The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. —Karl Marx
U.S. aggression against Iran threatens to begin yet another disastrous, bloody war. The people of the world must fight back and demand: No war on Iran!

On Saturday, January 25, actions across the world will oppose a new war in West Asia. Now is the time for all those opposed to war to speak up.

Initiators for this call include United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), the International Action Center, ANSWER Coalition, CODEPINK, Popular Resistance, Black Alliance for Peace, National Iranian-American Council (NIAC), Veterans For Peace, U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW), Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Pastors for Peace/Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), International Workers Solidarity Network, United For Peace and Justice, FIRE (Fight for Im/migrants and Refugees Everywhere), Alliance For Global Justice (AFGJ), December 12th Movement, World Beyond War, Peoples Opposition to War Imperialism and Racism (POWIR), Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Dominican Sisters/ICAN, Nonviolence International, No War on Venezuela, Food Not Bombs, and many other antiwar and peace organizations.

Socialist Viewpoint urges our readers to participate in all protest demonstrations and actions to stop this war and get U.S. troops, bases, and weaponry out of the entire Middle East.

Please join: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScNrfCDr9uilSQtUvnbcxNiaC29QwMnEqVPiPFane8k-tEqA/viewform
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In a December 9, 2019 *New York Times* article by Sarah Almukhtar and Rod Nordland titled, “What Did the U.S. Get for $2 Trillion in Afghanistan?”:

“The Taliban are gaining strength. Opium production has quadrupled. Osama bin Laden is dead. Most Afghans live in Poverty...More than 2,400 American soldiers and more than 38,000 Afghan civilians have died. ...the cost of nearly 18 years of war in Afghanistan will amount to more than $2 trillion dollars.”

And according to the *Watson Institute Costs of War*, U.S. military emissions since the beginning of the Global War on Terror in 2001 has produced “1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gasses.”

These figures are a drop in the bucket if you consider the human and environmental costs of the U.S.’s massive war industry and trillions of dollars necessary to keep the threat of the destruction of the planet for profit on the agenda.

War is a top priority of capital. The U.S. war machine is the most profitable industry in the world.

In a February 21, 2019 *USA Today* article by Samuel Stebbins and Evan Coman titled, “Military Spending: 20 Companies Profiting the Most from War.”

“...the United States is the world’s largest defense spender by a wide margin. ...The United States’ position as the top arms-producing nation in the world remains unchanged, and for now unchallenged. ...The United States is home to five of the world’s ten largest defense contractors, and American companies account for 57 percent of total arms sales by the world’s 100 largest defense contractors.... Maryland-based Lockheed Martin, the largest defense contractor in the world, is estimated to have had $44.9 billion in arms sales in 2017 through deals with governments all over the world. The company drew public scrutiny after a bomb it sold to Saudi Arabia was dropped on a school bus in Yemen, killing 40 boys and 11 adults. Lockheed’s revenue from the U.S. government alone is well more than the total annual budgets of the IRS and the Environmental Protection Agency, combined.”

Life in service to the war machine of capital

The commanders of capital protect their wealth through the threat of war. They not only protect themselves through war but enrich themselves as well—all by utilizing our labor and our lives to accommodate their rule by threat of death over us.

But, what about us? How are we, the toilers, faring under the rule of profit for the few above all else?

In an October 27, 2019 *Alliance for Sustainable Communities* article by Elizabeth Oram, titled, “Dollar Meals and Diabetes,” (also appearing in this issue of *Socialist Viewpoint*):

“Public health indicators between the rich and the poor continue to diverge, but now it is chronic illness, not infection, that is the killer. Insidious and poorly understood biologic processes are driving accelerating rates of cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes. And, like the infectious pandemics of the 18th and 19th centuries, these illnesses claim more victims among the poor. ...The number of people diagnosed with diabetes has skyrocketed since 1980, increasing more than fourfold. The global prevalence has doubled. ...when we analyze maps
of diabetes incidence, it is zip code, not genetic code, that appears to confer risk."

Our health is the “collateral damage” of capital’s quest for profits. The food industry also targets the health of the poor because they, along with the medical insurance and pharmaceutical industries, profit off of our illnesses caused by the poverty and pollution capitalism creates:

“The modern western diet is high in sugar, denatured white flour, vegetable oils, and meat; it is low in fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains. More importantly, it is spiked with hidden sugar and fats, highly processed, and laced with chemicals to make it feel good in your mouth. … The tax-subsidized food industry spends billions on saturation marketing, chemical flavor manipulation, and portion creep—this expenditure has been highly effective in changing eating behavior over the years. Opting out is a luxury that takes time and money.”

Capitalism profits in every way it can

Capitalist economic exploitation of the working class and our environment sustains a vicious cycle of poverty and pollution that can only be broken if the system itself is eradicated from the planet.

By its very nature, the drive to increase the rate of profit is supreme. It is the driving force of war, poverty, sickness and environmental destruction.

It can’t continue, of course. The planet is dying and the human and material resources to maintain and increase their war profits are not limitless.

Choosing life

Every which way we look, the world is in turmoil.

The irony is, working people across the globe are suffering from the same calamity—capitalism.

The capitalists are at war with everyone, including themselves.

Their power and wealth depend upon their ownership of all the means of production, the weapons they have, and upon the cannon fodder—us—whom they rely upon to follow their orders and carry out their wars so that only they can increase their profits.

Our world, our choice

But we do not have to follow their orders.

We can decide ourselves what kind of a world we want—a world without war, poverty, squalor, pollution, racism and bigotry, slavery, and destruction.

We can build a world where all of society contributes their labor; where the decisions of what to produce are decided democratically; where work is performed communally, with the goal to produce what every individual needs and, finally, bringing an end to war and the destruction of our environment.

Only in this direct and democratic way can we carefully monitor our use of raw materials; make sure to leave no contamination whatsoever from production; and ensure that health and safety remain our first priority.

There are two possible ends to capitalism

One, is the complete and utter destruction of life on earth from capitalism’s necessary and relentless exploitation and plunder for ever-higher profits for themselves.

Or, we change the whole dynamic of our relationship to social production on Earth.

We can change from production for private profit to production for the needs and wants of all, prioritizing the health and wellbeing of ourselves and all life on our planet.

We can build a socialist society.

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1 https://watson.brown.edu/costofwar/papers/ClimateChangeandCostofWar
A globalization of the class struggle

We have seen an impressive chain of social revolts—real political confrontations in fact—throughout 2019, and with a huge leap forward beginning in October of this year. Some of these took the form of insurgent uprisings. These social mobilizations have had the proletariat as their determining force, in some cases with massive national strikes. In particular the urban working class has played the biggest role, with the youth at the forefront. These violent shocks, essentially between two classes, have occurred on an international scale on different continents, with a revolutionary protest potential we haven’t seen since the Arab Spring of 2011. Their strength and determination have taken the local bourgeoisies by surprise, at least temporarily.

Obviously, in each situation the political context gives these revolts their own specific characteristics (geopolitically, as well, in the Middle East, where the role of the big imperialist countries and the rivalries between regional powers are also in question.) But this succession of social explosions has fundamental common features. This is new. In any case for at least a decade.

Only a year ago, in 2018, we were noticing and fearing above all the rise of the extreme right, in the context of the explosion of social inequality, marching hand in hand with the reorganization of production; a recovery of world capitalism from the crisis of 2008-2010 by means of disastrous financial solutions for the world’s peoples. This new phase of globalization has aggravated social polarization and contributed to a heightened awareness of these inequalities among exploited people. After all, Marx in his time, had already shown that if absolute poverty falls (which UN statisticians repeat ad nauseam today,) it increases nonetheless in relative terms.

The wave of current revolts began to spread just over a year ago. At the end of 2018, a series of demonstrations shook central Europe, then France with the Yellow Vests. In a much harsher context, a popular uprising in Sudan in December brought down a thirty-year-old dictatorship; then in Algeria a movement began which has lasted for nine months—in February there was Haiti, in March Hong Kong, in April the Czech Republic and Honduras, in June Kazakhstan in Central Asia, in July Puerto Rico; then in September, the beginnings of protests in Egypt were violently repressed—following this we saw an acceleration starting in October with Lebanon, Iraq, Chile, Iran and Colombia.

The scale of the mobilizations

Beyond the specific forms of all these struggles, the commonalities are obvious. First of all, their scale: these mobilizations have engaged hundreds-of-thousands of new militants in the struggle, and for an unprecedented amount of time. The vast majority of them come from the proletariat in the broad sense of the term. As we discuss below, in the case of Chile, this is the most important national strike since 1990, and for Colombia since 1977. Accurate counting was certainly more difficult in Haiti, but the mobilizations were massive. These are just simple examples.

The actions taken at this initial stage by the struggling sectors include combined strike actions, but mainly take place outside of production sites: we see occupations of city squares, demonstrations repressed with violence (including hundreds killed in Iraq and Iran,) barricades and local assemblies, the beginnings of neighborhood management.

Political demands

The social demands have become radicalized and political, with harsh
denunciations of corruption. Rejecting existing institutions, along with their direct or indirect supporters (discredited parties, union bureaucracies, sectarian government clans as in Iraq or Lebanon,) they show the will to bring down these different regimes, along with aspirations for democracy.

The social nature of the revolts

All these social and political aspirations are rising from the great majority, at the bottom rung of society. The layers involved range from the slums of Iraq or Port-au-Prince, to the proletarian centers of the large metropolises of Santiago or Bogota, and broad layers of the working-class youth, along with the young college graduates who find themselves unemployed or experiencing precarious employment all around the world. In most of these countries, most of the active sectors are in urban areas (even if they are joined in some countries by rural sectors.)

And even if, at the present stage, these mobilizations are occurring for the most part outside the workplaces themselves. It is indeed the working class in the broad sense, that is to say the proletariat, those who have nothing but their arms to sell, that is driving this international conflict. The main problem remains—nowhere, it seems, has this mobilized working class constituted its own autonomous structures of counter-power to consciously take the political direction of these beginnings of revolutions.

Nevertheless, we are witnessing a new phase of the class struggle on a world scale. The bourgeoises were the first to realize this—the systematic and deadly repression is the clearest illustration of their comprehension of this.

Traditional parties and bureaucracies discredited

Much of this mobilization took place outside union organizations where they existed, and for the most part outside of the political parties, which have become discredited. The other salient feature is that while local organizational structures do exist, for example in the form of spontaneous assemblies, there is no centralization. From Chilean cabildos to neighborhood assemblies or occupations of places like Tahrir Square in Baghdad, these spaces of politicization and organization do not manage to achieve any national coordination, that is to say, to become a veritable counter-power against the bourgeois state. To move from the phase of highly politicized, quasi-spontaneous revolt, to a revolutionary alternative, these movements would need to have, if not a form of dual power, at least counter-powers capable of going beyond the local leadership of the mobilization (however necessary these may be as well.)

Updating the “Permanent Revolution?”

In this 21st century, it is the capitalist system (and the bourgeoisie itself) at its highest level of global development that is at stake. At the present stage, there is no question of national independence, nor of democratic bourgeois revolutions in the making, nor of class alliances. It is a direct class confrontation between the big bourgeoisie and the popular classes, that is to say the whole spectrum of the proletariat.

This simplification of the problem however doesn’t remove the numerous obstacles to revolutionary develop-
ment, in particular the central problem of the autonomy of the proletariat in relation to all kinds of “intermediate bodies”—political, union bureaucracies, reformist and collaborationist structures of all kinds, including “democratic” ones—so many buffers for the state, intended to contain, dull and extinguish all rebellions, and which will search for compromises, and institutional negotiations with the powers that be. This is, for example, what is currently happening in Chile, with the concerted, institutional change of the Constitution. This is almost a textbook case, in the form of a “democratic” rescue attempt that could be replicated by other bourgeoisies in difficulty.

**Constituent assembly?**

It is common among Trotskyist organizations to call for a constituent assembly, whether in Khartoum or Santiago, and sometimes in Barcelona or even Paris. “Sovereign and Free” for some, “Revolutionary” for others. This political demand (of an institutional nature) suggests a program of radical democracy, a transitional governmental stage, without any determined class character. If such a slogan were widely adopted by the mobilized population (which remains to be seen) as a first democratic objective, there would be no reason, as revolutionaries, to oppose it. On the other hand, this perspective, without the creation and development of organs of counter-power (tending towards a revolutionary seizure of power,) would be a trap, guiding the proletariat from mass action, towards the dead end of elections and finally towards the return to the usual social order.

**What about revolutionary activists?**

Ten years after the Arab Spring, the working class, in all its diversity, is therefore once again in the spotlight, and becoming significant this time on a world scale. With admirable improvisation and courage, as well as trial and error, obstacles, and difficulties to overcome.

Obviously, there is, unfortunately, no proletarian revolutionary party (let alone an international one) capable of providing the political perspectives essential to transform these beginnings of revolutions (that is the word) into victorious revolutions. But even in the absence of these parties, the specific possibilities for intervention by revolutionary militants do exist. These militants, whether distributed in multiple groups or without any affiliation, exist in most of the countries in question.

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The potential of this global revival is enormous, and it is possible for revolutionaries to intervene in it for the benefit of the exploited, to establish a social program (a kind of emergency program for workers, to be adapted according to local conditions) as well as political perspectives. All this on condition of focusing their efforts on the self-organization of workers, their coordination and centralization, the constitution of movement leaderships from the movement itself, the organization of distrust of parliamentary democracy, the preparation for the defense of the gains of the movement—including in the military field. This prospect is far from assured, but it is not a mirage either. And it is also in this type of revolutionary upheaval that revolutionary parties can arise.

We have just seen how the Chilean revolt spread to Colombia. How the one in Iraq spread to Iran—among others.

To take the example of Latin America alone, the two sleeping giants that are the proletariats of Brazil and Argentina could come out of their sleep. And in Argentina, there are thousands of revolutionary militants. We are witnessing more than the beginning of a worldwide spread of the social shock wave. Enough to say that a world overthrow could become more than a working hypothesis.

### Revolutionary convergences—December 8, 2019

Postscript: In Algeria, on December 8, there was a wave of strikes over four days. The slogan “8, 9, 10, 11: general strike” is one of the most popular slogans in the country, transmitted on social networks. After this past 42nd Friday demonstration (Act 42), this one against the elections organized by the system, scheduled for December 12, a call for four days of general strike was launched throughout the national territory. Workers went on strike massively in the region of Kabylie—the public sector, the private sector, transportation workers and small traders—answered the call. The region has been completely paralyzed. Workers from other regions are gradually joining the strike. Big or small, all the cities in the country are lowering the curtain: operation “dead city” is underway! Oil production workers are also in the mix.

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1 Convergences Revolutionnaire is the monthly journal of L’Etincelle a fraction (that was expelled from Lutte Ouvriere and entered in the NPA (French New anti-capitalist party created in 2008 from the former Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire.)
France’s Biggest Strike in Decades

By Joe Attard

As we go to press, French unions plan to stage new strikes and protests beginning January 9, 2020. —The Editors, Socialist Viewpoint

December 6, 2019—Yesterday’s general strike against Macron’s pension reform saw a “convergence of struggles” from across French society. According to the CGT (the trade union federation at the head of the strike,) 1.5 million people took part in the demonstrations, which would make this the biggest movement since the battle against Alain Juppé’s package of attacks in 1995. The spirit of the gilets jaunes (yellow vests) can be felt on the streets, where (despite the limitations of their leadership) the workers are directing their fury, not just against the pension reform, but the government as a whole.

The authorities tend to downplay the scale of demonstrations, and looking at the images on social media, it seems the unions’ numbers are closer to the truth. What is not in doubt is the turnout in Marseille, the CGT claimed there were 150,000 demonstrators—six-times higher than the official police estimate. The authorities tend to downplay the scale of demonstrations, and looking at the images on social media, it seems the unions’ numbers are closer to the truth.

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is limited information available, but it seems turnout here was limited to a small minority. For instance, it has been reported that only five percent of workers at the Renault factory in Flins took part, despite a call for participation from the unions.

However, some key private sector industries were affected. For instance, petroleum workers in the oil refineries have in recent years emerged as a very radical section of the working class. Seven out of the eight major French refineries were on strike yesterday, including those operated by Total in Donges (Loire-Atlantique), Gonfreville-l’Orcher (Seine-Maritime), Grandpuits (Seine-et-Marne), Feyzin (Lyon metropolis) and La Mède (Bouches-du-Rhône).

Moreover, there were disruptions in other sections of the supply chain. For instance, strikers blockaded 12 of Total’s 200 warehouses. Dockers have also been taking part, going on strike at the oil ports of Fos and Le Havre, with rumblings in Portes-les-Valence (Drôme), Puget-sur-Argens (Var) and Saint-Jean-de-Braye (Loiret).

While they have dwindled to a rump, the gilets jaunes were dotted throughout the demonstrations—shoulder to shoulder with the trade unions. They have been filming lifting toll booths in St-Arnoult, allowing traffic to pass without paying the fare; and small groups of between 200 and 300 protesters have been reviving the gilets jaunes’ signature tactic of blocking roundabouts. The gilets noirs (the movement of undocumented migrants inspired by the methods of the yellow vests) were also out on the demonstrations, offering general solidarity with the strike and raising their own demands for papers to work legally in the country.

Although youth participation was widespread, the students did not come out as an organized bloc. International Marxist Tendency (IMT) comrades raised slogans for student-worker solidarity and bringing down the government at student assemblies in Toulouse and Paris, which were well received. However, there is a mood of disaffection with the official leaders of the student movement, who have turned student assemblies on campus into toothless talking shops. There has also been some confusion and demoralization after a string of defeats inflicted against the student movement in the recent period. As a result, while assemblies of 400-500 have been raised on a number of campuses, this figure is far smaller than during the gilets jaunes movement at its height.

...the base of the union movement is bold and dynamic. The workers are already holding general assemblies of their own initiative and making efforts to extend and strengthen the strike. This represents the road forward...

This is not to suggest the youth are not supportive of the strike—quite the contrary. Students increasingly sense the dynamic of struggle is in the streets, amongst the working class, rather than seeing themselves as a separate faction. As a result, rather than debating endlessly with their peers on campus, thousands of young people have simply thrown themselves into the demonstrations, alongside the workers.

The strike rolled over into today, resulting in 350 kilometers of traffic jams in the Paris area, and most of the public transport networks will remain closed over the weekend. Although schools are officially open again, many lessons are still being disrupted. Despite the chaos, and fervent attempts by the Macron government to drive a wedge between the general population and public sector workers (whom Macron and the press have accused of enjoying unfair “privileges,”) public support for the strike is very high. A poll found that 69 percent of the French support the movement.

The masses have correctly drawn the conclusion that Macron’s attack on the public sector and pensions represents part of a general policy of attacks on workers. If it is not resisted, Macron will continue to decimate working conditions and public services at the behest of his capitalist masters. As Arnaud, a 30-year-old sales manager commented:

“If people really knew how this reform would impact them, they would all be out in the street.”

Problem of leadership

Today, the CGT convened a general summit, involving FO (General Confederation of Labor/Workers’ Force), Solidaire, FSU (Fédération syndicale unitaire) as the main trade union in the education sector in France) and four youth organizations, to debate how to proceed. It was subsequently announced that another inter-professional strike will be held next Tuesday, after a scheduled response from the Macron government. In the meantime, general assemblies of SNCF (French National Railway) and RATP (France’s bus network) workers had already voted by large majorities to continue their action until at least Monday.

Despite emphasizing the need to “generalize the strikes in all the workplaces,” there is an inescapable sense that the CGT leadership is lagging behind events. A clear contradiction is emerging between the strategy and outlook of the union tops, and the rank and file. The former are turning all their fire on the pensions reform. The latter are attacking the general policy of the Macron government and calling
for its overthrow. It is clear that the union leadership was spooked by the experience of the *gilets jaunes* movement, which happened entirely outside of its control and erupted into a struggle of insurrectionary proportions.

In the last decade, where the crisis of French capitalism has made genuine concessions by the government an impossibility, the strategy of the union leadership has followed a certain pattern. The government would carry out attacks on the working class, who would put pressure on the unions to lead a fightback. The unions would then call several “days of action” (rarely strikes), which would be well-attended and militant, but accomplish nothing more than letting off steam. Once the movement was exhausted, people would return to work—empty handed and demoralized—and the government would go ahead with its cuts.

The capitalist crisis has undermined the old system of social partnership, in which the union bureaucracy would serve as the official “mediator” between the government and the working class. In order to maintain their privileged positions, the bureaucrats have adapted themselves and now simply play the role of putting the brakes on the working class and helping to steer their rising anger down safe channels.

The *gilets jaunes* movement marked the end of this strategy. It was led by the most squeezed and depressed layers of French society and became a rallying cry for a working class that had become utterly fed up with the stultifying role of their traditional organizations. That the *gilets jaunes* emerged entirely outside of the official structures of the unions (whose leaders treated it with loathing and suspicion) was entirely unsurprising, as was their skepticism towards the traditional mass organizations. Despite the efforts of rank-and-file unionists to build links of solidarity with the yellow vests, this mutual hostility was never fully overcome.

Today, despite the movement ebbing (under the hammer blows of the state and given the lack of a revolutionary leadership) the impact of the *gilets jaunes* on French society has been profound. There have been two main effects. First, the masses have learned from the *gilets jaunes* that the way to win concessions is through direct action. In forcing a U-turn on Macron’s regressive fuel tax, the yellow vests accomplished more in a few weeks than the mass organizations had won in ten years. As Isabelle Jarrivet, a 52-year-old town hall administrator in Paris commented:

“The *gilets jaunes* protests got people thinking and talking more about politics and people determined not to let things pass. You can feel the defiant mood in the air.”

The workers in struggle must turn their general assemblies into the basis of a revolutionary leadership, elected from their own ranks.

In this sense, although the *gilets jaunes* have receded, they are stronger than ever. For many protesters on the ground, the sentiment today is: “we are all the *gilets jaunes*.”

The second effect of the *gilets jaunes* was to focus all the disparate struggles in French society against this—or that—counter-reform into a general fight against the entire policy of Macron’s government of the rich. This has really rattled the union tops. No longer able to divert the masses’ rage into useless “days of action” (which the government does not fear in the least,) they have been forced by pressure from below to organize a proper strike, which has paralyzed the country and put Macron back onto the defensive.

The problem, from bureaucrats’ point of view, is that—given the depth of anger on the streets, and the lessons learned over the experience of the *gilets jaunes* movement—this strike has the potential to get rapidly out of hand.

It is notable that the union leaders have deliberately been coy about the turnout in different sectors and parts of the country. The truth is, despite what they say, they don’t really want a “convergence of struggles” that draws in wide layers of French society. They have made no serious effort to coordinate the national struggle, or provide it with any political leadership, program, objectives or perspectives.

It is clear from the slogans and mood on the streets that the masses don’t just want the pension reform cancelled, they want Macron out. Another insurrectionary movement from below—especially one with a clear, working-class character—would put the privileged position of the union bureaucracy in jeopardy. The tops simply want to leverage the strike to force further negotiations with the government (as is clear in statements from CGT General Secretary, Philippe Martinez.) As such, they are doing their utmost to focus exclusively on the pension reform, avoiding any slogans against the government as a whole and refusing to provide leadership to the general offensive against Macron.

The pension reform is a reflection of a deeper need by crisis-ridden French capitalism to squeeze the working class. Macron’s whole policy is an expression of this. The battle against the pension reform therefore ultimately necessitates a reckoning with the Macron regime as a whole. The CGT leaders’ bankrupt strategy is designed simply to contain and divert the masses’ insurrectionary energy down a *cul-de-sac*.

Unfortunately, Mélenchon and France Insoumise have adopted the same position, emphasizing the fight
against the pension reform in isolation. This is a far cry from the radicalism of Mélenchon’s stance during the height of the gilets jaunes movement, where he endorsed their demand to overthrow Macron and even dissolve the National Assembly. This reflects the crisis gripping France Insoumise, whose aversion to establishing proper party structures, in favor of remaining an amorphous “social movement,” has hobbled the organization. After a bruising result during the recent European elections, this wounded self-confidence precipitated a rightward turn, with Mélenchon making overtures to the Greens (who are no better than the Social Democrats) to form a coalition government in future.

This is precisely the wrong strategy at this juncture. If Mélenchon could recapture some of his radical spirit from two or three years ago, put France Insoumise on a proper, organized basis, and come out with bold slogans aimed at bringing down Macron, he could fill the void left by the mass organizations and connect with the insurrectionary mood. As it is, France Insoumise’s dire straits were reflected during the march in Paris, where they constituted a bloc of 200 at the very back of a column over 200,000 strong.

**Spirit of the gilets jaunes lives on!**

In stark contrast to the passivity and obsession with “negotiations” at the top, the base of the union movement is bold and dynamic. The workers are already holding general assemblies of their own initiative and making efforts to extend and strengthen the strike. This represents the road forward.

