters Hedges. That takes out almost all so-called "socialists." Nevertheless, good, so far.

But Hedges fails to deal at all with the question of how Sanders' (and others') version of "socialism" came to be, and how that relates to the question of replacing capitalism with socialism, which for revolutionary socialists is, axiomatically, the biggest of the big

questions. First and foremost, Hedges completely ignores the critical and historically-determined difference between so-called "socialism" and communism.

This starts with the fact that originally...there was no such difference!

Before the "Great War" (World War I,) socialism and communism were different words for the same thing: the overthrow of capitalism, and the establishment of the working class in power, which would soon produce a classless society based on the principle of "from each according to ability, and to each according to need." Exploitation of labor, and imperialist war, would be abolished, and the state—the instrument of ruling class power—would eventually wither away. It would take a struggle for power and a revolution to accomplish this. Karl Marx, author of the *Communist Manifesto*, was a principal leader of the Socialist Second International, which brought socialist parties around the world together in one formation. The Second International of social-democratic parties was, in pronouncement at least, decidedly opposed to imperialist war... until 1914, that is.

The onset of World War I revealed the weaknesses that lurked within the social-democracy. Reformism, and the desire to preserve itself and its institutions within capitalist society, had corrupted the Second International. The vote in favor of war credits by the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in parliament in August 1914, together with similar actions by socialist parties throughout Europe, was a defining betrayal. It has led to the pitiful decline, and formal abandonment of Marxism by the German SPD and other "socialist" parties today. Communism, represented by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the Third (Communist) International—a continuity now carried forward by Trotskyists—became

the true representation of Marx's revolutionary socialism.

Chris Hedges: Are you aware of this crucial history of socialism and communism? Of course you are. Yet you have chosen to align yourself with the worst, most reformist and anti-communist "tradition" of the Social Democracy, by proclaiming that, "it is not our job to take power. It is our job to build movements to keep power in check."

What is this if not a repeat of the philosophy of Eduard Bernstein, the German Social-Democrat who wrote, *Evolutionary Socialism* (1899), and advocated reforming capitalism as the "socialist" path. He said (paraphrasing), that the movement is everything, and the end goal is nothing. Although he was denounced by the SPD leadership, Bernstein's reformist proscription was ultimately the defining characteristic of official "socialism," as well as the reason for its endorsement of imperialist war in 1914, and its subsequent decline into political irrelevance.

Chris Hedges: where does all this leave you? You say that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal was put in place "because socialists were a strong and serious threat." You quote Roosevelt saying that "...it is time for the country to become fairly radical for at least one generation. History shows that where this occurs occasionally, nations are saved from revolution." One waits expectantly for your revolutionary alternative to this miserably tepid prescription for the temporary "reform" of capitalism...in vain. There is none. In fact, although you admit that there are "no mechanisms to institute genuine reform...left within the structures of power," you explicitly renounce any struggle for power by the working class. Eduard Bernstein could not have said it better.

Chris Hedges: toward the end of your piece, you list 27 items marked as "If you do not do this, you are not a

socialist,” including such items as, nationalizing public utilities, railroads and banks; declaring a moratorium on foreclosures and bank repossessions; demilitarization of police; abolishing the for-profit arms industry: and, perhaps most importantly, prosecuting “those leaders, including George W. Bush and Barack Obama, who engage in acts of pre-emptive war, which under post-Nuremberg laws is a criminal act.” And you say, “if you will not demand we dismantle our military establishment...you are not a socialist.”

Chris Hedges: Just how do you suppose that “we” can accomplish all these things without taking power in our own name, as revolutionary working people? Can we do it by electing some reformist politician? Ha! The political system in this country, as in all capitalist so-called “democracies,” is rigged, as you admit.

And what do you mean by “our” military establishment anyway? It is not “ours;” it belongs lock stock and barrel to the bourgeois ruling class, and it is there for enforcing their interests and repressing us, full stop. They are the ones that “we,” the working class, must overthrow in order to accomplish your 27 demands.