The main danger at this point is of the transport workers at the vanguard of the strike becoming isolated. The government can probably just about endure an indefinite transport strike if other sectors recede or fail to come out. If it becomes desperate, the government might even enter into separate negotiations with the heads of the transport unions to protect workers in this industry from the brunt of the pension reforms, in order to drive a wedge between them and the rest of the working class.

As mentioned, the union leaders are making no efforts to seriously build the strike or bring out private sector workers, beyond passively “calling” for action. The workers in struggle must turn their general assemblies into the basis of a revolutionary leadership, elected from their own ranks. Rather than simply inviting wider layers of the working class to join the fight, this leadership must politically explain to the workers that all their grievances ultimately stem from the rotten Macron government, acting at the behest of the equally rotten capitalist system. What is needed, therefore, is a program of action: a continuous general strike to finish what the gilets jaunes started and put an end to Macron.

It is clear that the gilets jaunes movement was the first chapter in a new era of class struggle in France, one in which millions of workers have come to realize their potential power. The yellow vests were limited by their heterogeneous class character, and the lack of clear methods of class struggle. Now, there is the potential for a movement on a qualitatively higher level, rooted in the working class. If the workers’ methods of struggle are combined with the courage and direct action of the gilets jaunes, no maneuver by either Macron or the union tops will be able to hold the movement back. What we are witnessing is the next step towards a burgeoning French Revolution.

— In Defense of Marxism, December 6, 2019


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1 “French unions to stage new strikes and protests in January over pension reform,” by FRANCE 24, December 19, 2019

Marc Steiner: Welcome to The Real News. I'm Marc Steiner. Good to have you all with us.

Those are the protests in Hong Kong, of course [video footage was shown.] And they’ve been roiling consistently for the last six months. The complexity of this uprising, of this story, has not really been told. Folks at Jacobin published some articles by Kevin Lin who has interviewed student labor and leftwing activists in Hong Kong. Reading his analysis and listening to those voices, you begin to understand this multilayered struggle between the authoritarian capitalism of China and the free market, neoliberal capitalism of Hong Kong, a place where capitalist and real estate speculators surge and where poverty is soaring. It’s a story. Yes, with a fight for democracy. It’s also part and parcel of a larger struggle in this world between left and right, between workers and people who own the industries, and yes, between the United States and China. But it’s all too easy just to blame all this on U.S. intervention.

So, welcome. And I look forward to our conversation with Kevin Lin, who researches the Chinese labor movement; is an activist writing and speaking about the Hong Kong protest; and is a member of Lausan, which is a collective of writers, researchers, activists and artists from Hong Kong and its diasporas. And Kevin, welcome. Good to have you with us.

Kevin Lin: Thank you, Marc.

Marc Steiner: This is a really complex piece. People have a tendency when they look at these protests, whether it’s Hong Kong or protests happening in any part of the globe, in Lebanon or Chile or wherever they happen to be…and immediately I think the American impulse is to identify with the protesters fighting for democracy. But in this, in some of the stuff I’ve been reading that you all have been working on, when you frame it in some ways as the kind of authoritarian capitalist nature of China and then there’s kind of this kind of more neoliberal free marketplace that was Hong Kong, that’s part of their struggle. So, parse through some of this complexity for us.

Kevin Lin: Yes, absolutely. The protest movement in Hong Kong has entered its sixth month. This is a really unprecedented protest in recent Hong Kong history, but also in recent Chinese history. The last time we’ve seen such a sustained large-scale protest movement really goes back to 1989, the democracy movement in Beijing—not only in Beijing but actually across the country. So, this is extremely important as a historically significant movement. And I think we deserve to really analyze the situation very closely rather than simply describing that as the result of U.S. or UK intervention.

Marc Steiner: So, in one of the articles that you wrote in Jacobin, you quote one of the activists: “Simmering below the surface is a crisis of Hong Kong itself as a liberal free-market enclave within a state-managed capitalist nation-state, an always-unstable configuration now on the verge of exploding.” So, this kind of intra-capitalist tension is taking place. Now, how much of that is what’s fueling this, or is it part of defining the struggle but really doesn’t define it in its whole? Talk a bit about that.

Kevin Lin: Yeah. This is really, really complex and the understanding has to be historically rooted. Hong Kong for the past few decades has really been an extremely important financial center in Asia. And when Hong Kong was handed over back to China in 1987, that was the hope, that Hong Kong will be acting as this hub for international capital to utilizing China. And then in the last ten years or so, Hong Kong increasingly has been seen as a hub for Chinese companies to grow abroad and raise capital. So, the importance of Hong Kong for the capitalist structure, both in mainland China but also in Asia and internationally, is extremely significant. And a byproduct of that is extremely neoliberal, capitalist, free-market policies in Hong Kong itself that resulted in extreme levels of inequality, housing crisis, and a very sort of depressing economic prospect for young people. And that’s some of the long-term factors that really fuel this protest.

And now of course, the Hong Kong protest is also being caught up in the geopolitical competition between the U.S. and China. And that really adds another dimension, caught up in the trade war, et cetera, and that adds another layer of complexity to the conflict and protest.

Marc Steiner: What I’m trying to get to is that it seems to be really difficult to try to ideologically define these protests. And I think that’s what people are trying to do, whether they’re trying to say the United States is behind it or whether it’s saying these are left-wing activists. But nothing is that simple here. How do you ideologically define what’s going on at this moment?

Kevin Lin: So, the protest has really presented itself as not ideological. And that is actually a great conscious decision on the part of the protesters, because in the protest there are people on the left, people in the middle, and people on the right. And what they have learned from their experience in the 2014 umbrella movement is that in
order to achieve unity in the movement, they have to subsume ideological debates to their unity of action. So, that makes it really hard to really discern the kind of ideologies and politics in the movement. But also you have to acknowledge that the left, the kind of socialist and anti-capitalist left in Hong Kong has really been weakening the last few decades. The left is really small in Hong Kong, therefore you know it has not really been able to shape the debate and try to steer the movement toward a more social democratic or even socialist direction.

**Marc Steiner:** That’s really interesting. Let me explore that for just a bit more with you. So, what does that mean; why is the left so weak? What about labor activists and student labor activists? Some of the people you interviewed put out this website, there is your group, Lausan. So, why is the left so weak? And what’s the history there, and what role do they really play in these protests?

**Kevin Lin:** Again, the history is really important here. Hong Kong was a British colony for much of this last century. There was a left movement in Hong Kong, mostly underground, that was opposed to British colonialism. But that left was also connected to the Communist Party in mainland China. So, basically after 1997 when Hong Kong was returned to mainland China, what remained of the left were people who were aligned with the Communist Party in China. And historically in Hong Kong, the sort of non-Stalinist or non-CCP aligned left was always very small. And it was just all further weakened in the last two or three decades, also in part because of the relocation of manufacturing of jobs from Hong Kong to mainland China since the 1980s and ’90s. So, nowadays it’s a very strong social labor movement that underlies a left movement in Hong Kong. So, that’s also one reason that the labor movement, similar to the left socialist movement, is pretty weak in Hong Kong right now.

**Marc Steiner:** You do see China, The People’s Republic of China, not as a socialist nation, but as an authoritarian capitalist nation if I have that correct. Am I right about that?

**Kevin Lin:** That is correct, yes.

**Marc Steiner:** Talk about that definition and how that plays into the struggle that’s going on now.

**Kevin Lin:** It’s very clear. There remains some on the U.S. left for example, who still regard China either as socialist or at least not entirely capitalist because China retains a very significant state sector. However, if you look at labor relations, if you look at how the economy is structured, it’s very much going to stay a capitalist society, with a very strong state and a state sector for sure, but it is the capitalist competition and logic of profit maximization that really governs the economy and society.

**Marc Steiner:** So, as you look ahead with this struggle going on...And you said it’s a very broad struggle; involves lots of different people from many ideologies, I’m curious where you think this can go. It’s hard to watch this and think about the Hong Kongians themselves actually winning against the People’s Republic of China, what they want. But I was curious where you think that the student activists, the left labor people, the socialists, how they fit into all that and what may happen.

**Kevin Lin:** This has really been an ongoing debate in Hong Kong, ever since the 2014 umbrella movement. There was a left formation called Left21 who tried to intervene in the 2014 umbrella movement to talk about social and economic issues, to raise an issue about inequality, about housing, about the rights of workers, including the more than 300-thousand migrant workers from Southeast Asia. But Left21 as a formation pretty much went out of existence in the last few years. So, we really don’t have a very organized voice on the left in Hong Kong to really talk about those social and economic issues.

But what’s exciting, and as you mentioned that at the beginning of this interview, is Lausan, who is a collective of mostly researchers, activists, artists either from Hong Kong, based in Hong Kong, or the diaspora in the U.S., North America, or Europe. What’s exciting about this development is the Lausan Collective specifically wants to be in dialogue with the protests in Hong Kong, but at the same time develop an internationalist, a decolonial and left critique of the movement, and also of Hong Kong society in general. That is something that is very new and significant in helping people understand the movement. But also through translation from English back to Chinese, articles had been published the Hong Kong press. So, the hope is that some of that discussion within the Lausan community, Lausan Collective, can also feed into the protest movement in Hong Kong.

**Marc Steiner:** Well, our viewers can see the Lausan site on our screen at the moment. And I agree with Kevin. This is at the beginning of a new movement that is really interesting for all of us to watch here. And Kevin Lin, I want to thank you for your work, and thanks so much for taking the time today. I look forward to many more conversations with you and your friends and comrades in Lausan to continue our conversations about Hong Kong.

**Kevin Lin:** Thank you, Marc.

—The Real News Network, November 21, 2019


Message in Solidarity with Hong Kong Workers

By International Labor Solidarity Committee of Doro-Chiba, Japan

We strongly denounce the crackdown by the Hong Kong government and Chinese government, and fully support the struggle of workers in Hong Kong!

The Hong Kong people’s struggle since June of this year against the revision of “Fugitive Offenders Ordinance (amendment) bill” has entered a new stage.

Confronted with the workers struggling strenuously, the Hong Kong government invoked the “Emergency Regulations Ordinance” and implemented the “Prohibition on Face Covering Regulation.”

The police attacked the protesters by firing a vast amount of tear gas and even fired live ammunition. Furthermore, it is reported that they intend to mobilize the People’s Armed Police (PAP) or the People’s Liberation Army.

We cannot help expressing our extreme anger at this outrageous repression against people and resolutely denounce the Hong Kong government and the Chinese government.

The main demands—democracy, universal suffrage, and the fight for pursuing illegal police violence, which have been expressed by Hong Kong workers, are absolutely right and natural demands.

The unyielding struggle to overthrow the Carrie Law administration which has continued over five months, should be inscribed in history for the liberation of workers and cannot be stopped until Hong Kong’s liberation.

Hong Kong’s struggle inspires the workers’ struggle over the world. In the midst of the collapse of neoliberalism and the stormy advance of Hong Kong’s struggle, the uprising against oppression and war has begun around the world.

The Abe administration in Japan is going to enforce constitutional revision and wage aggressive war with breaking up of labor unions as its first step. Outbreak of fierce struggle is inevitable, however, against this onslaught.

Hong Kong’s struggle has become the “axis of rotation.” A tide of the workers’ struggle around the world has arisen with new international solidarity.

• We will never admit again the coming of the time of dictatorship and war. We are determined to fight together with workers in Hong Kong.

• We firmly support workers in Hong Kong struggling for achieving the five key demands: withdrawal of the extradition bill; investigation of police brutality and misconduct; release of arrested protesters; retraction of official characterization of the protests as riots; resignation of Carrie Lam and introduction of universal suffrage for the election of the Legislative Council and the Chief Executive.

• No to the crackdown by Chinese’s and Hong Kong’s governments!

• Never again the Massacre of Tiananmen Square in 1989!

Let’s fight together with Chinese workers and each ethnic group under the oppression of the Chinese government!

Let’s win the struggle of Hong Kong’s workers and people with unity of the workers of the world!

—December 1, 2019
Evo Morales’s fourth term was over before it began. After winning the latest presidential election by over 600,000 votes, a flurry of violence on the part of the U.S.-backed opposition in Bolivia pressured Evo to step down. Evo’s home was vandalized and several party members of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) threatened with violence. The coup in Bolivia, which was solidified by recommendation from the military, is the latest of dozens of military coups spearheaded by the United States over the last century-and-a-half. U.S. imperialism has viewed Latin America as its backyard since 1823 when it declared the “right to protect” the region in the Monroe Doctrine. It was at this time that the American Empire replaced the Spanish Empire as the foreign power responsible for keeping Latin America in a state of oppression, dependency, and poverty.

After over a century of U.S. imperial aggression, Evo Morales arose as one of the most revolutionary leaders of the movement for socialism in the 21st century in Latin America—a movement that gained significant traction after the election of former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez in 1998. MAS has been in power since 2006. The MAS has acted as a vehicle for workers and peasants to assert their dignity and self-determination. Trade union, indigenous, and women’s organizations have all played a major role in the implementation of social policy under Evo’s leadership. Economic growth in Bolivia has increased by an average of five-percent-per-year, with many of the gains distributed to the indigenous populations formally dispossessed by centuries of colonial and neocolonial rule. Extreme poverty has been cut in half over the same period.

U.S. imperialism sought to dispose of Evo Morales and his indigenous-led movement even before it came to power. A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request found that in 2002, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) had earmarked 97-million-dollars to assist “regional autonomy” projects and right-wing opposition political parties in Bolivia.

These funds helped develop a U.S.-aligned political infrastructure in Bolivia responsible for the coup. The USAID has acted as the political arm of the IMF, World Bank, CIA, and the Bolivian elites who do their bidding. One of the “protest leaders” of the right-wing opposition, Luis Fernando Camacho, is the son of the founder of Sergas, a gas corporation which owes over two million U.S. dollars to the Bolivian state for tax evasion and fraud. Under U.S. leadership, petty capitalists such as the Camacho family have used Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) funded by USAID to overthrow Evo and his nationalization decree that placed petroleum, electricity, telecommunications, and mining sectors under the direction of the state.

The coup being waged by the right-wing opposition has been labeled a “protest movement” by the U.S. corporate media. Coup plotters such as oligarch and former Bolivian President Carlos Mesa have alleged that their protests have come in response to election fraud. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, no evidence of irregularities or fraudulent activities were found in the election results. The baseless claim was used by the imperialist corporate media to provide cover for the violent military coup. MAS politicians have been forced to flee their homes, government buildings have been burned, and the Bolivian economy has been ground to a halt. The oligarchy in Bolivia is out for blood and it has the police and military on its side.

U.S.-backed coup in Bolivia

This is not the first time that the American Empire has waged a violent coup in Bolivia. The CIA provided military and technical support to right-wing military dictator René Barrientos.
Barrientos took power by way of military coup in 1964. His brutal suppression of the peasant uprising to his rule led to the assassination of Che Guevara. In 1971, the U.S. backed right-wing general Hugo Bánzer Suárez with the help of the U.S. Air Force. Hundreds of leftists and political activists would be murdered by his regime.

The coup against Evo Morales comes as the left in Latin America was making a resurgence amid countless attempts by the American empire to destroy their social democratic project. In late October, Argentina elected Alberto Fernandez and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as president and vice president, effectively ending the right-wing and neoliberal rule of Mauricio Macri. Tens-of-thousands took to the streets in Ecuador and forced Lenin Moreno to back away from an IMF deal which would have imposed harsh austerity measures on workers, students, and peasants. Lula De Silva was released from prison in November. Lula’s freedom represented a concrete victory for a Brazilian left currently facing enormous challenges under the rule of former officer of the fascist military dictatorship, Jair Bolsonaro.

Lessons to learn

The American Empire has struck back against the left in Latin America with a devastating blow in Bolivia. There are many lessons to learn from the U.S.-backed coup. For one, too few in the belly of the U.S. empire are prepared to come to the defense of the peoples’ struggle in Latin America or anywhere else. The corporate media has placed a national blinder on the host of coups staged by the American empire in the last ten years alone, whether we are talking about the Clinton-Obama coup in Honduras in 2009 or the ouster of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Awash in white supremacist ideology and confined to the most unrestrained form of capitalism on the planet, workers and poor people in the U.S. have few avenues from which to express concrete solidarity with the Bolivian masses.

The coup in Bolivia, which was solidified by recommendation from the military, is the latest of dozens of military coups spearheaded by the United States over the last century-and-a-half.

Another lesson of the U.S.-backed coup in Bolivia is that the so-called “end of history” proclaimed by the American empire after the fall of the Soviet Union was a complete and utter lie. The American empire is “capitalist to the bones” and its rulers believed the world would remain under its thumb indefinitely. Evo Morales and the rest of the socialist left in Latin America, while unable to completely expropriate the property and power of the oligarchs, were able to lead a mass movement toward the dignity and self-determination of the oppressed. This path required that the seeds of socialism were sewn into the fabric of governance throughout Latin America. Whether it’s called “Chavismo,” “21st century socialism,” or the “pink tide,” this movement has empowered workers and peasants to unify across borders to alleviate poverty, underdevelopment, and imperial dependency.

Evo Morales was at the forefront of Latin America’s burgeoning internationalism. He was a huge supporter of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). Furthermore, Evo challenged the American empire on the military front by advocating for the development of a continental military united in defending the sovereignty of Latin America. The so-called “end of history” was thus nothing more than an arrogant display of American imperial hubris that only clouded its true interests abroad. Socialism has remained the American empire’s public enemy number one even after the end of the so-called Cold War. The American Empire does not respect democracy or elections, just the profits of the few. Evo’s Bolivia is paying the price for placing the needs of poor Bolivians ahead of the riches of the elite.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the coup in Bolivia is that the struggle for socialism and self-determination is far from over. The oligarchs seeking to wrestle control of Bolivia and the entire continent back from the workers and peasants will stop at nothing to lynch Evo Morales. A warrant is out for his arrest even though he has committed no crime. The oligarchs want to bring the working class back into a state of total misery. While the ouster of Evo Morales is indeed a significant defeat, the socialist movement in Latin America will no doubt fight back. The people of Bolivia will fight back. Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and other allied nations will do everything they can to support the MAS through a difficult transition. It is important that the left living in the belly of the American empire find a way to do the same.

—American Herald Tribune, November 11, 2019

https://ahtribune.com/world/americas/bolivia/3647-american-empire-stuck-back.html?fbclid=IwAR2pkwvmuLSmRnjo85aSh5M-n1Dp0GPeLzkcC23JBiTii1y4AjBoXo
Evo Morales is more than Bolivia’s first indigenous president—he is our president, too. The rise of a humble Aymara coca farmer to the nation’s highest office in 2006 marked the arrival of indigenous people as vanguards of history. Within the social movements that brought him to power emerged indigenous visions of socialism and the values of Pachamama (the Andean Earth Mother.) Evo represents five centuries of indigenous deprivation and struggle in the hemisphere.

A coup against Evo, therefore, is a coup against indigenous people.

Evo’s critics, from the anti-state left and right, are quick to point out his failures. But it was his victories that fomented this most recent violent backlash.

Evo and his party, the indigenous-led Movement for Socialism (MAS in Spanish,) nationalized key industries and used bold social spending to shrink extreme poverty by more than half, lowering the country’s Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality, by a remarkable 19 percent. During Evo’s and MAS’s tenure, much of Bolivia’s indigenous-majority population has, for the first time in their lives, lived above poverty.

“My sin was being indigenous, leftist, and anti-imperialist,”

The achievements were more than economic. Bolivia made a great leap forward in indigenous rights.

Once at the margins of society, Indigenous languages and culture have been thoroughly incorporated into Bolivia’s plurinational model. The indigenous Andean concept of Bien Vivir, which promotes living in harmony with one another and the natural world, was written into the country’s constitution becoming a measure for institutional reform and social progress. The Wiphala, an indigenous multicolor flag, became a national flag next to the tricolor, and 36 indigenous languages became official national languages alongside Spanish.

Evo’s indigenous socialism has become the standard bearer for the international indigenous community. The esteemed Maori jurist, Moana Jackson, once referred to Bolivia’s 2009 constitution as the “nearest thing in the world to a constitution that has come from an Indigenous kaupapa (a communal vision.)”

The indigenous-socialist project accomplished what neoliberalism has repeatedly failed to do: redistribute wealth to society’s poorest sectors and uplift those most marginalized. Under Evo and MAS leadership, Bolivia liberated itself as a resource colony. Before the coup, Evo attempted to nationalize its large lithium reserves, an element necessary for electric cars. Since the coup, Tesla’s stocks have skyrocketed. Bolivia rebuked imperialist states like the United States and Canada by taking the path of resource nationalism to redistribute profits across society.

This was Evo’s crime.

“My sin was being indigenous, leftist, and anti-imperialist,” Evo said after being coerced into resigning this week.

His replacement, Jeanine Añez Chávez, agreed. “I dream of a Bolivia free of satanic indigenous rites,” the opposition senator tweeted in 2013, “the city is not for the Indians who should stay in the highlands or the Chaco!!!” After Evo’s departure, Chavez declared herself interim president while holding up a large bible, though she failed to get the required quorum in the senate to do so.
Next to her stood Luis Fernando Camacho, a member of the Christian far-right. After Evo’s resignation, Camacho stormed the presidential palace, a flag in one hand and a bible in the other. “The bible is returning to the government palace,” a pastor said on a video while standing next to Camacho. “Pachamama will never return. Today Christ is returning to the Government Palace. Bolivia is for Christ.”

In places where the opposition is strongest, Wiphala flags, symbols of indigenous pride, were lowered and burned. Police officers cut the flags from their uniforms. What were symbolic acts quickly escalated into street-level violence.

MAS members’ houses were burned. Evo’s home was ransacked. Masked armed men began rounding up suspected MAS supporters and indigenous people in the streets, loading them into the back of trucks. A handful of protesters have been killed. The same social movements that ushered Evo and MAS into power have taken to the streets to defend the gains of their indigenous revolution.

Amidst the chaos, anti-indigenous race-hatred has gripped the country since Evo’s October 20 re-election. While left critics continue to rail against Evo, paradoxically blaming him for the coup that overthrew him, no evidence has emerged of election fraud. The Organization of American States cited “irregularities” without yet providing documentation. A report by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, however, found no irregularities and no fraud.

To appease critics, Evo even agreed to re-elections but was forced to resign under orders from the military and escalating rightwing violence. No one resigns with a gun pointed to their head. Clearly, it was a coup.

Fearing assassination, Evo fled to Mexico where he was granted asylum and greeted by a cheering crowd.

The future of Bolivia is currently marching in the streets, the millions of people who voted for Evo in the last elections, the 47 percent whose voices and votes were stolen by the violent return of the old, colonial oligarchy.

Other critics still contend that Evo’s 13-year tenure was too long. They mention Evo losing a referendum to amend the constitution but failing to note the Supreme Court ruling that allowed him legally to run for another term. For our indigenous president, after five centuries of colonization, 13 years was not long enough.

“We will come back,” Evo recently assured supporters, quoting the 18th-century indigenous resistance leader, “and we will be millions as Tupac (Katari) said.”

Nick Estes is a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. He is an Assistant Professor in the American Studies Department at the University of New Mexico. In 2014, he co-founded The Red Nation, an Indigenous resistance organization. He is the author of the book Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance (Verso, 2019.)

—The Guardian, November 14, 2019

Once again, the United States is complicit in an illegal *coup d’etat* in Latin America, this time in Bolivia. On November 10, a right-wing, anti-Indigenous group seized power after the Bolivian military’s removal of President Evo Morales, who had declared victory in the October 20 presidential election.

The United States’ fingerprints are all over the *coup*. Advisers from the U.S. Southern Command have been stationed on Bolivia’s border with Argentina, Ivanka Trump made a surprising visit to an Argentine province near the Bolivian border in September, the pro-U.S. Organization of American States (OAS) cast unfounded doubt on Morales’s election victory, and the U.S.’s National Endowment for Democracy provided suspicious grants to Bolivia.

At least 32 people have been killed and hundreds injured since the *coup* began. Sacha Llorenti, Bolivian ambassador to the United Nations, told *Democracy Now!*, “We are going through not just a *coup d’état*, but a violent one.” Indeed, it has resulted in the rise of a far-right regime of terror,” professor Gabriel Hetland wrote in *The Washington Post*.

Like many Latin American strongmen over the years, at least six of the top military leaders involved in the *coup*, including Kaliman, were trained at the notorious U.S. Army School of the Americas (now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) in Fort Benning, Georgia.

Morales—Bolivia’s first Indigenous leader in a country where 65 percent of the people are Indigenous—received ten percent more votes than Carlos Mesa, the second-place candidate who has close ties to the U.S. government. Mesa was in regular communication with U.S. officials who were trying to destabilize Morales, U.S. government cables published by *WikiLeaks* reveal.

The day after the election, the U.S.-funded OAS sought to delegitimize the election results. “The OAS Mission expresses its deep concern and surprise at the drastic and hard-to-explain change in the trend of the preliminary results revealed after the closing of the polls,” it stated.

But the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) published a comprehensive statistical analysis on November 8 that found no evidence of fraud or irregularities in the election and determined that the results reflected highly similar patterns from past elections. Other research conducted by CELAG (*Centro Estratégico Latinoamericano de Geopolítica*) confirmed CEPR’s findings and identified insufficient evidence to support the assertions in the OAS statement.

CEPR co-director Mark Weisbrot noted in an op-ed for *Market Watch*, “The OAS isn’t all that independent at the moment, with the Trump administration actively promoting this military *coup*, and Washington having more right-wing allies in the OAS than they did just a few years ago.”

The OAS was established during the Cold War to prevent the proliferation of leftist governments. USAID considers OAS a critical tool in “promot[ing] U.S. interests in the Western hemisphere by countering the influence of anti-U.S. countries” such as Bolivia.

The November 10 military *coup* led to the forced resignation of Morales, who received asylum in Mexico. Right-wing politician Jeanine Añez declared herself interim president, and Donald
Trump immediately recognized her illegitimate claim to the presidency. Añez then issued a decree immunizing the military from criminal liability “for carrying out necessary actions in their legitimate defense while performing their constitutional duties.” Morales supporters accused Añez of giving soldiers “carte blanche” to shoot demonstrators. Bolivia’s human rights ombudsman and reporters have documented widespread injuries and fatalities from gunshots.

**U.S. involvement in the coup**

During Morales’s nearly 14 years in office, his Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party reduced poverty by 42 percent and extreme poverty by 60 percent. It cut unemployment by 50 percent and nearly tripled the per-capita G.D.P. “It’s indisputable that Bolivians are healthier, wealthier, better educated, living longer and more equal than at any time in this South American nation’s history,” Anthony Faiola wrote in *The Washington Post*.

There was discontent about Morales seeking a fourth term among some sectors in Bolivia, who thought there should be space for new leadership. But Morales had a strong record of establishing policies to help the people of Bolivia, which angered the U.S. government, Western corporations and the corporate media, “who function as ideological shock troops against leftist governments in Latin America,” Alan MacLeod wrote at *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting*.

The U.S. and Argentine governments helped to engineer the Bolivian coup, Stella Calloni reported in *Resumen: Latinoamericano*. She cited the presence of advisers from the U.S. Southern Command on the Argentine border with Bolivia.

Calloni also documented “the surprising trip of Ivanka Trump” to the Argentine province of Juju near the Bolivian border on September 4-5. Accompanied by 2,500 U.S. agents and Undersecretary of State John Sullivan, Ivanka Trump was ostensibly there to “visit” a small NGO dedicated to furthering women’s rights, and she delivered an “aid” package of $400 million for “road works.” Alicia Canqui Condori, national representative of MAS, said that, “in Jujuy Donald Trump’s daughter had met with Governor Gerardo Morales to plan what happened in Bolivia.”

**NED was complicit in the Iran-Contra affair in the 1980s, manipulated the 1990 Nicaraguan elections, heavily funded the 2002 failed coup attempt against socialist President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and supported the opposition to progressive President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti in the 1990s. Between 1990 and 1992, NED donated a quarter-million dollars to the Cuban-American National Foundation, the violent anti-Castro group based in Miami.**

Moreover, according to Calloni, Bolivian General Williams Kaliman, who “suggested” that Morales resign after the election, traveled to the United States 72 hours after the coup began and he received $1 million from the U.S. embassy in Bolivia. Like many Latin American strongmen over the years, at least six of the top military leaders involved in the coup, including Kaliman, were trained at the notorious U.S. Army School of the Americas (now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) in Fort Benning, Georgia.

Months before the coup, Bolivia concluded a $2.3 billion deal with a Chinese consortium to mine lithium. Bolivia has 70 percent of the world’s supply of lithium, which is used in car batteries, electronic devices and weapons systems. “The idea that there might be a new social compact for the lithium was unacceptable to the main transnational mining companies,” Vijay Prashad wrote. U.S. and Canadian companies sought to make a lithium agreement with Bolivia but they could not meet Morales’s conditions. “Morales himself was a direct impediment to the takeover of the lithium fields by the non-Chinese transnational firms,” according to Prashad. “He had to go.”

**Sordid history of U.S. meddling in Latin America**

U.S. complicity in the Bolivian coup follows in a sordid tradition of meddling in the political and economic affairs of Latin American countries. “For many years, the U.S. government has provided overt financial support to opposition political parties and civic groups, including to many of the groups that have been engaged in violent insurrections and coup plotting since at least 2008,” Thomas Field wrote in *Jacobin*.

One key vehicle that the U.S. government uses as a cover for its imperialist policies is the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). After disturbing revelations of covert CIA operations in the second half of the 1970s, NED was established under Ronald Reagan. “The idea was that the NED would do somewhat overtly what the CIA had been doing covertly for decades, and thus, hopefully, eliminate the stigma associated with CIA covert activities,” William Blum wrote in 2005. NED co-founder Allen Weinstein
In 2018, under the guise of “democracy,” “human rights” and “entrepreneurship,” NED funneled more than $23 million to opposition groups in Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba and Bolivia.

Former National Security Adviser John Bolton called Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua the “Troika of Tyranny” in November 2018. A few months later, in April 2019, the U.S. government orchestrated another unsuccessful coup in Venezuela. Juan Guaidó, Washington’s chosen puppet to seize power from President Nicolás Maduro, was funded by NED.

The Obama administration, led by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, supported the 2009 coup in Honduras.

Trump not only took aim at the progress Barack Obama had made toward normalization of relations with Cuba, he has escalated the U.S. economic war on Cuba and unleashed untold numbers of lawsuits that threaten to destroy the fragile Cuban economy.

The Obama administration, led by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, supported the 2009 coup in Honduras. The fraudulent election following the coup was financed by NED and the State Department, ushering in a repressive and militarized regime. Conditions deteriorated, leading to the exodus of thousands of Honduran children fleeing north.

U.S. complicity in the coup in Bolivia is illegal

U.S. complicity in the coup in Bolivia is illegal under both U.S. and international law. The United Nations Charter prohibits the use of or threat to use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another nation. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees the right to self-determination.

The Charter of the Organization of American States, to which the U.S. is a party, forbids any country from intervening in the internal or external affairs of another country. The OAS charter declares that, “Every State has the right to choose, without external interference, its political, economic, and social system and to organize itself in the way best suited to it and has the duty to abstain from intervening in the affairs of another State.”

The Foreign Assistance Act forbids the United States from assisting a country “whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup or decree.”

There has been global condemnation of the coup. Sixty-four organizations of jurists, lawyers, NGOs, social movements and trade unions from around the world, including the International Association of Democratic Lawyers and the National Lawyers Guild, sent a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, urging her to strongly condemn the human rights violations resulting from the coup.

Fourteen members of the House of Representatives sent a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo saying they were “deeply concerned” about the contribution of the Trump administration to the “escalating political and human rights crisis” in Bolivia.

Over 800 scholars, activists and public figures published an open letter demanding that the United States and the international community halt all support to the right-wing, anti-Indigenous regime that took power after the military coup.

Veterans For Peace condemned the racist coup in Bolivia and demanded an end to U.S. intervention in Latin America:

Peter Haberfeld, a retired lawyer and labor organizer who has studied the “Pink Tide” governments in Latin America, documented NED grants in Bolivia. He told Truthout that “between 2016 and 2019, NED gave grants to over 30 organizations for ‘democracy promotion’ in Bolivia. The grants total $3,209,887.”

Haberfeld said the grants were officially earmarked for “lofty objectives such as expanding participation by women, youth, media and entrepreneurs in a vibrant political process, particularly in connection with elections,” but cautioned “it is wise to be suspicious.” Haberfeld cited author Neil A. Burron, who wrote in The New Democracy Wars: The Politics of North American Democracy Promotion in the Americas, that “democracy promotion is typically formulated to advance commercial, geopolitical and security objectives that conflict with a genuine commitment to democracy development.” Burron noted, “For the U.S., the political manipulation of democracy promotion in support of a North American-led regional order is a continuation of long-standing forms of intervention [that have been] used as a license to meddle in the domestic affairs of others.”

NED was complicit in the Iran-Contra affair in the 1980s, manipulated the 1990 Nicaraguan elections, heavily funded the 2002 failed coup attempt against socialist President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and supported the opposition to progressive President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti in the 1990s. Between 1990 and 1992, NED donated a quarter-million dollars to the Cuban-American National Foundation, the violent anti-Castro group based in Miami.

In 2019, NED gave grants to over 30 organizations for “democracy promotion” in Latin America: America:
“Veterans For Peace stands in solidarity with the Indigenous majority in Bolivia who are resisting the racist, right-wing takeover of their democracy. We demand that the coup be stopped and democracy restored in Bolivia. As military veterans who have been used and abused in too many unjust wars, we demand an end to 200 years of U.S. intervention in Latin America.”

The situation in Bolivia is volatile and there is danger it could devolve into civil war. This is the time to urge senators and Congress members to end all U.S. support for the illegitimate regime, demand free and fair elections with all political parties represented, and insist that fundamental human rights of all Bolivians are protected.

—Truthout, November 27, 2019

Brexit, Scottish Nationalism and Socialism

By John Blackburn

Nationalism is one of the most powerful political forces in history and remains so today. It has dictated the patterns of voting in the recent British general election which is the product of the three years of chaos that have followed the EU referendum of 2016.

In that referendum the percent of the vote for leaving was:

England as a whole, 54.2; Wales, 52.5; Scotland, 38.0; Northern Ireland, 44.2.

The leave campaign is fundamentally an English nationalist movement while the Conservative and Unionist Party (Tories) has transformed into the “English national party” with Brexit representing the longing to return to the glory days of the English empire. The population of England is 80 percent of the UK, greater than Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland taken together, so this skewed the whole UK result of the vote towards leave. When seen in this light England is imposing Brexit on Scotland and Northern Ireland against their will.

The general election results have given Johnson’s Conservatives an unassailable 78 majority in Parliament. This is due to large numbers of former Labour supporters in the devastated industrial and mining communities of England voting for Conservative and Brexit Party candidates. The utopian Tory campaign of “Get Brexit Done!” with little else of substance but a subtext that immigration is the real problem, together with an unrelenting campaign of vilification of Jeremy Corbyn by the right-wing media has successfully attracted the votes of many working-class people.

In Scotland the vast majority of the working class which has also suffered the consequences of the deindustrialization, austerity and social deprivation that their English counterparts have did not fall for the Brexiteers’ reactionary propaganda. The Scottish National Party (SNP) campaigned to “Stop Johnson,” remain in the EU and for Scottish independence, together with a left-wing reformist program. They took 48 of the 59 Scottish Parliamentary seats. The Tories have only six (having lost seven) and Scotland where the British Labour Party began has now only one Labour MP. The SNP has taken on the radical mantle in Scotland. The Scottish people have overwhelmingly rejected Johnson’s Tories and their Brexit program. Johnson has said that he will not countenance Scottish independence so the imposition of the will of the English Tories on the Scots will be a major political issue for the whole term of this government.

UK background

“United Kingdom” is the creation of the English ruling class. Wales was conquered, Ireland was colonized and after six centuries of conflict Scotland was finally subdued in 1746. The Union Flag is meant to symbolize the union of these equal partners (though Wales is left out.) The history of all four countries is characterized by ebb and flow in the popularity of nationalist movements with armed conflict featuring frequently between rebels and the British state.

Attempts to crush Scotland began with Edward I, known as the “Hammer of the Scots” for his unbridled brutality. With the defeat of his son, Edward II, by a Scottish part-time army, led by Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn, in 1314, independence was secured for a time. The first defeats of the English invaders were by Scots led by the then commoner William Wallace and that egalitarianism was to be consolidated in the Declaration of Arbroath (1320):
“As long as but a hundred of us remain alive, never will we on any conditions be brought under English rule. It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honors, that we are fighting, but for freedom—for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself.”

The Magna Carta was about equal rights for barons while the Declaration of Arbroath is about freedom for all Scots. (Most Scottish people know of the Magna Carta but few English people know of the Declaration of Arbroath, which is just as important.)

The Reformation occurred in Scotland in 1560 nearly 30 years after England. However, the forms that the respective Protestant religions took were fundamentally different. In 1534 Henry VIII basically substituted himself for the Pope and, provided the clergy came to heal, they were relatively safe. As head of the Church of England, Henry would appoint the bishops and they, with the local aristocracy, would select the local clergy. The religious and political conflicts triggered by Henry would not be settled in England for nearly two centuries with hundreds-of-thousands of lives destroyed on and off the battlefield.

In Scotland, the leader of the reformation was a Calvinist protestant John Knox. The Church of Scotland would be Presbyterian, have no bishops and each congregation would elect its own minister. Knox vowed a school in every parish (so that everyone could learn to read the bible for themselves) and a college in every town. French educated and Catholic, Mary Queen of Scots, returned to a protestant country in 1561 but her stay was short and after defeat in battle she was forced to abdicate and flee to England for sanctuary in 1567. Her protestant cousin Elizabeth would eventually have her executed on February 8, 1587. James, Mary’s son, who was raised as a Protestant, would inherit the English throne on Elizabeth’s death.

Later it was the refusal of the Scots protestants to accept bishops and the “Book of Common Prayer,” both of which they considered “papist,” (relating to or associated with the Roman Catholic Church) that indirectly precipitated the English civil war and the eventual execution of Charles I on January 30, 1649.

...the people of highland Scotland were valued less than sheep, were treated like beasts and sold as slaves. It was never a union of equals—Scotland was a very junior partner but by and large of no real importance to the national government though a source of cannon fodder for the growing number of British imperialist military campaigns...

Although one of the poorest countries in Europe, by the late 18th century, Knox’s legacy was that Scotland was one of the most literate, and home to some of the most famous names in publishing—e.g., Collins, Macmillan, Chambers.

Scotland’s Renaissance
The late 18th century is one of the most exciting in Scotland’s and the world’s cultural history and is known as the Scottish Renaissance. During this time Scotland was one of the intellectual world. The names of Hume, Adam Smith, Hutton, Watt, Telford, Napier and many others are legendary in the history of science, engineering, medicine, philosophy and the arts, and all are Scots.

The mass of Scotland’s people were never party to the processes which absorbed their country into the “United Kingdom.”

On April 4, 1603, at the news of the death of Elizabeth of England, the opportunist James the VI of Scotland rode to London to be crowned James I of England. British monarchs in the 17th century ruled over two separate countries, so James was the VI of Scotland and I of England. In his 22-year reign James returned only once, showing how much he and his English government cared for Scotland.

That changed with the Union of the Crowns—1707, which was forced upon the Scots. In part it is as a consequence of the “Darien Disaster” in the Caribbean, which bankrupted many aristocrats and the emerging Scottish bourgeoisie.

Scotland’s bourgeois democratic revolution was stopped in its track and subject to England’s control.

The Act to dissolve the Scottish Parliament and in effect the Scottish nation was achieved through a combination of bribery, subterfuge, kidnapping and even murder. In the end the future of Scotland was decided by the Act of Union. Described as a “Shabby and underhand deal” which fewer than 200 had voted for, it resulted in the dissolution of the Scottish Parliament and in effect the Scottish nation, though many laws and legal practices remain Scottish.

It was the legacy to Scotland by the last of the Stuart monarchs, Queen Anne.

As Burns put it:

“They’re bought and sold for English gold,

Such a parcel of rogues in a nation.”

The tri-centenary in 2007 of this momentous event in the forming of the United Kingdom in 2007 passed without ceremony, pomp or pageantry and hardly a mention from official sources. It meant nothing to the English
establishment and there was nothing for Scots to celebrate.

The final futile Jacobite rebellion was crushed in 1746 and the decades that followed were characterized by English military occupation, brutal oppression, famine, eviction and starvation. Then came the “Clearances,” when the people of highland Scotland were valued less than sheep, were treated like beasts and sold as slaves. It was never a union of equals—Scotland was a very junior partner but by and large of no real importance to the national government though a source of cannon fodder for the growing number of British imperialist military campaigns.

(Wellington, who would later be Prime Minister, described the Scottish soldiers who had just helped to win the Battle of Waterloo as “The scum of the Earth.”)

All of this has remained part of the general Scottish culture and is deeply embedded in most Scot’s people’s consciousness. Robert Burns, born only 12 years after Culloden, wrote poems and songs that expressed the anger and bitterness felt by Scots at that time and persists to this day.

“The Sark runs o’er the Salway Sands,
The Tweed runs to the ocean,
To mark where England’s province stands,
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation.”

Or the powerful “Scot’s Wha Hae,” and other nationalistic anthems.

Burns, a poor but educated farmer, is Scotland’s national poet because he reflected and honored the lives of ordinary Scots people, their world, culture and their politics in the late 18th century. In great art the particular becomes also universal and Burns is still relevant today for Scotland and the world. His poem to a friend “Auld Lang Syne” is sung the world over, an anthem to our common humanity. Burns actively supported the French Revolution. A radical, a non-conformist, a libertarian (and libertine) and an internationalist, Burn’s supported Irish, American and Scottish independence movements and left a political outlook in his poetry that still influences the outlook of virtually every Scottish person.

Socialism, internationalism and independence are intertwined in the minds of most left-wing Scots.

Of course, there was always significant support for the Union from those who have benefited from it. This was mostly the Scots aristocracy who received honors, military and diplomatic positions and lands in the newly acquired colonies. Daniel Defoe and Walter Scott were among the most prominent unionists.

Defeated in war, the Scottish identity was never obliterated and even the most ardent unionists now honor the Scottish past and its heroes. Walter Scott immortalized and glorified Scottish rebels and anti-establishment folk heroes such as Rob Roy MacGregor, Redgauntlet, Lochinvar and Ivanhoe.

Following George IV’s visit in 1822, which Scott had choreographed, all things Scottish including tartan, became legal and fashionable again. Descendants of Norman barons now had their own tartans while the clan chiefs (the lairds) who had thrown their people off their lands were all now parading in tartans as way of claiming some fictitious ancient heritage.

Industrialization

The 19th century saw the rapid industrialization of central Scotland with coal mining, steel making, engineering and shipbuilding. As a result of Glasgow’s easy access to the trade routes to North America, the Caribbean and beyond, it became the second largest trading city of the British Empire. Immigrants moved from all over the UK, including England but especially the Highlands and Ireland for the lowest skilled work. This also meant rapid expansion of appalling living conditions—the notorious Glasgow tenements. One result was that the working class of central Scotland became highly politicized and organized in trades unions.

No matter where people had come from originally within a generation, they consider themselves Scottish. (My grandparents were—English, Highland
Scots and Irish but my parents considered themselves Scottish, as do all of their grandchildren. There is also a significant Italian-Scots community most of whom had never planned to settle in Scotland but pride themselves now in being Scottish.)

There was a massive growth of trades unionism and interest in socialist ideas throughout the industrial belt of Scotland in the late 19th century. Prominent socialists such as William Morris, George Bernard Shaw and other national figures did regular speaking tours of Scottish industrial towns. In the early 20th century John Maclean was giving weekly classes in Marxist economics and philosophy to hundreds of working-class people in Glasgow.

Keir Hardy the first “Labour” MP, grew up in Bellshill, Lanarkshire and had worked in the coal mines from the age of ten. Originally, he was elected as a Liberal MP. Later he became a founder of the Scottish Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party and the Labour Representation Committee, which became the Labour Party we know today.

All of these parties had in their founding program “Home Rule for Scotland” which was the term used at that time for independence. Cunningham Graham was the first declared socialist elected to parliament as the Liberal MP for North West Lanarkshire in 1922 and his platform included nationalization of the land and “Home Rule for Scotland.” (A bye-election in 1929 in the same constituency was to elect Jenny Lee a coal miner’s daughter as the first woman Labour MP—my maternal grandfather was her election agent.) Cunningham Graham would later be a founder, and the first president, of the Scottish Labour Party; he became a founder of the National Party of Scotland in 1928; and the first president of the Scottish National Party in 1934.

**UK-wide Labour Party**

When the UK-wide Labour Party was founded “Home Rule for Scotland” was in the original program and was only dropped when it was clear to the career Labour politicians that there would never be a Labour Government without the large number of Labour MPs elected in Scotland. In the 1920s almost all parliamentary seats in Glasgow were won by socialists and trades union militants including Maxton, Shinwell, Wheatley collectively known as the “Red Clydesiders” their program was “For socialism and home rule.”

**Scots have always resisted submerging their national identity in the UK but have always been at the forefront of the labour movement in Britain. For the Scottish communist the fight for socialism and independence are facets of the same struggle—it follows therefore for its own liberation the English working-class organizations should be in solidarity with the struggle for Scottish independence.**

The Communist Party of Great Britain from the beginning also supported Scottish independence and took its position from Lenin’s pamphlet “The Right of Small Nations to Self-Determination” which supported to right of subject nations to independence and mandated communists to support those struggles.

John Newbolt, a Communist, was elected as Labour MP in 1922 for Motherwell when membership of both parties was still allowed. Willie Gallacher a “Red Clydesider” and one of the Communist Party founders was MP for West Fife from 1935 to 1950. (Gallacher is referred to in Lenin’s *Left Wing Communism...* The same parliamentary seat was held later by Gordon Brown.)

John Maclean who Lenin appointed as the Soviet’s first representative in Britain was a Marxist teacher and again one of the leaders of “Red Clydeside” who advocated an independent Scottish socialist republic and founded the Scottish Workers Republican Party.

Scottish socialists and communists such as Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDairmid were leaders of the Scottish cultural revival of the 1920s and ’30s, which contributed to the founding of the Scottish National Party in 1932. From its inception the SNP has had a range of political influences including Marxism, socialism and petit bourgeois nationalism. Frequently, however the SNP has been more radical than the Labour Party. While the Prime Minister David Cameron was referring to refugees as an “invading hoard” Nicola Sturgeon leader of the SNP and Scotland’s First Minister was saying that refugees were welcome in Scotland.

The folk music revival in Britain in the 1950s and ’60s was a left-wing phenomenon associated with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and the Communist Party.

Disillusionment with the Labour Government also lead to a resurgence of Scottish nationalism and the rapid growth of the SNP and recruitment of young people in the ’60s. This was also reflected in the folk music community where some of Scotland’s most prominent folk musicians were outspoken
socialists and nationalists. One particular favorite song was “The Scottish Breakaway” written by the communist, Hamish Imlach, to the tune of the loyalist anthem “The Sash.” (An album, “The Scottish Breakaway,” which contains several songs in this republican vein was released in 1968 by Alex Campbell, father of the UB40 brothers. Billy Connolly was in the backing band of Matt McGinn another communist/nationalist folksinger who actively supported our Vietnam Solidarity Campaign group in Glasgow.) In Scotland, Hamish Henderson, a communist, CND activist and poet was among the leaders of this movement while his protege, Roy Williamson (of the Corries), another socialist, was to write “Flower of Scotland” which was adopted spontaneously by the Scots people as their national anthem:

“But we can still rise now, and be a nation again.”

Socialism, internationalism and independence are intertwined in the minds of most left-wing Scots.

When Winnie Ewing won the working-class Hamilton constituency for the SNP in November 1967 it was a shock to the Labour Party, which had held the seat for 50 years. She received 46 percent of the vote in a seat that the SNP had never contested previously and was viewed by most on the left as a reaction to the betrayals of the Wilson Government and the stagnation and corruption of the Labour Party in Scotland.

A monumental betrayal of the Scottish people by the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson has come to light recently. When oil fields were discovered off the coast of Scotland in the early 1970s the Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath commissioned a secret enquiry conducted by a Professor Gavin McCrone into the economic feasibility of an independent Scotland. This report concluded in 1975 that Scots could have a standard of living on par with that of Switzerland. First the Tory Heath then Wilson and since then every government suppressed the McClcone report until the SNP forced its publication in 2005.

Interwoven struggles

This brief history shows that the struggles of socialism and national independence are interwoven into the political consciousness of the Scottish working class. Scotland is a subject nation. But the Scots have always resisted submerging their national identity in the UK but have always been at the forefront of the labour movement in Britain. For the Scottish communist the fight for socialism and independence are facets of the same struggle—it follows therefore for its own liberation the English working-class organizations should be in solidarity with the struggle for Scottish independence.

The Labour Party in Scotland and in England (and socialist parties around the world) must rally to the cause of Scottish self-determination and unite in the struggle with the SNP for independence.

The result of this election is that reactionary nationalism in the guise of the Brexit utopia, has triumphed in England. Johnson and his contemptuous cohort have paraded as patriots of the “Great British Empire” type when in fact they are the representatives of 21st century multinational financial capitalist interests. The working class will be repaid in the time-honored fashion that Johnson’s predecessors always have.

In the class war we must hit capitalism at its weakest points and at this time in the UK it is the right of the Scots to independence. The English working class, its organizations including the Labour Party and its leaders, now must see Scottish self-determination not as a threat or a rejection but as part of the process in its own and the world’s liberation. The Labour Party in Scotland and in England (and socialist parties around the world) must rally to the cause of Scottish self-determination and unite in the struggle with the SNP for independence.

The English electorate have chosen a reactionary, racist, sexist liar as their Prime Minister who will be imposed on the Scottish people against their will. “Not Our Prime Minister” is already a popular chant around Scotland.