But then, you are not for overthrowing anybody, are you: you are for reforms that may last for one generation at best, like those of that “socialist” (read bourgeois aristocrat) Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Chris Hedges: You have done much good work in exposing the crimes of the capitalist/imperialist system. Now it is time for you pony up to the reality of what we really need to do to get rid of it.

Comradely, Chris Kinder

Dear Editors,

Those terrible terrorists are killing our soldiers in their countries and killing us here at home. How can we stop them?

The answer is simple: Stop terrorizing them. We started this war. What we do to others comes back on us.

In the late 1940s the USA and Britain pressured the United Nations into confiscating Arab land to form the state of Israel, making the Arabs pay for the crimes of the Germans. They wanted Israel as a forward base for dominating the resources of the Middle East.

In the early 1950s the USA and Britain overthrew the government of Iran because it tried to nationalize its oil industry, which was under Western control. We installed the Shah as dictator, and he promptly gave the oil back to us. Then he began a 25-year reign of terror against his own people. His secret police jailed, tortured, or killed hundreds-of-thousands of Iranians who opposed him. Since they knew he was kept in power only by American military aid, they began hating the USA.

In the mid 1950s Egypt decided to nationalize the Suez Canal and use the income from it to help their people out of poverty. They were willing to pay its British and French owners the full market value for their shares, but Western governments and Israel responded violently, invading and bombing Egypt into submission.

Countries have the right to nationalize their resources as long as they pay a fair compensation, so what Iran and Egypt wanted to do was legal. The Western response, though, was illegal aggression in violation of international law and the United Nations charter. It roused in its victims a deep resolve for revenge.

The West has committed similar atrocities in Syria, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Indonesia. We’ve overthrown their governments, installed dictators, undermined their economies—all to strengthen our business interests. In every nation where we now have terrorism, we had first assaulted them. We are under attack only because we are on the attack. It’s

no wonder they hate us. Imagine how we would feel if a foreign country was doing this to us. We’d be fighting back any way we could.

Since they don’t have our military power, they’re resorting to guerrilla warfare. As Mike Davis wrote, “The car bomb is the poor man’s air force.” The rich have Stealth bombers, the poor have Toyota Corollas, both filled with explosives. The bombers are much bigger and kill many more people. Since 9-11 the USA has killed over three-hundred-thousand—a hundred times more than died in the World Trade Center. The overwhelming majority have been civilians. We are the top terrorists, armed to the teeth with weapons of mass destruction. As Martin Luther King stated: “The greatest purveyor of violence in the world today is my own government.”

Our politicians and media have created an image of fiendish terrorists who “hate us for our freedom.” But they really hate us for subjugating them. Since we started the aggression, the attacks won’t end until we leave their countries.

Even fanatics like al-Qaeda and ISIS are fighting a defensive war, trying to force us out. The Western media never publish their demands because they are so reasonable. They basically come down to, “Go home and leave us alone. Pull your soldiers, your CIA agents, your missionaries, your corporations out of Muslim territory. If you do that, we’ll stop attacking you.” Nothing about destroying the West or forcing it to become Islamic. Just that the West should stay in the West.

If people knew this—knew how easy it would be to stop terrorism—they wouldn’t want to fight this war. That’s why the media ignore the fundamentalist’s demands. Western leaders don’t want people to see that the war’s real purpose isn’t to stop terrorism but to control the resources of this region. They actually want the terrorism

because that gives them the excuse they need—the threat of an evil enemy.

As Hermann Goering, Hitler's assistant, declared: "Naturally the common people don't want war.... But...it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship.... All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country."

Goering was right about the democracies that existed both then and now. In these, the people's influence in politics is limited to ensure that only pro-capitalist parties have a chance. Corporate financing, winner-take-all elections, ballot-access laws, and slanted media coverage effectively exclude alternatives. Democracy means power is in the hands of the people. But the real power in our society—economic power—remains firmly in the hands of the rich elite, enabling them to control politics—and us—to a large degree.