For England the road to socialism more than ever involves supporting the struggle of the Scots for their independence.

1 The Gulf of Darién “…was the site of the Darien scheme, autonomous Scotland’s one major attempt at colonialism. The first expedition of five ships (Saint Andrew, Caledonia, Unicorn, Dolphin, and Endavour) set sail from Leith on July 14, 1698, with around 1,200 people on board. Their orders were ‘to proceed to the Bay of Darien, and make the Isle called the Golden Island...some few leagues to the leeward of the mouth of the great River of Darien...and there make a settlement on the mainland.’ After calling at Madeira and the West Indies, the fleet made landfall off the coast of Darien on November 2. The settlers christened their new home “New Caledonia.”


2 The Jacobite risings, also known as the Jacobite rebellions or the War of the British Succession, were a series of uprisings, rebellions, and wars in Great Britain and Ireland occurring between 1688 and 1746. The uprisings had the aim of returning James II of England and VII of Scotland, the last Catholic British monarch, and later his descendants of the House of Stuart, to the throne of Great Britain after they had been deposed by Parliament during the Glorious Revolution. The series of conflicts takes its name Jacobitism, from Jacobus, the Latin form of James.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobite_risings

3 The Battle of Culloden was the final confrontation of the Jacobite rising of 1745.
The United States drone assassination of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi commander Abd Mahdi al-Muhandis, along with eight others, was a war crime by any definition, violating both Iraqi sovereignty and international law. This criminal act carelessly risked sparking a wider, catastrophic war that would involve many nations and put millions of lives at risk.

President Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo followed their aggression with a series of lies, which were repeated by much of the media and many politicians, claiming that General Soleimani was responsible for the deaths of over 600 U.S. soldiers in Iraq. But it is Iran who has been the victim of U.S. aggression ever since 1953, when the democratically-elected president Mohammed Mossadegh was overthrown in a joint British/U.S. coup, followed by the imposition of the Shah. From 1980-1988, the U.S. fueled the Iran/Iraq war, which killed more than one million people. In 1988, the U.S. shot down an Iranian civilian passenger plane, killing more than 290 Iranian civilians. Since 1984, the U.S. has imposed crippling sanctions that have devastated Iran’s economy and the lives of its citizens.

Iraq also has been devastated by U.S. sanctions imposed by the Clinton administration, which killed 500,000 children, and by the U.S. invasion and occupation which followed in 2003, resulting in the deaths of over one million Iraqis.

Donald Trump’s order to assassinate General Soleimani was the culmination of his campaign of “maximum pressure” against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The bipartisan attack began when Democrats joined with Republicans to resume sanctions in 2017, giving Trump leverage to withdraw from the Iran nuclear agreement (JCPOA). The Iranian people continue to suffer tremendously from U.S. sanctions, which prevent Iran from accessing world financial markets, depriving them of life-saving medications and the ability to maintain the nation’s infrastructure.

The antiwar movement responds

But the U.S. people are not fooled by their government’s aggression. The antiwar movement quickly and decisively organized mass actions in 80 different cities in 38 states. Tens-of-thousands of people rallied across the country to demand No War on Iran and U.S. Out of Iraq!

Most importantly, the people of Iran and Iraq have spoken loudly. Millions have taken to the streets to mourn their martyrs and both governments spoke quickly. The Iraqi parliament passed legislation demanding that the U.S. close its embassy and remove all military personnel. They also ended all security agreements and now deny the U.S. the right to use Iraqi airspace. Iran announced that the JCPOA is officially dead, that they will resume enriching uranium, and that they will take their case to the United Nations.

Donald Trump is just the latest U.S. president to lay waste to the nations of the Middle East, a region whose problems can all be laid at Washington’s door. Democrats in Congress have made a great show of their impeachment but not before giving Trump everything he wanted. They agreed to remove language from the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would have required him to seek congressional approval before taking action against Iran. They gave him more than $700 billion in defense spending—more than ever before—and refused to end the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) which is the pretext for continued occupations in the region.

Trump’s provocations did not end with the assassinations. He publicly stated that the U.S. would target 52 sites in Iran, including those of cultural significance—another war crime. He then threatened Iraq with extreme sanctions after its parliament and Prime Minister requested that all foreign troops, including U.S. troops, be removed from their country. Trump also said he would force Iraq to pay for the bases built to support the U.S. occupation. This is a gross violation of Iraqi sovereignty and a slap in the face of the Iraqi people.

When Congress returns on January 7 they must be met with demands for action. Their impeachment makes no mention of the international crimes in which they are complicit. They must add war crimes—surely a high crime and misdemeanor—to their articles of impeachment. Congress must clearly state that they oppose war on Iran, whether Trump seeks approval from them or not.

The people’s demands are clear. We are absolutely opposed to a war with Iran—which could have devastating consequences for the entire planet. The U.S. must withdraw its military from Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and all of the Middle East. The January 4 anti-war protests are just the beginning. We will continue to mobilize mass actions and to voice our demands for an end to invasion, occupation, and war. We stand in solidarity with the people of Iran and Iraq, who want the U.S./NATO axis to leave their region and end their deadly interference and interventions.

NO WAR ON IRAN—U.S. OUT OF IRAQ!

U.S./NATO Out of the Middle East!
End the Sanctions!

—United National Antiwar Coalition, January 6, 2020

https://www.unacpeace.org
Iran Menaced by U.S. Imperialism

By Speakoutsocialists.org

Last week, the Trump administration ordered the assassination of one of Iran’s top generals, Qasem Soleimani. While the administration claims that the strike was in response to “terrorism” and Iran’s subversive role in the Middle East, it’s really about one thing—the long running efforts of the U.S. to dominate Iran, the region’s second-largest oil producer. During the 20th century, the U.S. used every means to dominate Iran—supporting brutal dictators, overthrowing governments, and funding devastating wars. Iran was under the thumb of foreign domination until 1979. In fact, the U.S. government—and the big oil corporations it serves—have never forgiven the Iranian regime for what it did in 1979. It took back control of the oil on its own land.

Iran’s oil exploited by the British

Iran has the fourth largest oil reserves in the world. This oil was exploited by the British starting in 1909. After World War I the British occupied the country and propped up an army officer named Reza Khan who became the “Shah” or king. His regime ensured that the British oil interests in Iran would be protected.

A movement to gain rational control of the oil

A movement grew to kick out the British and regain control of the Iranian oil. It was led by a lawyer named Dr. Mohammed Mossadeq. In 1951, the movement demanded real elections, and Mossadeq was elected Prime Minister. After being elected, Mossadeq demanded that Iran retain at least some of the profits from the oil fields. When the British refused, Mossadeq ordered the total takeover of the oil fields.

The U.S. and Britain overthrow Iran’s Prime Minister

As a response to the threat to their oil interests, in 1953 Britain’s intelligence agency and the U.S.’s CIA, organized a coup to remove Mossadeq from power. They replaced him with the former Shah’s son, Mohammed Reza Shah. Iran’s oil was divided between Britain and the U.S., with 40 percent of the profit going to companies from each country and the rest going to a handful of other international corporations.

The Shah—a brutal dictator serving the U.S.

The CIA helped the Shah set up a brutal secret police force, SAVAK, that kidnapped and murdered thousands of people for opposing his regime. During the 1970s, the U.S. also helped the Shah set up one of the most powerful armies in the region to help ensure U.S. dominance in the Middle East. The oil continued to be exploited by U.S. and British oil interests.

The revolution of 1979

Despite the intense repression, people’s anger grew, and in 1979 Iranians took to the streets in protest. The movement was huge. Working people went on strike, took over cities, and even disarmed the police and army. It was the end of the Shah’s reign. During the intense repression under the Shah, one of the only organized political forces in Iran was the Islamic religious establishment. Under the leadership of a high-ranking cleric, Ayatollah Khomeini, religious clerics assumed control of the country, and founded the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Revolution of 1979 deprived the U.S. of one of its most important military allies in the region, and this new regime took back the oil fields just as Mossadeq had done in 1951. The rulers of the Islamic Republic enriched themselves, becoming wealthy while most Iranians remained poor and exploited. But the regime won a certain amount of legitimacy by taking control of the country’s resources.

A standoff with the U.S.

Since the 1979 Revolution, the U.S. has been in a standoff with the Iranian regime, continuing to this day to be an obstacle to U.S. control of the Middle East and its resources. During the 1980s the U.S. armed Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq to undertake a massive invasion of Iran. During that war, although more than a million people lost their lives, the regime survived. Iran has been able to develop an important influence in the region, especially in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, much to the frustration of the United States government. Internationally Iran has worked with Russia and China to develop its oil fields. All of this puts Iran in the cross hairs of U.S. foreign policy. Now Trump flirts with launching a war. We have every reason not to fall for this agenda. We know that the U.S. government only has a return to total U.S domination in mind for Iran. Only the poor and working class of Iran has the right and the possibility to enact a true “regime change.” NO to U.S. war on Iran!

—Speakoutsocialists.org , January 4, 2020
bayarea@speoutssocialists.org

NO WAR ON IRAN
Major U.S. arms companies have seen their stock prices jump following the Trump administration’s assassination of Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani.

The U.S. announced it was deploying nearly 3,000 extra troops to the Middle East on Friday as Iran vowed “severe revenge” on those responsible for Soleimani’s killing.

Iran’s expected retaliation means America’s long-running military presence in Iraq and the Middle East, which has financially benefited U.S. defense companies, is unlikely to wind down.

Defense technology company Northrop Grumman saw its stock up by 5.43 percent on Friday, while Lockheed Martin stock gained 3.6 percent and Raytheon stock rose by 1.5 percent.

The killing of Soleimani, a powerful military commander, has sparked fears of an all-out war between the U.S. and Iran, which would lead to increased military spending.

Donald Trump has said the airstrike was a defensive move and claimed Soleimani was “plotting imminent and sinister attacks on American diplomats and military personnel.”

“We took action last night to stop a war. We did not take action to start a war,” Mr. Trump said on Friday.

However, the assassination is a clear escalation in U.S.-Iran tensions and is likely to increase clashes between the two countries.

Tasnim news agency has quoted a senior commander in Iran’s Revolutionary Guards as saying the country “will punish Americans wherever they are within reach” in retaliation for Soleimani’s killing.

On Saturday, thousands of mourners in Baghdad, Iraq, marched in a funeral procession for the commander and chanted “America is the Great Satan” and “Death to America.”

The U.S. State Department has already urged all U.S. citizens to leave Iraq following a New Year’s Eve attack on an embassy in Baghdad by an “Iranian-backed” group.

Stock market analysts tracking the Defense market believe the escalated tensions in the region could lead to increases in military spending, according to The Washington Post.

Oil prices also surged following the strike on Friday, with U.S. crude oil climbing by 3.1 percent, while stocks fell broadly on Wall Street.

Roman Schweitzer, from the Cowen Washington Research Group, has said the airstrike is a “major escalation” that shifts U.S.-Iran tensions towards a direct confrontation.

“This is the equivalent of Iran killing the U.S. chairman of the joint chiefs of staff or the director of the Central Intelligence Agency and then taking credit for it,” Mr. Schweitzer wrote in an analyst note.

Sheila Kahyaoglu, an analyst for Jefferies Investment Bank, also wrote to investors that the threat of conflict in the Middle East “points to the broad threat profile that supports elevated levels of spending,” according to The Post.

—Independent, January 4, 2020

Inescapable Casino of Free Market Capitalism

By Dr. Nayvin Gordon

An excellent article “The Inescapable Casino,” written by Bruce Boghosian, a professor of mathematics at Tufts University, is definitely worth reading. The article shows how physics and mathematics can describe the distribution of wealth in modern economies with unprecedented accuracy. Oxfam estimates that today some 26 individuals possess as much household wealth as the lower-half of the world’s population combined—over 3.5 billion people! Statistics indicate that the rich are increasingly concentrating more wealth. Between 1989 and 2016, the U.S. has become more unequal and now has the highest inequality in the “developed” world. Presently 14 European countries also fall into an oligarchy state (power in the hands of the top one percent.)

The free market is essentially a casino that you can never leave. The longer you stay in the casino the more likely you are to lose, and inequality inevitably grows due to the well documented multitude of systemic biases favoring the wealthy. If the economy is unequal to begin with the wealth of the poorer will decrease and be transferred to the wealthier.

Mathematical models demonstrate that the natural inclination of wealth is to flow upward in a “free” market capitalist economy. Once there is some variance in wealth, no matter how small, wealth will move from poorer to richer. Inequality inevitably grows more pronounced. There is a systematic inherent unfairness as the top one percent takes a greater and greater share of social wealth, and only redistribution sets the limits on inequality.

The professor of mathematics at Tufts University writes that conflating the concept of the free market with the notion of freedom is a mistake. The “free” market gives rise to economies that are anything but free and fair. In fact, the inequality in free market economies inevitably grows more pronounced.

The physics of inequality

Water has a dual state, either water or water vapor, depending on temperature. At the boiling point water turns into steam (water vapor.) This sudden and dramatic change is called a “phase transition.” Such jumping from one state to another is also known as quantum phase transitions, which play a role in other areas of physics.

“Free” market capitalist economic systems exhibit quantum phase transition. If the wealth of society is substituted for the water, then wealth can quantum phase from a steam state—democracy, to a water state—oligarchy (Power in the hands of a small dominant class, the one percent.)

Mathematics demonstrates that this quantum phase occurs when the ratio of the wealth bias over the wealth redistribution (WB/WR) is greater than one. In other words, when the forces of wealth attained advantages (bias), exceeds the forces of democratic wealth redistribution. Wealth attained advantages are privatization, deregulation, lower taxes for corporations and the rich, tax loopholes, corporate subsidies, inheritance, etc. Forces of redistribution are: public services, debt forgiveness, government programs, subsidies, progressive taxation, regulations, higher wages and benefits, etc.

At a particular cooling of political temperature, when the inevitable forces of inequality sufficiently weaken the forces of democratic redistribution there will be a sudden condensation of wealth to the top one percent—a phase transition to a state of oligarchy. For example, in 1991 Russia suffered the politics of shock therapy economics with sudden privatization and deregulation. Russia became an oligarchy almost overnight, plunging the working class into poverty. The author states that it is “only redistribution that sets limits on inequality.” The question is: Can we escape the limits of inequality?

Continuous heat can boil away all the water resulting in a complete state of steam. The same holds true for economies of class inequality. Sustained political heat from the working classes has the potential to push not only for greater wealth redistribution, but also to reduce the wealth bias to zero and abolish any wealth advantage. This would be a quantum leap to a qualitatively new economic system of social, economic and political equality—an egalitarian society.

Mathematics and Physics point the way to the possibility of the greatest escape of all, the escape from inequality.

Dr. Gordon is a California Physician who has written many articles on health and politics.

1 https://wwwissenschaftamericam.com/article/is-inequality-inevitable/
Logan County, West Virginia was the epicenter of the final battle of the “mine wars” of the 20th century: The Battle of Blair Mountain. In 1921, thousands of miners—white, Black and immigrant—stood together and took up arms against the forces of state and corporate terror that held them hostage in coal country. They were proud workers and they knew they deserved better. To the defeated and discouraged working class of present-day Appalachia, the story of the Battle of Blair Mountain must sound like a fairy tale.

Today, Logan County is ground zero for another battle—the struggle to survive in a region with the highest rates of Type 2 Diabetes (T2D) in the country. It is a place where all the risk factors for this global pandemic come together: chronic economic stress, broken communities, powerlessness, poverty, and toxic food.

Eighty years after conquering the major communicable diseases, the poor are still dying younger than the rich. In a shocking reversal rarely seen outside of wartime, 2017 saw a decline in life expectancy among some sectors of the poor in the U.S. A 2018 survey finds the same dismal reversal of longevity gains in Great Britain. Public health indicators between the rich and the poor continue to diverge, but now it is chronic illness, not infection, that is the killer. Insidious and poorly understood biologic processes are driving accelerating rates of cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes. And, like the infectious pandemics of the 18th and 19th centuries, these illnesses claim more victims among the poor.

The prevailing 19th century explanation for this disparity was “miasma:” a mysterious and invisible cloud of toxic air that was thought to hover over the slums of industrial England and sicken the residents. The first epidemiologist, John Snow, debunked this explanation forever by proving that it was tainted water, traced to a single pump, that was causing cholera. The germ theory took hold.

There is no germ theory for these modern-day scourges—no coherent, scientifically acceptable explanation for why poor people get more chronic illnesses. Medicine, the scientific lens through which we interpret and understand disease, is not a neutral force. When capitalism emerged from the ashes of the feudal realm, science took the place of religion as the legitimating ideology for the new social order. Who can dispute a scientific fact? But the focus of medical science is on individual habits, biology and genes. It’s an orientation that ignores environment, social relations and the now-undisputed unity of mind and body in the genesis of illness. Is health an individual problem with individual solutions? Or is health the social product of how we live in society? There are powerful repercussions depending on how these questions are answered. Modern medicine’s answer—that our individual biology determines our health—effectively eliminates the possibility that societal change can improve our wellbeing. We can only change ourselves, or submit to our genetic fate. It is a belief system that works very well to cement the status quo in place. But is it an accurate representation of how disease works?

What is diabetes?
Medically, T2D is the inability of cells to utilize insulin, with eventual failure of the pancreas to produce insulin. Insulin is the “key” that allows glucose (sugar) into the cells. If insulin is absent or blocked from entering the cell, blood sugar rises in the bloodstream, but cells are starved. A high blood sugar environment is uniquely

Dollar Meals and Diabetes
By Elizabeth Oram
toxic to cells. The failure of insulin—“insulin resistance”—is related to a pervasive high sugar diet and obesity. Researchers have characterized diabetes as a microcosm of the degenerative process of aging on a cellular level. The elevated blood sugar binds to cellular structures, producing inflammation that accelerates the damage of aging. Unsurprisingly, diabetes is the major risk factor for heart disease and stroke—diabetics have three times the risk of death from these cardiovascular conditions. Diabetics may suffer blindness due to retinopathy, amputation due to vascular disease, numbness and pain due to nerve damage and kidney failure requiring dialysis. It increases the risk for cancer and dementia. Diabetes is like speeding up the aging process. But it is premature aging with a preference for the poor.

The number of people diagnosed with diabetes has skyrocketed since 1980, increasing more than fourfold. The global prevalence has doubled. According to the World Health Organization, we are on track for one out of four people in the world to have diabetes by 2050. And estimates of undiagnosed illness is as high as 30-50 percent. Incidence is rising fastest in middle- and low-income countries.

Healthcare providers like myself are taught that diabetes is a hereditary affliction made worse by “lifestyle” factors: unhealthy food choices, a sedentary lifestyle and obesity. We are trained to treat one patient at a time and use the personal responsibility mantra to push our patients to improve their health status. Gluttony and sloth will get you sick.

Over the years I started to question these assumptions. If diabetes is primarily genetic, why has prevalence doubled in 40 years? It is impossible for genes to change that quickly. On the other hand, when we analyze maps of diabetes incidence, it is zip code, not genetic code, that appears to confer risk. Very poor localities like Appalachia, Native American reservations and impoverished urban neighborhoods all have outsized incidence. Endocrinologists blame the exceptionally high prevalence of T2D in Native American populations on “bad genetic substrate.” But I found studies comparing members of a Native American tribe who grew up with strikingly different socioeconomic circumstances (due to income-producing casinos on their land). The more economically secure section of the tribe has dramatically lower rates of T2D. Same genes, different outcome.

...when we analyze maps of diabetes incidence, it is zip code, not genetic code, that appears to confer risk...

If T2D is not primarily hereditary, then certainly it is due to diet, obesity and lack of exercise. It is, after all, a condition in which the body has trouble turning food into energy. Is the globally pervasive Western diet the unseen contagion that is sickening modern humans and taking years off our lives? The answer is a qualified yes. The modern western diet is high in sugar, denatured white flour, vegetable oils, and meat; it is low in fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains. More importantly, it is spiked with hidden sugar and fats, highly processed, and laced with chemicals to make it feel good in your mouth. The scientists Gary Taubes and Robert Lustig have shown that sugar, present in almost all processed foods, is physically addictive. Sugar and simple carbohydrates are also calming—they temporarily treat feelings of stress and depression through the release of endorphins, the body’s own opioid compounds. The impact of sugar alone could account for the entire obesity and diabetes epidemic.

Causes of the epidemic

The popular writer Michael Pollan has written persuasively and urgently about the disastrous health effects of corporate food production driven by powerful agribusiness interests. But his dietary mantra: “eat food, not too much, mostly plants,” is a tough ask for the residents of Logan County, home to 37 fast food restaurants; or those forced to live in the “food deserts” of dense impoverished urban neighborhoods, where there are Burger Kings with 64-ounce sodas, but no greengrocers. The tax-subsidized food industry spends billions on saturation marketing, chemical flavor manipulation, and portion creep—this expenditure has been highly effective in changing eating behavior over the years. Opting out is a luxury that takes time and money.

Making the “choice” to eat real food means having access to affordable, high quality fresh fruits, vegetables, grains, and protein, and more importantly, the time to prep and cook a healthy meal from scratch every evening. Making the “choice” to be healthy means having safe streets to play in, bike lanes in neighborhoods that are walkable and time for informal group sports. Working Americans are exhausted and indebted, every family member is in the work force and work schedules are punishingly unpredictable—when parents finally pick up hungry and cranky children from day care, they want to treat them to something fun, delicious, fast and cheap. There is a straight road from Dollar Meals to diabetes.

The jaw-dropping explosion in diabetes having been normalized, treatment of this illness has become an industry. Lip service is given to “healthy lifestyles” by the pharmaceutical industry, but maintenance of an ever-growing market for expensive drugs used for a lifetime is the holy grail of Big Pharma. And profits continue to roll in as the disease destroys organs: the kidney dialysis industry has been wholly
financialized and is now controlled by two corporate players, DaVita and Fresenius, whose stock is ascendant on Wall Street. Kidney failure preferentially affects the poor, but it is fully covered by Medicare at any age, so treating it is much more profitable than preventing it. A ProPublica investigation has found that fatality rates for dialysis in the U.S. are worse than anywhere else in the developed world—commercial dialysis care means short staffing, filth, high rates of infection and medication errors. A decade ago every major hospital had a diabetes center to focus on prevention—the vast majority have closed. The real money is in treating the complications.

So far in our story we have a corporate global food system that has replaced real food with highly profitable, adulterated, non-nutritive food-like substances for an expanding market around the world. Add to that an insurance industry that masquerades as healthcare; healthcare that profits from our bodies; oppressive conditions of work that leave us stressed and exhausted with no time to prepare and enjoy real food, and communities built for machines that deprive us of the natural physical exercise our bodies need to survive. And yet we have only scratched the surface of the modern miasma.

The late Richard Levins was known as “the dialectical biologist.” A Marxist, a farmer, a biologist, and professor emeritus at Harvard, Levins insisted that a dialectical method was necessary to deal with complexity and change in the social and natural world. Medicine, on the other hand, divorces itself from the social, and deals in simple linear, causal relationships between biological parts: A causes B and is cured by C. But health and illness are always in dialectical relationship with environment, society, culture and history. We can’t chop reality into little pieces without losing the plot. The global pandemic of diabetes, and the social gradient that confers increased risk on the poor, is similarly complex. Biological feedback systems designed by evolution to protect us from danger have become the danger.

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The tax-subsidized food industry spends billions on saturation marketing, chemical flavor manipulation, and portion creep—this expenditure has been highly effective in changing eating behavior over the years. Opting out is a luxury that takes time and money.

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The role of stress

It turns out that our bodies generate substances that can cause diabetes, even in the presence of an optimal diet. These substances—hormones called cortisol and adrenalin—are produced by the adrenal glands to be released into the bloodstream under conditions of extreme life-threatening necessity. That is the evolutionary function, anyway—think tiger chasing prey on the savannah. The effect is to temporarily raise the blood sugar under stress to supercharge muscle and brain function. Robert Sapolsky is a neuroscientist who has been studying baboon populations in Africa for 30 years, and what he has discovered about a stress response gone awry is part of the puzzle of diabetes.

Humans are experiencing something new—chronic stress, stress that lasts for days, weeks, even years, and the physiological consequences are devastating. When cortisol levels in the bloodstream are chronically elevated, the result is not only diabetes, but a cascade of related ills: impaired immunity to infection and malignancy, abdominal obesity, increased rates of dementia (high blood sugar is toxic to the brain’s hippocampus), high blood pressure, depression, diminished fertility and more. Pregnant women who experience frequent stress can have babies who secrete higher levels of glucocorticoids their whole lives—they are overweight and get more diabetes. According to physician and researcher Gabor Mate: “stress is not an abstract psychological event, it is a set of physical responses in the body.”

We know from post-mortem studies that the adrenal glands of poor people are abnormal and enlarged from overuse—the work of continually pumping cortisol and adrenalin into the blood. What causes this kind of chronic stress? Why do the poor get more of it? Arline Geronimus, a professor of public health at the University of Michigan, studies the health effects of the stressors of poverty, along with gender and race inequality. It is a catalogue of misery: unsafe living conditions, the constant threat of random violence, rampant everyday racism, discrimination and social exclusion, excessive caregiving responsibilities, deteriorated housing and crowded conditions, precarious employment and chronic financial insecurity. Geronimus calls the cellular damage wrought by this onslaught “weathering”—it prematurely ages every organ system in the body. As author Damon Young put it recently, writing in the New York Times about the premature death of Black men: “we age out of bullets and into high blood pressure.”

The levels of stress that cause this weathering occur when the threats to bare survival are always just beyond our ability to control. We then expend all of our energy simply trying to cope, but the threat is always close behind. We lack the power to control the forces that are buffeting our lives, and the lives of those we love. To be poor is to be at the bottom, always looking up.

It is this pyramid of hierarchy that is the most important factor in the social gradient of illness. In Sapolsky’s
baboon tribe, it’s good to be the king. It’s also healthier—lower order members of the pack have higher stress hormone levels with resulting lower fertility, excess disease and shorter life spans. In the human tribe, “hierarchy” is a euphemism for our class position, and the consequences are the same. The health effects of an accident of birth are more diabetes, more cardiovascular disease, more cancer and a shorter life span.

This association is borne out in the famous Whitehall Studies. These longitudinal trials of health outcomes for thousands of British civil servants were begun in 1967 and are still ongoing. The subjects are not poor, and yet any job characterized by the experience of domination led to shortened life spans. According to Sir Michael Marmot, principal investigator: “We have strong evidence that there are two important influences on health in explaining the hierarchy in health. The first is autonomy, control, empowerment. People who are disempowered, people who don’t have autonomy, people who have little control over their lives, are at increased risk of heart disease, increased risk of mental illness. And we’ve also shown they had metabolic disturbances, the so-called metabolic syndrome, which increases risk of diabetes. We’ve shown that these work factors increase risk of the metabolic syndrome related to insulin resistance and lipid disturbances that, we think, increase risk of diabetes and heart disease.”

The antidote: community

We take for granted that for most Americans, work is hierarchical and alienating. But being dominated and powerless in the workplace literally makes us sick.

We also know that there are factors that are protective against the damaging effects of stress. The single highest predictor of elevated stress hormone levels in Sapolsky’s baboons is social isolation. The single most important buffer is social connectedness and community. The most damaging scenario for human health is lack of control over what is going on, no predictive information about the stressor, no outlets for the frustration caused by it, and no social support in coping with it.

...the kidney dialysis industry has been wholly financialized and is now controlled by two corporate players, DaVita and Fresenius...

So, it is not surprising that, according to Vicente Navarro, a researcher who has spent his life documenting the health consequences of capitalism, “the world’s healthiest societies are those with the lowest inequality—societies where leftwing forces are strong.” Navarro attributes this to the increased social cohesion and greater sense of power and participation in less unequal countries. Universal access to healthcare does not make the social gradient vanish because it cannot heal the weathering of body and spirit.

The quotidian, grinding violence that is life on the losing end of capitalism; a corporate assault that poisons our food and preys on the victims—this is the miasma that sickens us. The people of Logan County in Appalachia have endured decades of deindustrialization and layoffs that have all but destroyed their communities. With those losses go the institutions of collective support and connectedness that Sapolsky cites as essential to resilience and survival. In the wake of this trauma, the victims are disoriented, paralyzed, their sense of self-worth and autonomy shredded. It is that autonomy that is the prerequisite for power, and the antidote to the diseases of despair. The Battle for Blair Mountain occurred in the context of organized working people who knew their labor was indispensable and understood their power in withholding it. The response was rapid and brutal, and it continues to this day in Appalachia. “Stress” doesn’t begin to describe the experience of living in one of capital’s sacrifice zones.

As the globally dominant social and economic system, capitalism’s impact on our lives is all-encompassing. Diabetes may be a final common pathway of a toxic social environment that literally depletes life. Its disparate toll in zip codes like Logan County should be an urgent wake-up call. We are a product of our social relations, but we also shape them. It is that struggle—to forge human connections and locate our power—that brings health.

In 2018, teacher walkouts all over the country were sparked by a wildcat strike in West Virginia. The tipping point for the West Virginia teachers was the imposition of a “personal fitness wellness app,” refusal of which would incur a fine. The teachers saw the deception in a device that is not only personally invasive, but coercive and disempowering. In the face of the real threats to health—inadequate salaries, overcrowded classrooms, and unresponsive officials—the teachers’ united NO echoed with a strike wave across the country. It was the spirit of Blair Mountain.

Elizabeth Oram is a nurse and adjunct lecturer at Hunter College. She is a member of the Professional Staff Congress.

—Alliance for Sustainable Communities, October 27, 2019

https://www.sustainlv.org/focus-on/dollar-meals-and-diabetes/
What Cruelty Looks Like

By Jake Johnson

The Trump administration announced Wednesday, December 4, 2019, that it has finalized a plan to tighten punitive work requirements for food stamp recipients, a move that would strip nutrition assistance from an estimated 750,000 low-income people by mid-2020.

"Pay attention. This is what cruelty looks like," tweeted the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights in response to the completed rule, which would be the first of a series of proposed food stamp cuts to take effect.

The rule change, which was first unveiled earlier this year, would restrict states’ ability to exempt people without dependents from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program’s work requirements. The rule is set to take effect April 1, 2020.

"For able-bodied adults without dependents, U.S. law limits SNAP benefits to three months, unless recipients are working or in training for 20 hours a week,” the Wall Street Journal reported Wednesday. “States can waive those limits in areas where unemployment runs 20 percent above the national rate, which was 3.6 percent in October.”

The Trump administration’s proposal to curtail states’ ability to waive work requirements sparked a flood of outrage from aid groups, Democratic lawmakers, and ordinary people. During the rule’s 60-day public comment period, tens-of-thousands of people decried the measure as an immoral attack on the most vulnerable by an administration that has worked tirelessly to fatten the pockets of the rich.

“The comments make it clear that most Americans not only oppose but are utterly repulsed by this plan to punish the poorest among us by denying them help to feed themselves,” Scott Faber, senior vice president for government affairs at the Environmental Working Group (EWG), said in a statement in April.

According to an Urban Institute study (pdf) published last week, the Trump administration’s three proposed SNAP changes combined would strip federal food aid from 3.7 million people.

“The basics of the situation are clear,” Rolling Stone’s Patrick Reis wrote Tuesday. “When it came to tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, Trump and Republicans felt the nation’s finances were firm enough to give up more than $1,500,000,000,000 [1.5 trillion]. When it’s time to spend a fraction of that to help poor people eat, that’s when the well has supposedly run dry.”

—Common Dreams, December 4, 2019

**Our History is the Future**

**Lakota historian Nick Estes on indigenous resistance**

*A Democracy Now! Interview*

**Amy Goodman:** In this special broadcast, we begin the show with the indigenous scholar and activist Nick Estes. He is a co-founder of the indigenous resistance group The Red Nation and a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. I talked to him earlier this year about his book *Our History Is the Future*. The book tells the history of indigenous resistance over two centuries, offering a road map for collective liberation and a guide to fighting life-threatening climate change. Estes centers this history in the historic fight against the Dakota Access pipeline at Standing Rock. I asked him to talk about the two Thanksgiving stories he writes about at the beginning of his book.

**Nick Estes:** So, the first Thanksgiving story begins with the Pequot massacre by members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which really, in my opinion, marks the mythology of the United States as a settler-colonial country founded on genocide to create, ironically, peace. And then I begin with another story of a prayer march that we led in the Bismarck mall in Bismarck, North Dakota, to bring attention to the Standing Rock struggle during a Black Friday shopping event, which was met by police armed with AR-15s, who then began punching and kicking water protectors who were holding a prayer in the Bismarck mall.

And I thought it was a really kind of jarring sort of contrast between, you know, the past and the present, to say that while there are differences between the massacre of Pequots in Massachusetts to the contemporary fight against an oil pipeline, nonetheless, you know, Bismarck, North Dakota, is a 90 percent white community that originally the Dakota Access pipeline was supposed to go upriver from, but then was rerouted downriver to disproportionately affect the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. And “disproportionate” is the language that the Army Corps of Engineers used, as if there’s ever a proportionate risk to environmental issues and water contamination. So, at this particular moment, there weren’t any actions that were happening in the camps, and it was largely at a standstill. And I think that Thanksgiving weekend, there was an Unthanksgiving feast that was held in the camps, and it was actually the highest point of the camps themselves, in the sense that the most water protectors had showed up. So, I thought it was a good kind of contrast to show that this history is a continuing history of genocide, of settler colonialism and, basically, the founding myths of this country.

**Amy Goodman:** Your book’s last words are, “[W]e are challenged not just to imagine, but to demand the emancipation of earth from capital. For the earth to live, capitalism must die.” Explain.

**Nick Estes:** So, that line is part of this longer section on liberation. And I think when we think about climate change, oftentimes the question of climate change really centers on market-driven solutions, such as, you know, green capitalism, and how do we create markets that sort of incentivize transition to sustainable economies, right? And I think, really, what we’re kind of like beating around the bush is that it’s the system of capitalism that led us into this economic crisis to begin with. It’s the sort of designation of certain populations in certain territories as disposable, that has led us into our current epoch of global climate change. And so, when we talk about who’s going to bear the most burden when we transition, you know, out of the carbon economy, it most likely is going to be those populations that have historically been colonized.

And, you know, what’s happening in southeast Africa is a perfect example of why we need to transition away from not just the carbon economy, but capitalist economies in general. If we look at the history of how Africa has been a resource colony for Europe and for North America, we can look internally in the United States and understand that indigenous nations continue to serve as resource colonies for the United States, whether it’s the Navajo Nation, where I’m living right now, that is producing oil and coal to generate electricity for the Southwest region, or whether it’s the Fort Berthold Reservation up in North Dakota that is ground zero for oil and gas development in the Bakken region. We have to understand that indigenous nations have largely been turned into resource colonies and sites of sacrifice for not just the United States, but for the oil and gas industry.

And so we need to not just think beyond climate change and putting car-
bon into the atmosphere, but we actually need to think about the system, the social system that created those conditions in the first place. And so, capitalism is fundamentally a social relation. It’s a profit-driven system, whereas indigenous sort of ways of relating is one about reciprocity and a mutual sort of respect, not just with the human, but also with the nonhuman world. And we’re undergoing, you know, the sixth massive extinction event, which is caused by not just climate change, but is caused by capitalist systems and the profit-driven motive of our current economic and social system.

Amy Goodman: I want to go to President Trump, right after he was inaugurated, announcing the pair of presidential memorandums to revive the Keystone XL and Dakota Access oil pipelines, the two major projects halted by the Obama administration following massive resistance from indigenous and environmental groups.

President Donald Trump: “This is with regard to the construction of the Keystone pipeline, something that’s been in dispute and is subject to a renegotiation of terms by us. We’re going to renegotiate some of the terms. And if they’d like, we’ll see if we can get that pipeline built. A lot of jobs, 28,000 jobs, great construction jobs....This is with respect to the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, Dakota Access pipeline, again, subject to terms and conditions to be negotiated by us.”

For the earth to live, capitalism must die.

So, that is President Trump, newly inaugurated, announcing that he was moving forward with the Dakota Access pipeline and he was reviving the Keystone XL. The significance of this, Professor Estes?

Nick Estes: If we go back to 2014, Obama was one of six sitting presidents to actually visit an Indian reservation during his time in office, and he actually visited Standing Rock during their Flag Day powwow and met with then-Tribal Chairman Dave Archambault II. And so, he made a promise to youth at that particular powwow that we would put our minds together to make what’s best for the future generations, you know, citing Sitting Bull, one of the Lakota leaders of resistance in the 19th century. And, you know, the Dakota Access pipeline, when it came down from the Bakken oil region, it was those Standing Rock youth who ran to Washington D.C., hoping that Obama would live up to his promise to listen to the youth, the indigenous youth. And, you know, from what we know now, it’s that we don’t know if he was even listening. And so, in many ways, you know, Obama couldn’t really halt the construction of the pipeline. Towards the end of his term, I know there was an order to halt the construction and mandated environmental review. But, by and large his administration was a failure in upholding that promise to indigenous people.

And so, if Obama’s administration is a failure, then the Trump administration is an absolute catastrophe for indigenous nations in the United States, because, you know, Trump has intensified the oil and gas extraction, not just in the Bakken region, but here in the Four Corners area, in the Permian Basin in western Texas and parts of New Mexico.

Oil production has just increased, and he’s using the Bureau of Land Management to, essentially, sell off, sometimes for dollars on the acre, indigenous land or public lands, as we know it now, which is really just stolen indigenous land, to the highest bidder. And when we talk about pipelines and we talk about oil and gas production, we really have to talk about the source of those pipelines. And here, you know, in the Southwest region, it’s the Permian Basin and the Four Corners...
region, where there’s been extensive fracking and oil and gas development.

**Amy Goodman:** Nick Estes, you focus on seven historical moments of resistance in your new book, *Our History Is the Future*. You say they form a historical road map for collective liberation. How did you choose these histories? Just quickly take us through them.

**Nick Estes:** I begin at the camps. I begin in the present, you know, at Standing Rock. And then I go to the fur trade with the first U.S. invasion, which was Lewis and Clark, who came through—who trespassed through our territory and were stopped by our leadership. And then I go through the Indian Wars of the 19th century and the buffalo genocide. And then I go into talking about the damming of the Missouri River in the mid-20th century, and then looking at Red Power in the 1960s and in the 1970s and how all of these indigenous people, who were relocated because their lands were flooded by these dams, eventually found themselves and created sort of the modern indigenous movement, known as Red Power, and then looking—going back and ending actually at Standing Rock in 1974, with the creation of the International Indian Treaty Council, which really coalesced these generations of indigenous resistance and took the treaties, the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, to the world and to the United Nations. And to do that, they looked to Palestinians, they looked to the South African anti-apartheid movement, who provided the mechanisms for recognition of indigenous rights at the United Nations. And that all resulted, over four decades, in the touchstone document, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was passed by the U.N. in 2007.

And so, in many ways, when we look at Standing Rock—if we go down flag row and we see the hundreds of tribal nation flags that were represented in 2016 and 2017, we also saw the Palestinian flag that was there, kind of hearkening back to that international solidarity with movements of the Global South, and specifically our Palestinian relatives, who, you know, today are still facing—much like us—are still facing the brunt and the brutality of settler colonialism, whether it’s the United States recognizing the annexation of the Golan Heights or whether it’s here in North America and the continued dispossession of indigenous territory and rights. We can see that settler colonialism in Israel—or, in Palestine, is really an extension of settler colonialism in North America.

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And then I end back at the camps. I actually look at a physical map that was handed out to water protectors who came to the camp. And on that map there was where to find food, where to find the clinics and where to find the security, and all the camps that were represented at Standing Rock.

And, to me, that provided a kind of interesting parallel to the world that surrounded the camps, which was some 92 different law enforcement jurisdictions. You had the North Dakota National Guard, the world of cops, the world of the militarized sort of police state. And in the camps themselves you had the primordial sort of beginnings of what a world premised on indigenous justice might look like.

And in that world everyone got free food. There was a place for everyone. The housing, obviously, was transient and teepees and things like that, but then also there were health clinics to provide healthcare, alternative forms of healthcare, to everyone. And so, if we look at that, it’s housing, education—all for free, right?—a strong sense of community. And for a short time, there was free education at the camps. Those are things that most poor communities in the United States don’t have access to, and especially reservation communities.

But given the opportunity to create a new world in that camp, centered on indigenous justice and treaty rights, society organized itself according to need and not to profit. And so, where there was the world of settlers, settler colonialism, that surrounded us, there was the world of indigenous justice that existed for a brief moment in time. And in that world, instead of doing to settler society what they did to us—genociding, removing, excluding—there’s a capaciousness to indigenous resistance movements that welcomes in nonindigenous peoples into our struggle, because that’s our primary strength, is one of relationality, one of making kin.

**Amy Goodman:** Nick Estes, indigenous scholar and activist, author of *Our History Is the Future* and co-editor of the new book, *Standing with Standing Rock: Voices from the #NoDAPL Movement*. Nick Estes is co-founder of the indigenous resistance group The Red Nation and a citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. He’s assistant professor in the American Studies Department at the University of New Mexico.

—Democracy Now!, November 28, 2019

https://www.democracynow.org/2019/11/28/our_history_is_the_future_lakota
A White House report recently proclaimed that the “War on Poverty is largely over and a success.” United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley said it was “ridiculous for the United Nations to examine poverty in America.”

Well-positioned Americans must talk like this, of course, because admitting the debilitating state of poverty in America might provoke feelings of guilt for 35 years of oppressive economic policies. Wealthier people need to take an honest look at the facts. They need to face reality as it sadly exists in America today.

One-in-seven Americans is part of the world’s poorest ten percent

According to the Credit Suisse 2018 Global Wealth Databook, 34 million American adults are among the WORLD’S POOREST ten percent. How is that possible? In a word, debt. In more excruciating words: stifling, misery-inducing, deadly amounts of debt for the poorest Americans. And it goes beyond dollars to the “deaths of despair” caused by the stresses of inferior healthcare coverage, stagnating incomes, and out-of-control inequality.

Numerous sources report on the rising debt for the poor-half of America, especially for the lowest income group, and largely because of healthcare and education costs. Since 2008 consumer debt has risen almost 50 percent. The percentage of families with more debt than savings is higher now than at any time since 1962.

Half of us are in or near poverty

$1 in expenses twenty years ago is now $1.25. $1 in earnings twenty years ago is now still $1.

More and more Americans are facing financial difficulty. Estimates of adults living from paycheck to paycheck range from half to 60 percent to 78 percent. Any sign of a recession would be devastating for most of us.

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It’s estimated that a typical U.S. household needs about $60,000 annually to meet all expenses. That’s only manageable if two adults are working full-time for $15-per-hour. Beyond that, little cushion exists. No American adult in the bottom 40 percent has more than $31,124 in total wealth, including house and car and savings.

Booming economy, low unemployment, and other deceptions

While one-in-seven Americans is part of the world’s poorest ten percent, nearly three-in-seven Americans are part of the world’s richest ten percent. The economy is booming for THEM. Yet the Wall Street Journal has the arrogance to claim that “Americans traditionally left behind...are reaping the benefits.”

How about the “jobs for everyone” fantasy? The official unemployment rate, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) itself, is based on employees “who did any work for pay or profit during the survey reference week.” The BLS workforce includes contingent and alternative employment arrangements that make up about ten percent of the workforce. It includes part-time workers (even one hour a week!), who make up about 16 percent of the workforce. And, inexplicably, it fails to count as unemployed those who have given up looking for work—four percent more Americans than in the year 2000.

Many of today’s “gig” jobs don’t pay a living wage, and most have no retirement or health benefits, no job security, no government regulations backing them, and usually a longer workday, with many people putting in ten-to12-hour days for $13-per-hour or less. According to a New York Times report, “41.7 million laborers—nearly a third of the American work force—earn less than $12-an-hour, and almost none of their employers offer health insurance.”

Safety net failures

While it’s true that the U.S. spends a greater percentage of its GDP on social safety net programs than developing countries, Americans generally have to face much higher costs for housing, heating, transportation, childcare, and other basic expenses.

Beyond this, there are significant shortcomings in American social protections, as pointed out by the UN. These include the “shockingly high number of children living in poverty”
and the “reliance on criminalization to conceal the underlying poverty problem.” Furthermore, with the call for work requirements comes the realization that the job market for the poorest Americans is “extraordinarily limited.”

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Poverty: not just a number

Poverty is living without healthcare and choosing the life-threatening alternative of opioid painkillers. Poverty is the stress of overwhelming debt; the steady decline of jobs that pay enough to support a family; the inability to afford a move to a desired neighborhood; the deadening impact of inequality on physical and mental well-being. The United Nations describes America as a nation near the bottom of the developed world in safety net support and economic mobility, with its citizens living “shorter and sicker lives compared to those living in all other rich democracies,” with the highest infant mortality rate in the developed world, the world’s highest incarceration rate, and the highest obesity levels. Low-income Americans are often surrounded by food deserts, with insufficient access to clean water and sanitation, and with the pollution levels of third-world countries. The poorest among us are even susceptible—unbelievably—to rare tropical diseases and once-eradicated scourges like hookworm.

The extreme levels of American poverty and inequality are ripping apart once-interdependent communities with mental health and homelessness problems, and with a surge in drug and alcohol and suicide “deaths of despair.”

Part of the definition of poverty is “the state of being inferior in quality.” As one of the most unequal nations in the entire world, America is also, in many ways, one of the most poverty-stricken.

—Common Dreams, November 5, 2019


The United Nations describes America as a nation near the bottom of the developed world in safety net support and economic mobility, with its citizens living “shorter and sicker lives compared to those living in all other rich democracies,” with the highest infant mortality rate in the developed world, the world’s highest incarceration rate, and the highest obesity levels.
For much of the world, donating blood is purely an act of solidarity; a civic duty that the healthy perform to aid others in need. The idea of being paid for such an action would be considered bizarre. But in the United States, it is big business. Indeed, in today’s wretched economy, where around 130 million Americans admit an inability to pay for basic needs like food, housing or healthcare, buying and selling blood is one of the few booming industries America has left.

The number of collection centers in the United States has more than doubled since 2005 and blood now makes up well over two percent of total U.S. exports by value. To put that in perspective, Americans’ blood is now worth more than all exported corn or soy products that cover vast areas of the country’s heartland. The U.S. supplies fully 70 percent of the world’s plasma, mainly because most other countries have banned the practice on ethical and medical grounds. Exports increased by over 13 percent, to $28.6 billion, between 2016 and 2017, and the plasma market is projected to “grow radiantly,” according to one industry report. The majority goes to wealthy European countries; Germany, for example, buys 15 percent of all U.S. blood exports. China and Japan are also key customers.

It is primarily the plasma—a golden liquid that transports proteins and red and white blood cells around the body—that makes it so sought after. Donated blood is crucial in treating medical conditions such as anemia and cancer and is commonly required to perform surgeries. Pregnant women also frequently need transfusions to treat blood loss during childbirth. Like all maturing industries, a few enormous bloodthirsty companies, such as Grifols and CSL, have come to dominate the American market.

But in order to generate such enormous profits, these vampiric corporations consciously target the poorest and most desperate Americans. One study found that the majority of donors in Cleveland generate more than a third of their income from “donating” blood. The money they receive, notes Professor Kathryn Edin of Princeton University, is literally “the lifeblood of the $2-a-day poor.” Professor H. Luke Schaefer of the University of Michigan, Edin’s co-author of $2-a-Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America, told MintPress News:

“The massive increase in blood plasma sales is a result of an inadequate and in many places non-existent cash safety net, combined with an unstable labor market. Our experience is people need the money; that’s the primary reason people show up at plasma centers.”

Almost half of America is broke, and 58 percent of the country is living paycheck to paycheck, with savings of less than $1000. Thirty-seven-million Americans go to bed hungry, including one-sixth of New Yorkers and almost half of South Bronx residents. And over half-a-million sleep on the streets on any given night, with many millions more in vehicles or relying on friends or family. It is in this context that millions in the red have turned to selling blood to make ends meet. In a very real sense then, these corporations are harvesting the blood of the poor, literally sucking the life out of them.

MintPress News spoke to a number of Americans who consistently donated plasma. Some of them did not want to be fully identified. But none were under any illusions about the system and how they were being exploited.

“The centers are never in a good part of town, always somewhere they can get a never-ending supply of poor people desperate for that hundred bucks a week,” noted Andrew Watkins,
who sold his blood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for around 18 months.

The people who show up are a mix of disabled, working poor, homeless, single parents, and college students. With the exception of the college students who are looking for booze money, this is probably the easiest and most reliable income they have. Your job may fire you at any time when you’re on this level of society, but you always have blood. And selling your blood doesn’t count as a job or income when it comes to determining disability benefits, food stamps, or unemployment eligibility so it’s a source of money for the people who have absolutely nothing else.”

Rachel from Wisconsin, who donated hundreds of times over a seven-year period, also commented on the obvious socio-economic makeup of donors.

“We were poor, all of us in there you could easily tell that we were on the lower ends of the income bracket. They incentivize you with bonuses and the more you donate in a month the more you’ll get paid—recruiting friends bonuses, holiday bonuses, etc.”

Keita Currier from Washington, D.C., noted how she and her husband had little choice but to continue visiting clinics in Maryland for years but resented their payment methods.

“They’re predatory, the price set for your plasma is based on a whim. For example, one place I donated the first five times you get $75, then you get 20, 20, 30, 50, 25. It’s random, it doesn’t matter, but they know you are desperate and if you don’t do your $30 donation you won’t get your 50 next time. Apparently, the plasma is worth something in the hundreds, so it is not surprising that you’re screwed over.”