Capitalism is always at war. The violence, though, is often abstract: forcing us either to accept low-paying, exhausting jobs or starve; denying us adequate healthcare, education, and economic security; convincing us that human beings are basically isolated, autonomous units seeking self gratification. But when this doesn't suffice to keep their profits growing, the violence becomes physical, the cannons roar, and the elite rally us to war to defend "our" country and destroy the fiendish enemy. Motivating us to kill and die for them requires a massive propaganda campaign—The West is under attack!—which we absorb whenever we turn on their media.

Why do they do this? Are they monsters?

No, they're not. They're just human beings who are products of an inhuman system which they have chosen to

serve rather than change. Capitalism is inherently predatory, so predatory personalities rise to the top. Since it demands aggressive growth, they must either dominate or go under.

The drive for domination is the root cause of war, and until we eliminate it, we're going to continue killing one another. Eliminating it requires a global struggle to bring down capitalism and replace it with socialism. Political democracy must be expanded and extended into the economic sphere. We, the people of the world, have to take control of the forces that shape our lives. This is the basis for building a society in which we can all fully develop as human beings. Once we achieve this, we'll have a real chance for lasting peace.

We can do this! It's no more difficult than other evolutionary challenges humanity has mastered.

—William T. Hathaway

Dear Editors,

I write to express my deep sadness and heartfelt sympathy and solidarity with the French and Lebanese peoples in the wake of the awful and indiscriminate attacks by Daesh (Islamic State) extremists that killed so many innocent people in Paris and Beirut. My thoughts are with all the families of those who lost loved ones and those who were injured. But these are not the only innocent people suffering such ordeals. And the Daesh or IS group are not the only immoral and evil forces at work in the world carrying out horrific massacres and other abuses. I'm also very mindful and offer my utmost support to the brave brothers and sisters, Kurds, Syrians, Iraqis, Yazidis, Palestinians, Armenians, among others engaged in fighting these same cruel fascists of Daesh who are still massacring and repressing people (mostly Muslims, but also Christians and others) in Iraq and

Syria. And I want to express my solidarity with others enduring war, terror and resisting oppression. Unlike some in the Western countries, I do not forget or neglect the fact that there are other courageous peoples in Palestine, Syria, Turkey and elsewhere also struggling for freedom, human rights and self-determination against vicious, fascist regimes that have imposed brutal occupations, ethnic cleansing, appalling atrocities and tyranny on them. I grieve for the hundreds and thousands killed in these conflicts, for the many hurt, the millions of terrorized and displaced refugees and salute those continuing to struggle, sacrifice and refusing to give up their quest for justice.

—Steven Katsineris

Save Ashraf Fayadh, Palestinian poet sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia.

Dear Editors,

Ashraf Fayadh, Palestinian refugee poet and artist living in Saudi Arabia, has been sentenced to death by a Saudi court, on charges of apostasy or abandoning his faith in Islam. The charges appear to be based on his poetry and writing and also maybe a form of retaliation for posting an online video showing Saudi religious police lashing a man in public.

Fayadh is a Palestinian refugee who was born in Saudi Arabia and has become a leading member of the young Saudi art scene. He was arrested in January 2014, his identity documents confiscated, and held for a lengthy period without charge. He was then sentenced to four years in prison and 800 lashes; after he appealed; he was re-tried last month and sentenced to death. He did not have legal representation.

Fayadh is being sentenced to death after having been jailed for more than 22 months in the Saudi city of Abha without clear legal charges beyond



“insulting the Godly self” and having “ideas that do not suit the Saudi society.” These charges are based on the complaint of a reader’s interpretation of Fayadh’s 2008 poetry collection titled, *Instructions Within*.

“According to Fayadh’s friends, when the police failed to prove that his poetry was atheist propaganda, they began berating him for smoking and having long hair,” reported the *Guardian*. Fayadh said his poetry book, *Instructions Within*, is “just about me being [a] Palestinian refugee...about cultural and philosophical issues. But the religious extremists explained it as destructive ideas against God.”

This is not the first time that Saudi authorities have arrested Ashraf Fayadh. The poet was detained before after a Saudi citizen filed a complaint with the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice accusing Fayadh of having “misguided and misguiding thoughts.” Fayadh was bailed out of jail at the time, only to get arrested again. According to sources close to Fayadh, the poet has been denied both visitation and legal representation rights.

Amnesty International stated, “We condemn these acts of intimidation targeting Ashraf Fayadh as part of a wider campaign inciting hate against

writers and using Islam to justify oppression and to crush free speech. We express our solidarity with Fayadh, hoping to increase support for the poet as well as pressure to release him. Our efforts should come together to ensure the proliferation of free speech and personal freedoms. We specifically call on Saudi intellectuals to express solidarity with Fayadh against Takfir’s intimidation practices meant to silence poets, writers, and artists like him. Let the flag of creativity fly free and remain innovative. Remaining silent towards Fayadh’s detention is an insult to knowledge, literature, culture, and thought as well as to freedom and human rights.”

Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network joins the call for the immediate freedom of Ashraf Fayadh. His imprisonment, persecution and death sentence by the Saudi regime reflects the deeply reactionary and far-right role played by the Saudi regime in the region—alongside its close imperial partners in the United States, Canada and Europe—that threatens Palestinian and Arab culture, life, and movements and works to block and suppress any struggle for liberation.

One hundred Arab intellectuals have called for Fayadh’s release and so far over 10, 000 people have signed an AI petition to save his life. Please sign and share the petition. https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/Amnesty_international_Save_the_palestinian_poet_and_artist_Ashraf_Fayadh/?tUPvwdb

To take further action:

1. Call the Saudi Embassy in your area and demand freedom for Ashraf Fayadh. In the United States, call 202-342-3800. In Canada, call 613-237-4100. Find the embassy in your country here: <http://embassy.goabroad.com/embassies-of/saudi-arabia>

2. Protest at the Saudi Embassy in your area for freedom for Ashraf Fayadh. Print signs and materials, and gather outside the Saudi embassy with Palestine rights activists, artists and

others to demand his freedom. See the list of Saudi embassies here: <http://embassy.goabroad.com/embassies-of/saudi-arabia>

3. Contact your government officials. The Saudi regime is a close partner of the United States, Canada and various European governments. Demand that your government pressure the Saudi regime to release Fayadh. In Canada, Call the office of the Foreign Minister, Stéphane Dion, at 613-996-5789 and demand Canada pressure Saudi Arabia to release Fayadh, or email: stephane.dion@parl.gc.ca. In the U.S., call the White House (202-456-1111) and the U.S. State Department (202-647-9572); demand the U.S. pressure Saudi Arabia to release Fayadh. In the EU, contact your Member of the European Parliament—you can find your MEP here:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/map.html>

Please also write letters, Facebook posts, emails or send Facebook messages to your local politicians, newspapers and friends to publicize this dire case and spread the information about the situation of Ashraf Fayadh.

—Steven Katsineris

*Information from Amnesty International, Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network and AVAAZ.



SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT

Where to find us:

www.socialistviewpoint.org

info@socialistviewpoint.org

(415) 824-8730

EDITORS

Carole Seligman, Bonnie Weinstein

GRAPHIC & WEB DESIGN

Mykael

BUSINESS MANAGER

Carole Seligman

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Note to Readers:

Socialist Viewpoint magazine has been edited and distributed by a group of revolutionaries who share a common political outlook stemming from the old Socialist Workers Party of James P. Cannon, and Socialist Action from 1984 through 1999.

After being expelled from Socialist Action in 1999, we formed Socialist Workers Organization in an attempt to carry on the project of building a nucleus of a revolutionary party true to the historic teachings and program of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky.

What we have found is that our numbers are insufficient for this crucial project of party building. This problem is not ours alone; it is a problem flowing from the division and fragmentation that has plagued the revolutionary movement in capitalist America and the world since the 1980s.