Zombifying America’s poor

Respondents all agreed that they were indeed being exploited, but in more ways than one. Desperate Americans are allowed to donate twice per week (104-times-per-year.) But losing that much plasma could have serious health consequences, most of which have not been studied Professor Schaefer warns, stressing that more research is necessary. Around 70 percent of donors experience health complications. Donors have a lower protein count in their blood, putting them at greater risk of infections and liver and kidney disorders. Many regularly suffer from near-permanent fatigue and are borderline anemic. All this for an average of $30-per-visit. Rachel described the terrible Catch-22 many of the working poor find themselves in:

Americans’ blood is now worth more than all exported corn or soy products that cover vast areas of the country’s heartland.

“I got turned away twice—once for being too dehydrated and once for being anemic. Being poor created a shitty paradox where I couldn’t eat, and because I couldn’t eat my iron levels weren’t high enough to allow me to donate. That was a week of a pay cut, money I desperately needed for rent and bills and meds.”

A common method of cheating in endurance sports is to inject extra blood into your system before a race, giving you a huge performance boost. But extracting it has the opposite effect, making you sluggish and tired for days. Thus, this debilitating practice is zombifying America’s poor.

The process of giving blood is not a pleasurable one. Currier noted that after constantly donating, “the bruising gets terrible...Sometimes they can’t find the vein ‘n’ shit or they insert it wrong and they have to adjust the needle underneath your skin” she said, claiming that just thinking about it freaks her out, and revealed that her husband had to temporarily stop donating as his bosses thought he was on heroin due to the track marks on his arms.

Watkins agreed. “You could always tell how long someone had been doing the job by that needle,” he recalls. “Once they’d been there a year or so, they’d have stabbed literally thousands of people and could just tap your elbow once and slide the needle into the vein with no problems. New guys would miss the vein, punch through the vein, or try to hunt for it with the needle tip, which would leave terrible bruises.”

There is also little thought for the comfort of the patients. As Watkins explained, the thermostats are always turned down to around 50-60ºF for the plasma’s sake. Once the amber-colored plasma has been extracted, your cooled blood is re-injected in a painful process that feels as if ice is being inserted into the body. “Combined with the already cold air temperatures, this was maddening,” he notes.

Thus, America’s zombie poor are left almost permanently mentally drained like heroin addicts, and with similarly bruised and punctured arms, except they are being paid for the inconvenience. But perhaps the worst thing about the experience, according to those interviewed, is the dehumanization of the process.

Donors are publicly weighed to make sure they are heavy enough. Obese people are worth more to the bloodthirsty companies as they can safely extract more plasma from them each session (while paying out the same compensation.) “They definitely turn you into a product in a very literal sense,” Watkins says; “It’s deeply exploitative and a symptom of just how far gone capitalism is.”

Many centers are enormous, with multiple rows of dozens of machines working in an attempt to appease the insatiable appetite of the vampiric corporation. And there is, according to
Watts, no lack of human “victims” willing to be treated like animals in battery farms, in exchange for a few dollars: “It was an assembly line to extract liquid gold from human mines,” he notes.

Currier also highlighted the treatment of the staff and the cost-cutting measures of clinics in Maryland she visited would enact:

“Usually the places are hugely understaffed which means they frequently don’t change gloves, the people are overworked, and at the minimum you’re staying there for two-three hours which means you have to plan a whole day around this shit only to get 20 bucks in your pocket to make it through the next few days. It’s depressing, disheartening and frankly embarrassing to have to hustle like this. I feel like shit after I donate.”

Exploitation reaches new levels

But the exploitation of humans has reached new levels in clinics on the U.S.-Mexico border. Every week, thousands of Mexicans enter the U.S. on temporary visas to sell their blood to for-profit pharmaceutical corporations. The practice is banned on health grounds in Mexico but is completely legal north of the border. According to ProPublica, there are at least 43 blood donation centers along the border that prey primarily on Mexican nationals in a legally ambiguous practice.

According to a Swiss documentary on the subject, there are precious few checks on the cleanliness of the blood these companies accept, with some donors interviewed admitting they were drug addicts. But all is sacrificed in the pursuit of dazzling profits, something donors were well aware of. Rachel from Wisconsin admitted,

“I did it for the money, I think we all do it for the money, but it’s not really something you out and out say because there’s a veneer of ‘helping the sick’ slathered over it. But I caught glimpses of what kind of industry it was on occasion through innocuous questioning. The amount of plasma drawn from one person per donation was worth upwards of $600, I never really got a clear answer on that.

Andrew from Pennsylvania agreed, noting wryly,

“I know my plasma was worth thousands of dollars per donation [to others], because I’ve seen what a hospital in my city charged a hemophiliac for platelets, so the pittance that they pay is ridiculous, but there is only one buyer making offers at the human level. If you’re poor and out of other options, you’ll take $40 however you can get it. Any port in a storm.”

Michael, a social worker from Georgia who sold his blood for extra cash, was deeply scornful of the entire situation. “I’ve known quite a number of people who rely on money made by selling plasma. A lot of times it’s to cover childcare or prescriptions or something along those lines,” he said. “It’s absolutely deplorable to leverage literal blood money from people who have so few options.”

Big pharma is particularly interested in the blood of the young. One billboard campaign from Grifols intentionally targeted working-class students. “Need books? No worries. Donate Plasma” reads the headline. Teenager blood is in high demand in, of all places, Silicon Valley, where anti-aging technologies are the latest trend. One company, Ambrosia, charges $8,000 per treatment to aging tech executives, infusing them with the blood of the young, turning these individuals into bloodsuckers in more ways than one. Despite the fact that there is no clinical evidence that the practice has any beneficial effects, business is booming. One committed customer is PayPal co-founder turned Trump surrogate Peter Thiel, who is reportedly spending vast sums of money on funding anti-aging startups. Thiel claims that we have been conned by “the ide-
Socialist Resurgence: Who We Are

By Adam Ritscher

In response to the very fractured American left, we print this article from a new organization in line with a policy we adopted a few years ago to invite socialist organizations to explain who they are and how they differ from others. We take a non-sectarian viewpoint welcoming discussion and common work in the class struggle. —The Editors, Socialist Viewpoint

Socialist Resurgence (SR) is a new national organization of activists committed to the interests of workers and the oppressed. We have hit the ground running, and already our members are actively involved in the immigrant rights, feminist, GLBTQIA+, anti-racist, labor and climate activism. Our ultimate goal is the creation of a socialist world in which society is organized according to the needs of working people rather than profit.

We think that the moment is extremely favorable for the founding of a new revolutionary socialist organization. We are greatly enthused by the increased interest in socialist ideas in the United States, the rise in activism in the labor movement as well as in many social movements, and the fervent dialogue within the socialist movement about how to advance the efforts to build a revolutionary party. We wish to participate in that dialogue.

Most of our members were until recently part of Socialist Action. We emerged from that group after years of debate and disagreements. One key issue that was debated was how to apply the theory of permanent revolution in a world that is increasingly seeing an inter-imperialist rivalry. Should we give active solidarity to the struggles of working people against their own governments in the semi-colonial world, or do we keep mum about their struggles in favor of solidarity with alleged “anti-imperialist” regimes. We argued that it is very much possible to oppose the machinations of U.S. imperialism, while supporting the struggles of working people against their governments in countries like Syria, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

For folks interested in delving into more detail about the debates that unfolded in Socialist Action, there are documents available on our website. But Socialist Resurgence is a forward-looking organization. From union organizing drives to solidarity with protesting workers in Chile and Bolivia, we are actively looking for meaningful ways of contributing to the fight to make the world a better place.

And part of that forward-facing perspective is our commitment to explore and pursue regroupment with other revolutionary activists and organizations. On one hand, the world is facing an existential crisis in the form of climate change and capitalism’s ever mad drive for profits at all cost. On the other hand, we are seeing massive working-class upsurges around the world, as well as millions of young people in the U.S. exploring socialist ideas. If ever there was a need for a creative, dynamic revolutionary movement, it’s now! And we are eager to do whatever we can to help make a contribution to pulling together such a movement.

We want to thank Socialist Viewpoint for opening up its pages for us to present this brief introduction to our group. We welcome you all to get to know us further by checking out our website at www.SocialistResurgence.org and by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We are confident that we can find common ground in which to work together. One modest proposal that we would like to make to you is to invite the readers of Socialist Viewpoint to participate with us in a solidarity campaign with the students and workers of Chile who have courageously risen up against their rotten government. We are urging folks to take selfie pictures of themselves holding up messages of solidarity with, and with the hashtag of #ChileRevolution on the top of the sign.

But of course, let’s not stop with selfies! Let’s all re-commit ourselves to attending every strike and picket line. Let’s redouble our efforts to build effective social movements. And let’s try to find ways to bring revolutionaries together, into the kind of revolutionary workers party that this country so desperately needs!
Climate and Capitalism editor Ian Angus spoke at an educational conference organized by Socialist Action in Toronto, on November 16, 2019. His talk has been edited for publication.

These sentences are from a recent report on the consequences of climate change:

“Sea level rise, changes in water and food security, and more frequent extreme weather events are likely to result in the migration of large segments of the population. Rising seas will displace tens—(if not hundreds)—of millions of people, creating massive, enduring instability….Saltwater intrusion into coastal areas and changing weather patterns will also compromise or eliminate fresh water supplies in many parts of the world….A warming trend will also increase the range of insects that are vectors of infectious tropical diseases. This, coupled with large-scale human migration from tropical nations, will increase the spread of infectious disease.”

Many reports have made such points. What makes this one significant is that it was commissioned by the Pentagon, by the General who is now chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The authors are senior officials of the U.S. Army, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and NASA, and it was published by the United States Army War College.

Their report recommends strengthening the U.S. military, already the biggest war machine on Earth, to protect the U.S. empire from the consequences of the environmental chaos. They call for a “campaign-plan-like approach to proactively prepare for likely conflict and mitigate the impacts.” As we know, when the U.S. military embarks on a campaign, the result is always devastation and destruction for the poor and oppressed.

As this report shows, the U.S. Army, unlike the U.S. president, knows that climate change is real, and that the consequences may be catastrophic. The generals recognize that something has gone terribly wrong in the relationship between human society and the Earth.

**Planetary boundaries**

Climate change is the most extreme example of the crisis, but it is not the only one. Earth System scientists have identified nine planetary boundaries—global environmental conditions that define “a safe operating space for humanity.” Crossing any one of those thresholds could have deleterious or even disastrous consequences for civilization. Seven of the nine critical planetary boundaries are close to or already in the danger zone.

Such research leads irresistibly to the conclusion that modest reforms and policy shifts are not enough. We confront not individual problems that can be tackled separately, but an interlocked set of disruptions of Earth’s life support systems. Fundamental natural processes that have evolved over millions of years are being shattered in just a few decades.

Radical remedies are obviously required, but we won’t find a cure unless we identify the underlying cause, the systemic disease that is attacking our planet.

**Why growth?**

Many environmentalists identify the underlying problem simply as growth. And indeed, as many books and articles show, the drive to extract, produce and grow ever more stuff is filling our rivers with poison and our air with pollution. Oceans are dying, species are disappearing at unprecedented rates, water is running short, and soil is eroding faster than it can be replaced—but the growth machines push on.

Corporate executives, economists, bureaucrats and politicians all agree that growth is good and non-growth is bad. Unending material expansion is a deliberate policy promoted by ideologues of every political stripe, from social democrats to conservatives. When the G20 met in Toronto they unanimously agreed that their highest priority was to “lay the foundation for strong, sustainable, and balanced growth.” The word growth appeared 29 times in their final declaration.

Uncontrolled growth is clearly a central issue, but that raises a further question—why does it continue? Why, in the face of massive evidence that expanded production and resource extraction is killing us, do governments and corporations keep shoveling coal for the runaway growth train?

In most environmental writing, one of two explanations is offered—it’s human nature, or it’s a mistake.

The human nature argument is central to mainstream economics, which assumes that human beings always want more, so economic growth is just capitalism’s way of meeting human
desires. For our species, enough is never enough. That view often leads its proponents to conclude that the only way to slow or reverse the pillaging of Mother Earth is to slow or reverse population growth. More people equals more stuff; so fewer people would equal less stuff.

That claim is fatally undermined by fact that the countries with the highest birth rates have the lowest standard of living, own the least stuff, and produce the least pollution. If the poorest three billion people on the planet somehow disappeared tomorrow, there would be virtually no reduction in ongoing environmental destruction.

The other common explanation for the constant promotion of growth is that we have been seduced by a false ideology. The drive for growth has been described as a fetish, an obsession, an addiction, or even a spell. Greens often use the term growthmania.

Such accounts present the drive for growth as a choice that politicians and investors make, under the influence of a bizarre obsession. As British Marxist Fawzi Ibrahim says, this “must be the first time in history that a necessity has been described as a fetish. You might as well describe fish having a fetish for water as capitalism having a fetish for growth. Growth is as essential to capitalism as is water to fish. As fish would die without water, so would capitalism drown without growth.”

Growth ideology doesn’t cause perpetual accumulation—it justifies it. Uncontrolled growth is not the root cause of the global crisis—it is the inevitable result of the profit system, of capitalism’s inherent drive to accumulate ever more capital.

**Personifications of capital**

As individuals, the people who run the giant polluters undoubtedly want their children and grandchildren to live in a clean, environmentally sustainable world. But as major shareholders and executives and top managers they act, in Marx’s wonderful phrase, as “personifications of capital.” Regardless of how they behave at home or with their children, at work they are capital in human form, and the imperatives of capital take precedence over all other needs and values. When it comes to a choice between protecting humanity’s future and maximizing profit, they choose profit.

As a case in point, consider the nitroglycer oxide gases, nitrogen monoxide and nitrogen dioxide, which are produced by burning petroleum fuels, especially by diesel engines. They don’t get as much media attention as carbon dioxide, but they are powerful greenhouse gases, and they are directly harmful to human health. They cause throat and lung diseases, and they increase the severity of diseases such as asthma.

In 2009, regulators in Europe and North America introduced strict limits on automobile nitroglycer oxide emissions. All automakers had to submit their cars for testing. That was a big problem for the world’s second largest automobile company, Volkswagen, because much of their profit came from vehicles with diesel engines that did not meet the new standards.

But, as we are often told, capitalism encourages innovation. Just in time, VW announced that its engineers had solved the problem. They had invented technology that fully met or exceeded the new standards. They promoted it very heavily under the slogan “Clean Diesel,” and it was hugely successful. Between 2009 and 2016 Volkswagen sold over 11 million Clean Diesel cars worldwide.

That’s pretty impressive—a giant corporation was doing well by doing good, making huge profits while protecting the environment and human health.

Or so it seemed.

In 2016, thanks to investigations by some dedicated engineers, we learned that Clean Diesel was a hoax. Volkswagen had not invented new emissions technology. Volkswagen had invented software that cheated on the tests. When the software detected that a test was being conducted, it reduced the engine’s power and performance. Under laboratory conditions, VW’s Clean Diesel cars met the emission regulations. On the road, they emitted up to 40 times more nitrogen oxide than the legal limit.

Senior executives have been fired and the company has paid heavy fines, but that’s after the fact. Seven years of Volkswagen pollution and seven years of big Volkswagen sales illustrate two fundamental characteristics of capitalism—short-term gains are always more important than long-term losses, and profit is always more important than protecting human health.

Volkswagen’s owners and executives are personifications of capital, and capital must grow, no matter who gets hurt.

**Machines for accumulation**

The reason is very simple, although its implications are complex and profound. Big banks and money funds and multimillionaires invest in corporations like Volkswagen in order to get more money back. They really don’t care if Volkswagen makes cars or clothes and candy bars, so long as they get a return on their investment.

Corporations are giant social machines for turning capital into more capital. That’s what shareholders expect and want, and that’s what managers and executives must deliver.

A person who is unwilling to put the needs of capital first is not likely to become a major corporate executive. If the screening process fails, or if a CEO has an inconvenient attack of conscience, he or she will not last long in that position. It has been called the ecological tyranny of the bottom line. When protecting humanity and planet might reduce profits, corporations will always put profits first.
Capital has only one measure of success. How much more profit was made in this quarter than in the previous quarter? How much more today than yesterday? It doesn’t matter if the sales include products that spread disease, destroy forests, demolish ecosystems, and treat our water, air, and soil as sewers. It all contributes to the growth of capital, and that is what counts.

Each corporation seeks to ensure that its products produce an attractive profit on invested capital. A corporation with lower costs or more attractive products can drive its competitors out of business. There is constant pressure to expand physically, financially, and geographically.

If nothing stops it, capital will try to expand infinitely, but Earth is not infinite. The atmosphere and oceans and forests are finite, limited resources, and capitalism is now pressing against those limits.

Capital must grow. A zero-growth capitalist economy simply cannot exist. As Marx wrote, the historical mission of the bourgeoisie is “accumulation for accumulation’s sake, production for production’s sake…. production on a constantly increasing scale.”

Of course, the fact that capital needs to grow does not mean that it always can grow. On the contrary, the drive to grow periodically leads to situations in which more commodities are produced than can be sold. The result is a crisis in which immense amounts of wealth are destroyed. Individual corporations can and do go out of business in such situations, but over the long term, the drive for profit, to accumulate ever more capital, always reasserts itself.

That is the defining feature of the capitalist system and the root cause of the global environmental crisis. Mass opposition and public pressure can slow down or hinder the drive to expand more and faster, but it will always reassert itself in some form.

**Metabolic rifts**

The anti-ecological results of such a system were first analyzed in the nineteenth century, when the productivity of English agriculture was in decline.

In the mid-1800s, the German scientist Justus von Liebig showed that in its natural state, soil provides the essential nutrients that allows plants to grow and replenishes nutrients from plant and animal waste. But when crops are produced for distant markets, as they increasingly were in 19th Century England, soil fertility suffers because food waste and excrement do not return to the soil. Liebig called this a robbery system, because nutrients were being stolen from the soil and not returned.

The concept of metabolic rift expresses society’s simultaneous dependence on and separation from the rest of nature. Like an auto-immune disease that attacks the body it dwells in, capitalism is both part of the natural world and at war with it. It simultaneously depends upon and undermines the Earth’s life support systems.

An incurably short-term horizon

Capital’s ecologically destructive impacts are driven not just by its need to grow, but by its need to grow faster. The circuit from investment to profit to reinvestment requires time to complete, and the longer it takes, the less total return investors receive. Competition for investment produces constant pressure to speed up the cycle, to go from investment to production to sale ever more quickly.

That’s why it took sixteen weeks to raise a two-and-a-half-pound chicken in 1925, while today chickens twice that big are raised in six weeks. Selective breeding, hormones, and chemical feed have enabled factory farms to produce not just more meat, but more meat faster. The suffering of the animals and the quality of the food are secondary concerns, if they are considered at all.

But most natural processes cannot be manipulated that way. Nature’s cycles operate at speeds that have evolved over many millennia—forcing them in any way inevitably destabilizes the cycle and produces unpleasant results.

Fertile land is destroyed, forests are clear-cut, and fish populations col-
lapse, all because of what Istvan Mészáros calls the incurably short-term horizon of the capital system. There is an insuperable conflict between nature’s time and capital’s time—between cyclical processes that have developed over hundreds-of-millions of years, and capital’s need for rapid production, sale, and profit.

The metabolic rifts that Liebig and Marx knew of and wrote about were initially local or regional, but they have grown along with capitalism. Colonialism extended the damage by transporting products and nutrients from distant places.

Ireland was the first victim of the global robbery system. Describing how England imported food from poverty-stricken Ireland, Marx wrote: “England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without even allowing its cultivators the means for replacing the constituents of the exhausted soil.”

Since the middle of the 20th century, capitalism has caused unprecedented changes in the entire biosphere, Earth’s lands, forests, water, and air. In its endless search for profits, it is massively disrupting and destroying Earth’s life support systems—the natural processes and cycles that make life itself possible. Metabolic rifts have become metabolic chasms.

Ecosocialist revolution

That’s why the environmental crisis can’t be just a talking point for socialists—it’s a planetary emergency that we must treat as a top priority. We need to initiate and join struggles for immediate environmental aims. We need to participate, not as sideline critics, but as activists, builders and leaders. And at the same time, we need to find the best ways to patiently explain how those struggles relate to the larger fight to save the world from capitalist ecocide.

As Simon Butler and I wrote in Too Many People, “in every country, we need governments that break with the existing order, that are answerable only to working people, farmers, the poor, indigenous communities, and immigrants—in a word, to the victims of ecocidal capitalism, not its beneficiaries and representatives.”

Such governments will have two fundamental and inseparable characteristics.

Uncontrolled growth is not the root cause of the global crisis—it is the inevitable result of the profit system, of capitalism’s inherent drive to accumulate ever more capital.

First, they will be committed to grassroots democracy, to radical egalitarianism, and to social justice. They will be based on collective ownership of the means of production, and they will work actively to eliminate exploitation, profit and accumulation as the driving forces of our economy.

Second, they will base their decisions and actions on the best ecological principles, giving top priority to stopping anti-environmental practices, to restoring damaged ecosystems, and to reestablishing agriculture and industry on ecologically sound principles.

Such a profound transformation will not just happen. In fact, it will not happen at all unless ecology has a central place in socialist theory, in the socialist program, and in the activity of the socialist movement.

In short, in the 21st century, socialists and greens must be ecosocialists, and humanity needs an ecosocialist revolution.

—Climate and Capitalism, November 19, 2019

Volkswagen pollution and seven years of big Volkswagen sales illustrate two fundamental characteristics of capitalism—short-term gains are always more important than long-term losses, and profit is always more important than protecting human health.

Endnote

Planetary boundaries is a concept involving Earth system processes which contain environmental boundaries, proposed in 2009 by a group of Earth system and environmental scientists led by Johan Rockström from the Stockholm Resilience Centre and Will Steffen from the Australian National University. The group wanted to define a “safe operating space for humanity” for the international community, including governments at all levels, international organizations, civil society, the scientific community and the private sector, as a precondition for sustainable development. The framework is based on scientific evidence that human actions since the Industrial Revolution have become the main driver of global environmental change.

According to the paradigm, “transgressing one or more planetary boundaries may be deleterious or even catastrophic due to the risk of crossing thresholds that will trigger non-linear, abrupt environmental change within continental—to planetary-scale systems.” The Earth system process boundaries mark the safe zone for the planet to the extent that they are not crossed. As of 2009, two boundaries have already been crossed, while others are in imminent danger of being crossed.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Planetary_boundaries
A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault on the American Mind

By Harriet A. Washington

In her 1962 book Silent Spring, Rachel Carson documented the deleterious effects of short-sighted public policy and toxic chemical use on our environment. Vivid, elegant descriptions of wildflowers blooming along the interstate highways prior to widespread DDT use contrasted with a somber desolation we could see with our own eyes to make clear that the world was dying—and we were the murderers. We are all connected, Carson reminded us, and insecticide use would do more than silence the songbirds. This poison would silence us.

Fifty-seven years later, Harriet A. Washington has published A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault on the American Mind. Just as Carson did back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Washington seems to anticipate controversial responses to her book, in which she identifies multinational corporations that produce untested chemicals, bemoans government policies that allow toxins to enter our ecosystem, and pleads for activism among the enablers (people like you and me) who choose not to support fence-line communities animated in their pursuit of environmental justice. Washington focuses on IQ, in a way similar to Carson’s focus on small animals, especially birds. And, just as the loss of certain species of small animals seemed less important before the publication of Carson’s book, a few IQ points might seem insignificant to most Americans now. That shortsightedness will change after they’ve read Washington’s book. This Shearing Fellow has written a fact-based analysis with conclusions that should absolutely animate us all.

In addition, Washington is a research fellow in Medical Ethics at Harvard Medical School, a senior research scholar at the National Center for Bioethics at Tuskegee University, and a visiting scholar at DePaul University College of Law. More than any academic credentials, she is a Black woman in the United States, one whose childhood experiences provided her with deep engagement in the natural world of an idyllic suburbia, as well as great enjoyment of the cosmopolitan excitement of the city. Explicitly positioning herself in the diverse beauty and cultural wealth of the African-American community only strengthens Washington’s call for a clean environment for all Americans.

“We must give the political polemics a rest,” Washington insists as her book takes on the pseudo-science of eugenics. She cuts through the crap that reeks of 400 years of racist attitudes to identify the biological consequences of 400 years of racist practice. Racism, Washington suggests, has achieved such automaticity that not enough people have stopped to wonder if lower IQ and test scores in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities might have nothing to do with race and everything to do with racism. As there is no biological basis for race, this social construct, as well as the social invisibility of Black and Brown people, has permitted an assault of environmental hazards made increasingly worse over generations. This racist assault has had many iterations, including benign neglect in the government enforcement of lead paint abatement in cities like Albany and Baltimore and lead poisoning of water systems in cities like Newark and Flint, as well as industrial waste dumping in communities of color, and Black and Brown babies’ vulnerability to IQ reducing ailments like hookworm in the rural South and asthma in the urbanized North.

Washington identifies heavy metal poisoning, like lead, as an intergenerational health problem. In addition to diminished IQ and increased ADHD, which create intergenerational social problems in communities affected by such poisoning, the effects of lead are cumulative, building in the human body over time, and altering the body’s instructions to develop, live, and reproduce in future generations. According to Washington, lead poisoning produces epigenetic changes that can
reprogram genes, changing their expression in a manner that further heightens the risks of disability and a variety of disorders ranging from heart disease to colorectal cancer triggered by lead-induced DNA exposure. And since such reprogrammed genes can be passed from generation to generation, this harms not only the poisoned child but also his own children, an example of the complex interplay between genetics and environmental exposures.

Though many think of lead as a water supply issue concentrated in aging, low-income cities like Newark and Flint, lead exposure from house paint affects nearly thirty percent of African-American homes. Racism enters Black bodies in the form of lead, and in a macabre and surreal occupation, assaults Black communities across generations.

In Baltimore, local statutes required landlords to remove lead-based paint from the homes they rent. Because of the costs of lead paint abatement, researchers like the team at the Kennedy Krieger Institute (KKI) sought cheaper alternatives to full lead abatement despite the fact that, as Washington points out, “[a]s early as 1987 the CDC advocated complete abatement because there is no safe level of lead exposure.”

Instead of helping African-American families by moving their children out of homes containing lead paint, KKI allowed unwitting children to be exposed to lead in tainted homes, thus using the bodies of the children to evaluate cheaper, partial lead-abatement techniques of unknown efficacy in the old houses with peeling paint. Although they knew that only full abatement would protect these children, scientists decided to explore cheaper ways of reducing the lead threat.

KKI acted in a manner not unlike the U.S. Public Health Service in their administration of the Tuskegee Experiment. Our government allowed infected men to treat syphilis when, all the while, over four decades, scientists were studying the effect of the disease in their Black bodies. Similarly, families in Baltimore believed the KKI website, which claimed their children would benefit from an “interdisciplinary team of experts in the problems and injuries that affect your child’s brain, and receive personal, compassionate care for your child.” KKI’s affiliation with the prestigious Johns Hopkins University further legitimized the organization and made Black families think their children were receiving special care—not acting as test subjects.

Common-sense proposals failed to rise to benefit the common good because of the racist practice of blaming the consumer victims of industrial chemical use, instead of blaming the profiteering corporations that produce them

As a Black woman in the United States, I am personally and deeply affected by The Tuskegee Experiment and the Baltimore Lead Cases. Just as lead builds in the human body, alters genes, and acts as an intergenerational poison, stories of the intentional dispossession of Black bodies enter me, influence my perception of the healthcare industry, and erode trust in public and private institutions that purport to aid the common good. Stories of lead poisoning are not outliers or blips on the news cycle; they are the weight of racism on communities of color, holding us down by reducing our children’s IQ, and then blaming us for being so low by abandoning us in substandard schools ill-equipped to manage the effects of lead on the human brain.

Washington’s book asks the nation to switch from the dangerous “mantra of personal responsibility” and instead engage in what Columbia University historian and public health professor David Rosner calls “universalist environmental solutions.” In a scholarly article called “The EXODUS of Public Health,” Rosner and his co-authors advocate for institutional responsibility by “introducing pure water, sewage systems, street cleaning” and other sensible public policy options.

The shift in the public discourse from corporate and government responsibility to personal blame occurred around the start of the Cold War, according to Washington. During that time, science and medicine became great levelers, allowing public health professionals to ignore social factors—including the racial segregation, poverty, inequality, and poor housing that had been the traditional foci of public health reformers only 30 years before—and explain disease without any of the disruptive implications of a class analysis.

Though Washington focuses on race, she acknowledges that money and class are inextricably bound to the racism in our capitalist country. By the 1970s, Washington says, the shift to personal responsibility and public absolution of corporations “that marketed harmful products such as cigarettes and lead paint” was complete. Common-sense proposals failed to rise to benefit the common good because of the racist practice of blaming the consumer victims of industrial chemical use, instead of blaming the profiteering corporations that produce them. Washington uses as an example a plan for lead paint abatement proposed by the late child psychiatrist and pediatric researcher Herbert L. Needleman. In the 1980s, Needleman proposed full abatement of lead, followed by a Work Projects Administration-style plan for proper sanding, repainting, and removing and repainting of lead-tainted materials by
unemployed workers in affected communities. Washington says Congress rejected Needleman’s $10 billion plan, even though a Congressional plan to spend $11.6 billion on new prisons around that same time was approved.

We need a fresh shift, Washington says, away from bemoaning the costs of expensive clean-up and wrangling over public dollars to the “precautionary principle,” which mandates safety testing of industrial chemicals before they enter the market. This precautionary principle is already employed in much of the European Union, where chemicals are tested in laboratories before they are used in people’s homes.

Washington documents the haunting impact of our regressive decision-making on fence-line communities from Anniston, Alabama, a town poisoned by Monsanto, to Harlem, New York, where children breathe the fumes generated by bus depots into their asthmatic lungs, to the Standing Rock Indian Reservation where, because of Trump’s reversal of the Obama decision not to drill beneath the Missouri River, construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline renewed and, “even before the pipeline’s completion, Sioux fears materialized as it ruptured, spilling 84 gallons of oil in Tulare, South Dakota, south of the resistance camps.” Six months later, another 200,000 gallons leaked from the Keystone Pipeline.

The planet is on fire: Bill Nye said it, and I believe it. Climate change is an objective fact that almost all Americans, even a slim majority of Republicans, recognize as a threat. Because doomsday blockbusters and looped cable access news stories grip public attention on extreme weather, too few people, even climate change believers, fully grasp the multifarious health consequences of this existential threat. We compost, recycle, drive hybrid SUVs, all in an effort to preempt the next typhoon. All the while, death is coming not in a raging, earth-scouring fire, but in a buzzing, dengue-bearing mosquito. Our capacity to think our way through the increase in leptospirosis cases following a hurricane or flood is compromised by a different kind of fire, a metaphorical, chemical burn instigated by environmental toxins that diminish human IQ.

In her ardent call to arms, Harriet A. Washington examines the microbes that reduce intelligence in floods, hurricanes, and other everyday disasters caused by environmental hazards. Washington excavates the history of environmental racism with a clear eye on the future: “We must also learn from past mistakes, such as the penny-wise and pound-foolish partial abatement of lead, mercury, and other intellect killers, in order to fully invest in our children and our nation’s future.” Washington’s book is a unifier, an effort to make us all realize that, “[d]espite the tensions that have driven our perception of this problem, we will rise or fall together, not as separate ethnic groups.” Therefore, Washington insists that we “must topple the barriers to optimal intelligence for all Americans.”

Eisa Nefertari Ulen is the author of Crystelle Mourning and is at work on her second novel, a story of an imagined Black Indian family through multiple generations.

—Los Angeles Review of Books, November 26, 2019

What’s Wrong with Malthus

By Louis Proyect

Limits: Why Malthus Was Wrong and Why Environmentalists Should Care

By Giorgos Kallis

In the recently published Limits: Why Malthus Was Wrong and Why Environmentalists Should Care, Giorgos Kallis tackles weighty and expansive topics in merely 156 pages. One cannot help but wonder if his brevity (the soul of wit, after all) was in keeping with the book’s theme—how humanity can live an abundant life within material limits.

Kallis is a research professor at the Catalan Institution for Research and Advanced Studies (ICREA), who has made both theoretical and practical contributions to environmentalism. In addition to writing articles in defense of “degrowth,” he worked for the European Parliament’s Science and Technological Options Assessment Unit for the preparation of the EU Water Framework Directive.

Limits: Why Malthus Was Wrong is a critique of Malthusianism, as put forward in the 1798 “An Essay on the Principle of Population.” It also refutes the “neo-Malthusian” writings of Paul Ehrlich and the Club of Rome. Since the Club of Rome issued a report titled “The Limits to Growth” in 1972, one has to wonder why a degrowth advocate would be its critic. The answer is that Malthus and neo-Malthusianism are entirely different animals.

When I first began writing in defense of ecological limits on the Marxism mailing list in the early ’90s, I had to put up with the jibes of James Heartfield, who was then part of Frank Furedi’s Living Marxism collective. For Heartfield, nuclear power, GMO crops, DDT, and massive hydroelectric dams were the cutting edge of capitalist progress that could serve the interests of working people but only under socialism. To oppose such questionable technologies marked you as a “neo-Malthusian.” Somewhere along the line, Furedi, Heartfield and company forgot about the possibility of a socialist future and now defend such technology as partisans of the Brexit Party in England. For Kallis, this evolution probably makes sense since he sees the questions of limits as transcending political economy. Toward the end of the chapter “The Limit of Limits,” he writes:

“A further problem with the idea that socialism would face no limit is that it reproduces the dream of limitless growth. The need for a culture of limits holds independently of the organization of society. Ancient Athens or the hunter-gatherers were not capitalists, but they did put limits on themselves. No system, socialist or otherwise, can exist without limits; the question is what limits it will have, and how such limits will be set. Those who think they have found the secret to a society of eternal luxury that will know no limits can only be fooling themselves.”

I tend to agree.

Malthus had a pretty simple idea, namely that since population growth is geometrical and food production growth is arithmetical, the result is suffering, hunger and death. If we are to avoid such a calamity, we need to have fewer babies. That’s the conventional view, anyhow.

In the first chapter titled “Why Malthus Was Wrong,” Kallis takes the conventional view and smashes it into smithereens. Drawing liberally from Malthus’s “An Essay on the Principle of Population” and citing scholars who have scrutinized it carefully, Kallis builds an air-tight case that Malthus favored population growth. He also saw capitalism as the best way to satisfy its needs.

Despite his reputation, Malthus opposed “artificial modes of checking population...for their tendency to remove a necessary stimulus to growth.” Also, unlike Paul Erlich, who famously bet Julian Simon that resources like metal would grow scarcer, Malthus claimed that “for commodities, the raw materials are in great plenty.” He added that “a demand for these will not fail to create them in as great a quantity as they are wanted.”

Instead of projecting the fears of Paul Ehrlich and the Club of Rome into Malthus’s writings, it makes more sense to ask what they advocated. It turns out that they were a warning against providing aid to the poor who might grow lazy if hunger did not gnaw at them. Despite being an ordained priest, Malthus had much in common with Ayn Rand. Despite her atheism, she was just as hostile to the weak and the defenseless. Furthermore, like today’s neoliberals, he was an advocate of growth. The only way to reduce misery was to grow more food. Yet, the only way to grow more food was to be “industrious” both in factories and in the fields. And what better way to foster industriousness is there than the threat of being fired? Sounding like a Trump administration official cutting off food stamps, Malthus proposed a “total abolition of all the present parish-laws” to “give liberty and freedom of action to the peasantry of England...to be able to settle without interruption, wherever there was a prospect of a greater plenty of work and a higher price for labor.”

This Scrooge-like meanness does not seem to connect with Paul Ehrlich, the author of The Population Bomb or the Club of Rome. They did not fret over the shiftless poor. Instead, they theorized a world in which population growth would outstrip food production. Despite being a misreading of
Malthus, it was one very much geared to the times when liberals in wealthy countries grew fearful of violent revolutions fueled by hunger. They also feared immigration from such countries since it would jeopardize “Green” values. That is why a small minority of Sierra Club members voted in favor of putting a limit on immigration—the kind of limit at odds with Kallis’s worldview.

To develop this worldview, Kallis draws from a wide variety of sources. Among them are Emma Goldman, Cornelius Castoriadis, Michel Foucault, and two novelists: Kim Stanley Robinson and Ursula Le Guin. Such a breadth of knowledge is commendable in a field often dominated by nit-picking whether nuclear power might be part of the solution alongside windmills.

Ultimately, Kallis is in search of a philosophical worldview that can make limits an expression of freedom rather than bondage. Drawing upon his heritage, he holds up the Greek republic as an exemplary model even if you take into account the retrograde treatment of women and slaves. As an analogy, Marx and Engels (as well as Ben Franklin) admired the Iroquois confederacy even as it exhibited the same sort of brutality toward its enemies. What they all had in common was an understanding of the need for equality, living modestly, and having respect for the natural world.

As a discipline, ecosocialist theory tends to face the need for an underlying philosophy since its concerns go to the heart of humanity’s relationship to nature. In his Justice, Nature and The Geography of Difference, David Harvey settled on Gottfried Leibniz as the philosopher best equipped to provide the tools for ecosocialist theory. His theory of monads as hubs of living activity suggested a world where everything is always evolving. More recently, Jason Moore, like Harvey, grappled with the world of classical European philosophy. He was in search of an “ontology for understanding and resolving the environmental crisis. The result of that search bore fruit in his Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital, where he took exception to a Cartesian dualism that divided humanity from nature in the work of Monthly Review editor John Bellamy Foster.

Should we be searching for answers in Leibniz or Descartes? Can philosophy help arm us against a crisis that might lead to the extinction of the human race? Granted, our disappearance as a species will make understanding its connection to the natural world unnecessary. Given the dynamics of capitalism in decline, the natural world will consist only of cockroaches, rats, pigeons and bedbugs a thousand years from now, after all. So why worry? With that in mind, does Kallis’s identification with the ancient Greeks serve as a useful guide for overcoming the crisis and leading to a more just and freer world?

Kallis makes a case for Hellenic-style moderation in a chapter titled “A Culture of Limits.” Solon, the father of Greek democracy, said there was a need for “a hidden measure (of intelligence) that holds the limits of all things.” For the ancient Greeks, the key was avoiding hubris. This term comes to mind when looking at the lifestyle of the rich and famous today, starting with the occupant of the White House. Unlike other philosophers of the modern era like Leibniz or Descartes, philosophers were often writing guides to living better lives. They even made recommendations about diet and exercise, as well as the best time to have sex. Kallis writes:

“If I may be allowed a diversion here, this aspect of Greek ontology and culture has features in common with the egalitarian societies of hunter-gatherers studied by anthropologists. These hunter-gatherers, too, live in a world of limits within limitlessness. They see nature as unlimited, but they respond to it with limits. Like the Greeks, they create institutions to curb the accumulation of resources and power—from reprimanding successful hunters to sharing and consuming all bounty, without allowing themselves to accumulate. Though I may risk overdrawing parallels, they also share an animistic view of the universe. In Greek myth, nature is humanized: gods become animals, copulate with humans, and the like. In older traditional societies, there is no boundary between the human and the nonhuman, a point that we moderns have realized only recently in our theories about the Anthropocene and the end of nature. Interestingly, for the ancients, this unity of the socionatural world was seen not as an invitation to endlessly exploit but as a reason for prudence, given the risk of hubris.

As an exponent of degrowth, Kallis differs from many of his colleagues who harp on ecological limits rather than self-control. For example, in chapter three, titled “The Limits of Environmentalism,” he takes exception to the notion of ecological footprints and planetary boundaries since they put the focus on nature rather than human beings. When he reads statements like humanity using the equivalent of 1.7 Earths, he sees them as concessions to a Malthusian vision of a limited earth. Calling attention to this type of disjunction struck me as being a veiled critique of Jason Hickel, another degrowth advocate, whose articles revolve around statistical analysis about the over-exploitation of natural resources. What differentiates Hickel from Paul Ehrlich and the Club of Rome is his sharp attack on how imperialism is at fault for such wanton practices in the Amazon rainforest rather than the poor people they victimize.

As made clear in my CounterPunch article “Ecological Limits and the Working Class,” I am a degrowth advo-
Two days after the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture Nils Melzer published a letter he sent to the U.S. government urging her release from federal prison, whistleblower Chelsea Manning issued a response welcoming the support and promising to stay resolute in the face of her prolonged detention.

“My long-standing objection to the immoral practice of throwing people in jail without charge or trial, for the sole purpose of forcing them to testify before a secret, government-run investigative panel, remains strong,” said Manning.

Manning was imprisoned on March 8, 2019 for refusing to take part in a grand jury investigation on WikiLeaks and the group’s founder, Julian Assange. Manning and her supporters have alleged that the real purpose of her testimony would be to set perjury traps that could eventually land the former Army private in prison.

As Common Dreams reported, Melzer’s letter expressed the rapporteur’s “serious concern at the reported use of coercive measures against Ms. Manning, particularly given the history of her previous conviction and ill-treatment in detention” and requested more information on Manning’s detention.

“Even knowing I am very likely to stay in jail for an even longer time,” said Manning, “I’m never backing down.”

“I recommend that Ms. Manning’s current deprivation of liberty be promptly reviewed in light of the United States’ international human rights obligations,” Melzer wrote.

“Should my assessment regarding its purely coercive purpose be accurate, I recommend that Ms. Manning be released without further delay, and that any fines disproportionate to the gravity of any offense she may have committed be cancelled or reimbursed.”

Manning’s attorney Moira Meltzer-Cohen in a statement said that Melzer’s letter made clear that Manning’s detention is in violation of international norms and for the sole purpose of torturing the whistleblower.

“Special Rapporteur Melzer has issued a legally rigorous condemnation of the practice of coercive confinement, and of Ms. Manning’s confinement in particular,” said Meltzer-Cohen. “While the United States has so far failed to live up to its human rights obligations, I remain hopeful that the government will reconsider its policies in light of the U.N.’s admonition.”

“In any case,” Meltzer-Cohen added, “there can be no further doubt that Ms. Manning has the courage of her convictions, and will never agree to testify before a grand jury, even at great personal cost.”

Manning echoed that sentiment in her statement.

“Even knowing I am very likely to stay in jail for an even longer time,” said Manning, “I’m never backing down.”

—Common Dreams, January 2, 2020
Torture of Julian Assange

BY CHRIS KINDER

Julian Assange is a journalist who has committed no crime. He is only “guilty” of publishing information revealing the war crimes and other deceits of U.S. imperialism, i.e., things we, the public, should all know. Yet he—the truth teller and publisher of WikiLeaks—is treated by the U.S. as if he was the worst criminal the world has ever seen. This is all done to intimidate the media, and cover up the crimes of the imperialist ruling class of the U.S.

The crimes of the U.S. include the murder of innocent civilians, including children and journalists. The now famous video “Collateral Murder,” showing one such incident in brutal detail, had been provided by Chelsea Manning, formerly (as Bradley Manning) of the U.S. military in Iraq. Manning is a heroine truth-teller who was jailed once for releasing documents and is now locked up for a second time by the U.S. for refusing to testify against Julian Assange in a kangaroo-court grand jury set up to frame Assange.

Manning is not the only one jailed for refusing to testify against Assange before this secretive grand jury. Jeremy Hammond, a member of the hacktivist network, Anonymous, is serving a decade in prison for allegedly disclosing information about the private intelligence firm Strategic Forecasting, Inc. (Stratfor), for revealing that they had been spying on human rights defenders at the behest of corporations and governments; documents which were published by WikiLeaks.

**Assange faces bogus charge of espionage**

Assange is accused by the U.S., under the World War I-era Espionage Act, of conspiring with Manning to obtain secret documents. There is no evidence for this alleged conspiracy whatsoever. Assange is a journalist/publisher, not a whistle-blower. He receives documents from whistleblowers and publishes them. No one has ever accused him of illegal activity, nor shown his revelations to be inaccurate in any way. Furthermore, all the major U.S. media, the New York Times, Washington Post and many others, have published the same material, straight from WikiLeaks.

That is what the U.S. ruling class wants to never happen again. But they can’t treat the U.S. media as they are treating Assange. After all the U.S. media is already about as subservient as it can be, and is owned by big corporations, for whom the U.S. government is the lapdog. But what they can do is the modern-day equivalent of putting Assange’s head on a spike, displayed for all to see. The message to both journalists and publishers is: first amendment rights be damned, don’t publish leaked material ever again! The threat to freedom of speech is blatant.1

**UK-U.S. extradition is not for political offenses**

This is why the U.S. is determined to extradite Assange from Britain—even though he is not a U.S. citizen (he’s Australian) and his work with WikiLeaks is based in Britain, not the U.S. They want to give him a life sentence—likely in solitary confinement—to shut him away in some U.S. dungeon until he dies. And that’s if they don’t manage to kill him while he is in Belmarsh. All this is to intimidate any journalist or any
publisher from repeating Assange’s exposure of U.S. war crimes.

Assange is falsely accused under the Espionage Act, but his actual “crime” was in exposing U.S. war crimes for all to see. He didn’t steal this evidence, he just published it, after it was already revealed. Clearly, this was a political act, not a criminal one. If the law actually played any role in this, which obviously it does not for the U.S. and UK officials, it would prevent Assange’s extradition from the UK to the U.S. because extradition for political offenses is illegal under the treaty governing extradition between the two countries. The treaty is clear: “Extradition shall not be granted if the offense for which extradition is requested is a political offense.”

Assange had asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy, until...

Assange now awaits an extradition hearing set for February 2020. He is currently confined in Belmarsh, the top-security prison in Britain, a hell-hole on the outskirts of London where accused “terrorists” are sent to be tortured, rot away and/or die. Assange is kept there in isolation for 23-hours-per-day. Assange is no terrorist, and indeed no criminal whatsoever. He was sent there after police, at the behest of the U.S., invaded the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, and dragged him out. He was then locked up in Belmarsh for the crime of...skipping bail! Normally there would be no jail time for this at all, and certainly not in Belmarsh. But not so with Julian Assange.

Assange’s earlier political asylum, granted by Ecuador under Rafael Correa, had been withdrawn by the new right-wing president Lenin Moreno. Moreno has allowed the U.S. to use the Galapagos Islands—a precious natural site explored by Darwin—as a military airfield, signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and agreed to hand over Assange to the U.S. and its CIA vultures.3

Police were allowed to come into the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where Assange had found refuge from the threat of extradition to the U.S. for years. The U.S. now had Assange where they wanted him: imprisoned, and on a fast-track to extradition to the U.S., under a trumped-up charge of “espionage.” But that is just the beginning.

U.S./CIA interference against Assange in UK court

In order to cater to the support of the U.S. on the eve of Britain’s separation from the European Union, British authorities have bent over backward to do whatever the U.S. wants. That was shown in the Westminster Magistrates Court on October 21, 2019 in which Assange appeared for a hearing on the management and timing of the extradition proceedings. Assange’s lawyers wanted to allow more time for Assange to prepare his defense before the extradition hearing. All of Assange’s records and documents had been seized when he was arrested and forced out of the Ecuadorian Embassy, and he has been allowed only very limited contact with his lawyers while in Belmarsh prison.

As if to add insult to injury, officials from the U.S. embassy were seen to be openly conferring with the prosecution in the Magistrates Court during the hearing. And the magistrate (judge), Vanessa Baraitser, completely ignored all the defense arguments and denied their claims for delay at the end of the hearing without any further consideration. This was the same magistrate who a month earlier had ruled that Assange will remain in prison, despite the fact that his sentence for “absconding” bail expired on September 22. The extradition trial stays set for February, but in addition, it will now be held, not in the Westminster Magistrates Court, but in the much more restricted court in Belmarsh prison, which is hard to get to and has only three seats for public observers of the proceedings.

The CIA spied on Assange’s privileged contact with his lawyers

Even more importantly, a case now proceeding in a Spanish court shows that the CIA had contracted with a Spanish company to spy on Assange while in the Embassy, including recording privileged conversations between Assange and his lawyers, in which his defense against the up-coming extradition proceedings was discussed. Such a charge would normally be grounds for the immediate dismissal of the case for extradition. Assange’s lawyers sought a delay to the extradition trial in order to allow time for the Spanish court to submit its findings, so that they could be heard at the upcoming extradition hearing. But Magistrate Baraitser ignored this.

All this was reported by a former British ambassador and friend of Assange, Craig Murray, who attended the hearing, and who said, “The charade might as well have been cut and the U.S. government simply sat on the bench to control the whole process.”

Did the CIA torture Assange in a British prison?

Murray also said that from his appearance at the hearing, Assange appears to have been viciously tortured while in Belmarsh Prison. Murray reported: “I was badly shocked by just how much weight my friend has lost, by the speed his hair has receded and by the appearance of premature and vastly accelerated aging. He has a pronounced limp I have never seen before. Since his arrest he has lost over 15 kg [about 33 pounds] in weight.” Murray goes on, “But his physical appearance was not as shocking as his mental deterioration. When asked to give his name and date of birth, he struggled visibly over several seconds to recall both... it was a real struggle for him to articulate the words and focus his train of thought.”

UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer, who found earlier in 2019 that Assange was the victim of a protracted campaign of “psychological torture,” has repeatedly condemned the British authorities for jailing him in a maximum-security prison. In a letter to
the British government in May, Melzer stated that the conditions of Assange’s detention had resulted in his “continued exposure to progressively severe psychological suffering and the ongoing exacerbation of his pre-existing trauma.”

Assange’s health and life are at stake
On November 25, 2019 the New York Times reported that “The mental and physical condition of Julian Assange has so deteriorated that he could die in a British jail before his February hearing on extradition to the United States, a group of international doctors has warned.” In an open letter to the UK Home Secretary, the doctors called for Mr. Assange to be transferred from the high-security Belmarsh prison in London to a university teaching hospital to receive an expert medical assessment.