What we intend to do is to continue to promote the idea of building a revolutionary Marxist working class political party through the pages of *Socialist Viewpoint* magazine. We continue to have an optimistic outlook about the revolutionary potential of the world working class to rule society in its own name—socialism. We are optimistic that the working class, united across borders, and acting in its own class interests can solve the devastating crises of war, poverty, oppression, and environmental destruction that capitalism is responsible for.

We expect that revolutionaries from many different organizations, traditions, and backgrounds will respond to the opportunities that will arise, as workers resist the attacks of the capitalist system and government, to build a new revolutionary political party. Just as we join with others to build every response to war and oppression, we look forward to joining with others in the most important work of building a new mass revolutionary socialist workers' party as it becomes possible to do so.

**NO CHILD SHOULD
EVER BE SENTENCED
TO DIE IN PRISON**



**FREE
KERRY
SHAKABOONA
MARSHALL**

Kerry Shakaboona Marshall has been serving a life sentence since 1988, when he was 17 years old. It's time to end mandatory minimum life sentences for minors in Pennsylvania.

Shakaboona, 8th grade, by Robin Markle, Philadelphia artist for social change. Follow her work at www.robinmarkle.com.

Kerry Shakaboona Marshall (BE-7826) is one of the 500 youth in the state of Pennsylvania who received mandatory LIFE sentences with total disregard of the youth's mental capacity, education, and any emotional and physical trauma they'd encountered.

He is now 45 years old and, against all odds, has matured into a humane and conscious individual. He is the editor of the Human Rights Coalition's news magazine, *The Movement*. He is a Prison Radio correspondent and you may hear his commentaries online at *Prisonradio.org*. He serves on the Project Advisory Board of *The Real Coast of Prisons Project*.

Your donations will provide a re-sentencing defense team of experienced individuals that will seek his immediate parole release as no child deserves to DIE in prison.



Box A, Bellefonte, PA 16823

Donate Now!

Please donate by check or money order payable to: **Patricia Vickers** and mail to:
Campaign for Shakaboona
C/O Human Rights Coalition
4134 Lancaster Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Please note all donations in any denomination are appreciated.

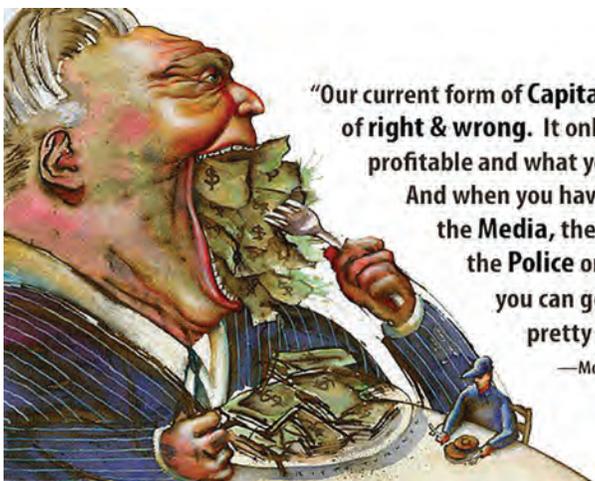
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**Thank
you!!**

FREE KERRY SHAKABOONA MARSHALL



**ARE YOU the
SAME person
you were at 17?**



"Our current form of Capitalism has no concept of right & wrong. It only recognizes what is profitable and what you can get away with. And when you have the Government, the Media, the Military, and the Police on your payroll, you can get away with pretty much anything."

—Modern American Proverb



US drone operators refer to children that appear on their screens as “fun-sized terrorists”. Read *Fun-Sized Terrorists* on page 35.

On the Front Cover: ►
Syrian refugees struggle for food, clothing and other items. (Photo/Lynsey Addario) Read *What is the “War on Terror?” And How to Fight It* on page 3.



Palestinians routinely executed at Israeli checkpoints. Read *Checkpoint Violence: Blood and Occupation* on Page 20.



A coal cutter in Britain. (Photo/National Coal Mining Museum for England) Read *Green Struggle* on page 44.