These alarming reports about Assange, who was coherent and relatively healthy when arrested, combined with the U.S. Embassy officials directing the prosecution with British officials at the October hearing, which signifies their deep and direct involvement, leads to only one conclusion: the CIA is torturing Assange in Belmarsh Prison to the point of incapacity to deal with his own case. This severe treatment could be destroying his mind, and even threatening him with death.

The CIA MK-Ultra program
Death was a frequent occurrence for the victims of the CIA’s secret MK-Ultra program, run for 20 years in the 1950s through early 1970s. This CIA “mind control” program involved giving huge doses of LSD and other drugs to various experimental victims who were often not informed that experiments were being performed on them. Besides LSD, MK-Ultra used other chemicals, electroshocks, hypnosis, sensory deprivation solitary confinement, verbal and sexual abuse, all amounting to torture.

A new book by Stephen Kinzer reports on this in a description of how one man, Sidney Gottlieb, conducted this “work” in secret—even in secret within the CIA. CIA tops ordered it, but didn’t want to know about the gruesome details. The original purpose was to both destroy a person’s mind completely, and then recreate it in accordance with the desires of the perpetrators. As reported by Kinzer, this CIA project “was a continuation of the work begun in World War II-era Japanese facilities and Nazi concentration camps on subduing and controlling human minds.” Kinzer cites evidence that this was a continuation of a Nazi agenda, pursued at the Dachau concentration camp, and facilitated through the CIA’s secret recruitment of Nazi torturers and vivisectionists at the end of the war.

The MK-Ultra program was terminated in 1973, but anyone who thinks that the CIA would not now use these techniques to attempt to destroy the mind of a perceived enemy such as Assange is delusional.

Torture, a long CIA record
The MK-Ultra project headed by Gottlieb began on the order of CIA director Allen Dulles; it was a part of the Cold War against the Soviet Union. The conclusion of this particular program was that while it was possible to destroy a person’s mind, it was not possible to recreate a new mind in its place. But that was not the end of the story.

“Rendition” proved that the U.S. was not done with torture, far from it. Ronald Reagan authorized a rendition in 1987, and Clinton authorized rendition to nations known to practice interrogation, which was dubbed “torture by proxy.” George W Bush rendered hundreds for detention in foreign sites, and “extraordinary rendition” was continued under Obama. The UK authorities, specifically MI5 and MI6 (British security units), were complicit in renditions done by the U.S. “The Report,” a new documentary film on CIA torture in rendition sites, displays CIA “enhanced interrogation” techniques, including use of graphic images, and shows that the real extent of this torture has been underestimated and hidden from the world.

Belmarsh prison is the latest “rendition” torture site, with Assange in the CIA’s cross hairs.

Did Assange commit rape?
Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of this case for some leftists to understand is the “charge” of the rape of two women in Sweden which was leveled against Assange in the press. In general, believing the woman in a rape charge is important for many reasons: women are often afraid to come forward after the fact, the police are highly disrespectful and don’t bother to process “rape kits,” and while DNA evidence may be available, often the lack of consent in the act is difficult to prove. And while Assange has always maintained his innocence in this, and offered to be interrogated by Swedish officials, the charge still leaves a question as to his character.

But unlike most rape cases, this one is vastly different: it has the footprints of the CIA all over it.

First of all, this alleged “rape” came up just months after Assange enraged the U.S. war makers with the release of the “Collateral Murder” video, which showed the blatant killing of civilians in Iraq by U.S. troops from a helicopter.

Secondly, no official charge of rape has ever been leveled against Assange. The two women involved did not allege rape and would not sign onto a charge of rape. A Swedish tabloid went public with the story of an alleged rape, which is how Assange found out about it.

It was all about Assange’s extradition to the U.S.
After a senior Swedish prosecutor cancelled an arrest warrant for Assange, saying the evidence “disclosed no crime at
As Women Against Rape spokespersons Katrin Axelsson and Lisa Longstaff put it in a Guardian article, “When Julian Assange was first arrested, we were struck by the unusual zeal with which he was being pursued for rape allegations. It seems even clearer now, that the allegations against him are a smokescreen behind which a number of governments are trying to clamp down on WikiLeaks for having audaciously revealed to the public their secret planning of wars and occupations with their attendant rape, murder and destruction.”

Axelson and Longstaff also point out that the two women involved have been mistreated as well, both by the system and the public. This notwithstanding, they oppose extradition for Assange.

Socialists must defend Julian Assange

This a no-brainer: No extradition! Free Julian Assange immediately! And, free Chelsea Manning and Jeremy Hammond now!

Julian Assange is a democrat, not a socialist. Assange falls in the category of muckraker, or in modern usage, investigative reporter. But journalists like Assange have played an important part in exposing the crimes of capitalism and imperialism throughout history. Consider Ida M. Tarbell (1857–1944). She was one of the leading muckrakers of the Progressive era, and an early pioneer of investigative journalism. She wrote the exposé, The History of the Standard Oil Company.

And Ida B. Wells (1862–1931), an African American investigative journalist who was born in slavery. Wells came to co-own and write for the Memphis Free Speech and Headlight and was one of the founders of the NAACP. She condemned the flaws in the United States justice system that allowed lynching to happen, and supported the women’s suffrage movement, among many other things.
Working people need these important truth-tellers.

The harsh treatment of many of these Progressive Era journalists and investigators was severe. But what Assange is going through today? The treatment of Assange shows how the U.S. imperialist ruling class has used modern control of information and advanced torture techniques to tighten the screws on opposition, wherever it arises. This is not fascism yet. But the essential groundwork needed to solidify the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in a fascist fashion is being built. The torture of Julian Assange is one important tentacle of this capitalist octopus.

Julian Assange is a libertarian, not a socialist, but his cause is critical to the class struggle against imperialist capitalism: we must know the truth of ruling class crimes.

The working class needs to mobilize behind a program which includes defense of muckrakers and whistleblowers such as Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning, and Jeremy Hammond. This is an important part of a revolutionary solution to the increasingly corrupt and oppressive bourgeois society that confines us all.

Continued from page 54

cate and even come down on the side of emphasizing footprints and over-exploitation. I cite Hickel’s article “Is it Possible to Achieve a Good Life for All Within Planetary Boundaries?” that violates Kallis’s strictures even though I am deeply sympathetic to his call for returning to the ethos of self-control and moderation.

What worries me, however, about the degrowth literature in totality is its usefulness to a revolutionary movement. Unlike the Green New Deal, what are the political implications of degrowth? What is a possible slogan? Stop building new factories? Or ground all Boeing 737’s, Max or not? Unlike the Green New Deal, degrowth only makes sense in a post-capitalist society. If social and economic equality were universal, it would not generate opposition since a sacrifice would be shared equally. You can see a foreshadowing of such a social compact from an article in the December 14th Globe and Mail titled, “The climate crisis is like a world war. So let’s talk about rationing.” Eleanor Boyle, the author of the op-ed, also wrote High Steaks: Why and How to Eat Less Meat. Such a book is necessary even if it is mostly irrelevant to people making $8.00-per-hour who can barely afford a Big Mac. Under socialism, we should develop the kind of egalitarian ethic that allows everybody to enjoy a steak as long as it doesn’t compete with land dedicated to quinoa cultivation.

For now, the books and articles of Kallis and Hickel will appeal to those who have already concluded that the capitalist system is an ongoing disaster. With that in mind, within a year or two, their books might be on a New York Times best-seller’s list at the rate things are going.

—CounterPunch, December 27, 2019


1 Displaying heads on a pike after the crushing of a revolt, and posting them on the roads leading into town, is an ancient tyrannical practice which was widely used by slavery rulers in the U.S. after crushing slave revolts.

2 See the US-UK Extradition Treaty, at: https://fas.org/irp/world/uk/extradite.pdf

3 https://nacla.org/news/2019/12/02/long-coup-ecuador

4 Craig Murray, “Assange In Court,” October 22, 2019. www.craigmurray.org.uk. For the relevant U.S./UK Extradition Treaty, see:

https://fas.org/irp/world/uk/extradite.pdf


9 Caitlin Johnstone, “Responding To Assange’s Critics 1-3,” in Tariq Ali and Margaret Kunstler, editors, In Defense of Julian Assange, OR Books, 2019. Find the complete original Johnstone article, “ Debunking All the Assange Smears,” (29 total) at The Medium: https://medium.com/@caitlynjohnstone/debunking-all-the-assange-smears-a549f677c9ac?


Cost-Benefit of Senate Bill 942
A Guest Editorial By Shakaboona

On November 11, 2019, Pennsylvania State Senator Sharif Street introduced Senate Bill 942 to help us finally get parole eligibility for our loved ones serving Death-By-Incarceration (DBI) or Life Without Parole (LWOP) in Pennsylvania, a struggle going on for about 60 years in this state. From the 1970s until today, we can guesstimate that thousands, if not more, of Lifer men and women in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections have died slow, agonizing, lonely deaths in prison from serving DBI sentences. This must end. People deserve second chances.

Placing my emotions aside, and looking at SB 942 from a practical standpoint, SB 942 is a bill we can get behind to support its passage. And with good reason, here is why:

- For the first time in Pennsylvania history there will be “Parole Eligibility” for incarcerated men and women condemned to death through LWOP sentencing schemes.
- A couple of thousand Lifer prisoners can immediately get free, and hundreds more would be set free possibly every year thereafter.
- Persons serving DBI sentences under Two and Three Strikes laws would be parole eligible in 20 years.
- A Life With Parole Reinvestment Fund would be established and would transfer 50 percent of the funds to Offender Reentry Programs.
- SB 942 would take effect in 60 days after passage.
- The time is ripe for passage of a parole eligibility bill to finally become enacted as law in Pennsylvania.
- And this is probably a once in a lifetime deal to get done, so we should seize the time.

Yes, SB 942 has its drawbacks of providing a provision excluding those convicted of killing a cop from parole eligibility [and] not providing a lesser parole eligibility term than 35 and 25 years for people who did not kill or intend to kill anyone, and for veterans, geriatric, and the terminally ill.

These problems of SB 942 is what caused me to rail against it in the past. But weighing the cost-benefit of the question at hand, to support or not to support, I think it best to support SB 942 to get what we can now, and struggle to pass different bills to get other parts later. Because at the end of the day, something is better than nothing at all, and we can set free a lot of condemned people who would otherwise die in prison.

Those are issues we’re going to have to deal with later. But before we can get to those issues, let’s support SB 942 now, and set those who are deserving free.

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Mumia Abu-Jamal: New Chance for Freedom

Police and State frame-up must be fully exposed!

By Chris Kinder

Mumia Abu-Jamal is innocent. Courts have ignored and suppressed evidence of his innocence for decades. But now, one court has thrown out all the decisions of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court that denied Mumia’s appeals against his unjust conviction during the years of 1998 to 2012.

This ruling, by Judge Leon Tucker, was made because one judge on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court during those years, Ronald Castille, was lacking the “appearance of impartiality.” In plain English, he was clearly biased against Mumia. Before sitting on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, Castille had been District Attorney (or assistant District Attorney) during the time of Mumia’s frame-up and conviction and had used his office to express a special interest in pursuing the death penalty for “cop-killers.” Mumia was in the crosshairs. Soon he was wrongly convicted and sent to death row for killing a police officer.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is an award-winning and intrepid journalist, a former Black Panther, MOVE supporter, and a critic of police brutality and murder. Mumia was framed by police, prosecutors, and leading elements of both Democratic and Republican parties, for the shooting of a police officer. The U.S. Justice Department targeted him as well. A racist judge helped convict him, and corrupt courts have kept him locked up despite much evidence that should have freed him. He continues his commentary and journalism from behind bars. As of 2019, he has been imprisoned for 37 years for a crime he did not commit.

Time is up. FREE MUMIA NOW!

District Attorney’s hidden files show frame-up of Mumia

In the midst of Mumia’s fight for his right to challenge the state Supreme Court’s negative rulings, a new twist was revealed: six boxes of files on Mumia’s case—with many more still hidden—were surreptitiously concealed for decades in a back room at the District Attorney’s office in Philadelphia. The very fact that these files on Mumia’s case were hidden away for decades is damning in the extreme, and their revelations confirm what we have known for decades: Mumia was framed for a crime he did not commit.

So far, the newly revealed evidence confirms that, at the time of Mumia’s 1982 trial, chief prosecutor Joe McGill illegally removed Black jurors from the jury, violating the Batson decision. Also revealed: The prosecution bribed witnesses into testifying that they saw Mumia shoot the slain police officer when they hadn’t seen any such thing. Taxi driver Robert Chobert, who was on probation for fire-bombing a school yard at the time, had sent a letter demanding his money for lying on the stand. Very important, but the newly revealed evidence is just the tip of the iceberg.

All evidence of Mumia’s innocence must be brought forward now!

Mumia Abu-Jamal’s trial for the murder of police officer Daniel Faulkner was rigged against him from beginning to end. All of the evidence of Mumia’s innocence—which was earlier suppressed or rejected—must now be heard:

- Mumia was framed—The judge at Mumia’s trial, Albert Sabo, was overheard to say, “I’m gonna help ’em fry the nigger.” And he proceeded to do just that. Mumia was thrown out of his own trial for defending himself. Prosecution “witnesses” were coerced
or bribed at trial to lie against Mumia. In addition to Clobert, this included key witness Cynthia White, a prostitute who testified that she saw Mumia shoot Faulkner. White’s statements had to be rewritten under intense pressure from the cops, because she was around the corner and out of sight of the shooting at the time. Police bribed her with promises of being allowed to work her corner, and not sent to state prison for her many prostitution charges.

- Mumia only arrived on the scene after Officer Faulkner was shot. William Singletary, a tow-truck business owner who had no reason to lie against the police, said he had been on the scene the whole time, that Mumia was not the shooter, and that Mumia had arrived only after the shooting of Faulkner. Singletary’s statements were torn up, his business was wrecked, and he was threatened by police to be out of town for the trial (which, unfortunately, he was).

- There is no evidence that Mumia fired a gun—Mumia was shot on the scene by an arriving police officer and arrested. But the cops did not test his hands for gun-powder residue—a standard procedure in shootings. They also did not test Faulkner’s hands. The prosecution nevertheless claimed Mumia was the shooter, and that he was shot by Faulkner as the officer fell to the ground. Ballistics evidence was corrupted to falsely show that Mumia’s gun was the murder weapon, when his gun was reportedly still in his taxi-cab, which was in police custody days after the shooting.

- The real shooter fled the scene and was never charged. Veronica Jones was a witness who said that after hearing the shots from a block away, she had seen two people fleeing the scene of the shooting. This could not have included Mumia, who had been shot and almost killed at the scene. Jones was threatened by the police with arrest and loss of custody of her children. She then lied on the stand at trial to say she had seen no one running away.

- Abu-Jamal never made a confession. Mumia has always maintained his innocence. But police twice concocted confessions that Mumia never made. Inspector Alfonso Giordano, the senior officer at the crime scene, made up a confession for Mumia. But Giordano was not allowed to testify at trial, because he was top on the FBI’s list of corrupt cops in the Philadelphia police force. At the District Attorney’s request, another cop handily provided a second “confession,” allegedly heard by a security guard in the hospital. At neither time was Mumia—almost fatally shot—able to speak. And an earlier police report by cops in the hospital said that, referring to Mumia: “the negro male made no comment.”

- The crime scene was tampered with by police. Police officers at the scene rearranged some evidence and handled what was alleged to be Mumia’s gun with their bare hands. A journalist’s photos revealed this misconduct. The cops then left the scene unattended for hours. All of this indicates a frame-up in progress.

- The real shooter confessed and revealed the reason for the crime. Arnold Beverly came forward in the 1990s. He said in a sworn statement, under penalty of perjury, that he, not Mumia, had been the actual shooter. He said that he, along with “another guy,” had been hired to do the hit, because Faulkner was “a problem for the mob and corrupt policemen because he interfered with the graft and payoffs made to allow illegal activity including prostitution, gambling, drugs without prosecution in the center city area.” (affidavit of Arnold Beverly).

- The corruption of Philadelphia police is documented and well known. This includes that of Giordano, who was the first cop to manufacture a “confession” by Mumia. Meanwhile, Faulkner’s cooperation with the federal anti-corruption investigations of Philadelphia police is strongly suggested by his lengthy and heavily redacted FBI file.

- Do cops kill other cops? There are other cases in Philadelphia that look that way. Frank Serpico, an New York City cop who investigated and reported on police corruption, was abandoned by fellow cops after being shot in a drug bust. Mumia was clearly made a scapegoat for the crimes of corrupt Philadelphia cops who were protecting their ill-gotten gains.

- Politicians and the U.S. Department Of Justice helped the frame-up. Ed Rendell, former District Attorney, Pennsylvania governor, and head of the Democratic National Committee—and now a senior advisor to crime-bill
author Joe Biden—is complicit in the frame-up of Mumia. The U.S. Justice Department targeted Mumia for his anti-racist activities when he was a teenager, and later secretly warned then-prosecutor Rendell not to use Giordano as a witness against Mumia because he was an FBI target for corruption.

All this should lead to an immediate freeing of Mumia. But we are still a ways away from that, and we have no confidence in the capitalist courts to finish the job. We must act. This victory in local court allowing new appeals must now lead to a full-court press on all the rejected and suppressed evidence of Mumia’s innocence.

Mass movement needed to free Mumia.

Mumia’s persecution by local, state and federal authorities of both political parties has been on-going and has generated a world-wide movement in his defense. This movement has seen that Mumia, as a radio journalist who exposed the brutal attacks on the Black community by the police in Philadelphia, has spoken out as a defender of working people of all colors and all nationalities in his ongoing commentaries (from Prison Radio now on KPFA/Pacifica radio and other local radio stations,) despite being on death row, and now while serving life without the possibility of parole (LWOP).

In 1999, Oakland Teachers for Mumia held unauthorized teach-ins in Oakland schools on Mumia and the death penalty, despite the rabid hysteria in the bourgeois media. Teachers in Rio de Janeiro held similar actions. Letters of support came in from maritime workers and trade unions around the world. Later in 1999, longshore workers shut down all the ports on the West Coast to free Mumia and led a mass march of 25,000 Mumia supporters in San Francisco.

A year later, a federal court lifted Mumia’s death sentence, based on improper instructions to the jury by trial judge Albert Sabo. The federal court ordered the local court to hold a new sentencing hearing. Fearing their frame-up of Mumia could be revealed in any new hearing, even if only on sentencing, state officials passed. Much to the chagrin of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP)—which still seeks Mumia’s death—this left Mumia with LWOP, death by life in prison.

Mumia supporters waged a struggle to get him the cure for the deadly Hepatitis-C virus, which he had likely contracted through a blood transfusion in hospital after he was shot by a cop at the 1981 crime scene. The Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal conducted demonstrations against Gilead Sciences, the Foster City, California corporation that owns the cure, and charged $1,000 per pill. The Metalworkers Union of South Africa wrote a letter excoriating Governor Wolf for allowing untreated sick freedom fighters to die in prison as the apartheid government had done. Finally, Mumia did get the cure. Now, more than ever, struggle is needed to free Mumia!

Labor Action Committee to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal

www.laboractionmumia.org
November 2019
Dear Editors,

Jamaica Hampton¹ is in critical condition at San Francisco General Hospital. He was gunned down by pigs at the San Francisco Police Department as he was running away in fear for his life. This is a clear example of the oppression dealt out on a daily basis to the communities that the police are supposed to be protecting. This is evidence of the capitalist government’s war on people. This was an assault on the life of Jamaica Hampton, and this was an assault on the entire community.

We are sick and tired of burying friends and family members and bearing the heartache caused by an unbalanced oppressive system only sustained by our blood sweat and tears. It’s time we hold the system’s cronies and goons accountable.

(SFPD and all police departments: You claim to be fighting crime, that stems from the oppressive system you work for, so you are a counterproductive remedy to a symptom of a systemic failure. It’s like giving a shot of whiskey to someone dying of liver failure. I’m not trying to change how you think. I’m not trying to pull on your heartstrings. I’m communicating from my soul to yours and I hope you hear it. I hope you understand and see this is not just another perspective. It is a clear view of the truth.)

Society suffers from the manifestation of our collective-defective human character traits such as self-centeredness, greed, pride and ego run riot—without constraint or direction. It’s a disease of capitalism in the same way a person suffers from the disease of addiction.

We live in a constant state of deep-seated fear from knowing this system is willing to kill, not only people, but life on earth as we know it, to assist the siphoning of wealth out of the earth and working class into the hands of the ruling capitalists class who happens to be the minority at only one percent of the world’s population, which completely contradicts the idea of majority rule.

When people feel afraid, traumatized, oppressed, powerless and without healthy productive ways of coping, as we do in society, we tend to become self-destructive. This applies both on an individual level as well as collectively in society. We experience what’s referred to as the gift of desperation from active addiction and realize, that in order to recover, we must abstain from participating in the behavior of active drug use. Then with the unity of group consciousness led by a set of guiding universal principles, together we come up with solutions to heal and ways to cope with life, first and foremost, by not participating in addiction—not using. This is the only way known to man proven to be affective in healing and recovering from the manifestation of our ego driven without constraint or direction—the lifestyle of addiction. And this can be applied to society as a whole in order to heal from the collective self-destructive lifestyle that is a direct result of the capitalist systems. Cause and effect is real.

As we speak, to save themselves, capitalist in power are planning to colonize Mars because they foresee earth becoming inhabitable due to the destruction caused by their capitalist system. Like a big, spoiled kid with toys and candy they don’t wanna share, ironically, with we who actually create the wealth, they’re attempting an escape from the earth they will have destroyed.

The struggle for revolution ain’t about the poor getting rich because, like it or not, “A rich man’s heaven is a poor man’s hell” (Peter Tosh). The cost of “doing business” always lands on the backs of the working poor especially in Third World countries.

It’s about, we the majority, accepting responsibility, becoming accountable, and creating a system of production that is not driven by the profit motive but instead driven by the common good of life on earth. A system guided by universally humanitarian principles and participation in the production of human needs from each person according to one’s ability, and the distribution of these goods to each person according to their needs.

The next step in human social evolution out of the destructive lifestyle of capitalism is socialism. Not socialized aspects of government and production, but a worldwide socialist workers’ revolution.

In order to heal we must abstain from participating in a destructive lifestyle and self-destructive behavior.

There’s a lot to be grateful for and even more reason to fight for justice. The positive aspect is that there is hope. We can organize and unite in solidarity to take our spirit back from the grips of the capitalist system.

We have all the ability and the answers are ingrained in our DNA. We just have to be willing to take an honest look at the part we play, and accept this lifestyle no longer serves a purpose. The cost of capitalism greatly outweighs the benefits, and it’s time for Real Change.

—Johnny Gould, January 3, 2020

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The editors take positions consistent with revolutionary Marxism. Within this context the editors will consider for publication articles, reviews or comments. The editors may publish comments to accompany these articles. Photographs and cartoons will be appreciated.

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Note to Readers:

Socialist Viewpoint magazine has been edited and distributed by 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.
On November 20, 2019, the Arizona jury found human rights activist Scott Warren not guilty of “harboring” undocumented migrants, charges that were levied by federal prosecutors after the geography teacher provided food, water, and shelter to two men traveling through the desert in 2018.

“The government failed in its attempt to criminalize basic human kindness,” Warren, a volunteer worker with the advocacy group No More Deaths, said from the steps of the Arizona courthouse following his acquittal. “As we stand here, people’s brothers, sisters, fathers, spouses, and children are in the midst of the perilous desert crossing. The need for humanitarian aid continues.”

On Twitter, No More Deaths applauded the jury’s decision.

“Yet again, No More Deaths has withstood the government’s attempts to criminalize basic human compassion,” the group said. “This verdict is validation of what we have always known: that humanitarian aid is never a crime.”

If convicted, Warren would have faced up to a decade in prison. As Reuters reported, the Tucson jury took just over two hours to find Warren not guilty on two federal charges.

“Human compassion shouldn’t be illegal,” the caucus tweeted. “Providing food and water to those in need should not be illegal. We must stand by our values and help immigrants in need, just as Scott did.”

Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), a top-tier candidate in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary race, acknowledged Warren’s acquittal in a tweet Thursday morning, writing that “if we criminalize compassion, we have lost our way as a society.”

The grassroots group New Sanctuary Coalition tied Warren’s case to the broader circumstances surrounding his volunteer work, tweeting: “Now, we demand an end to the Trump administration’s continued targeting of migrant justice activists, the dehumanization of migrants and refugees.”

The exoneration of Scott Warren is a triumph for humanity. (amnesty.org)
The nine planetary boundaries and estimates of how the different control variables for seven planetary boundaries have changed from 1950 to present. The green shaded polygon represents the safe operating space. Source: Steffen et al. 2015. See: “The nine planetary boundaries,” Stockholm Resilience Center, Stockholm University. Read Capitalism vs. Life on Earth on page 46.

On the Front Cover: A moment of grace in front of the Opéra Garnier December 24, 2019 as the Opéra de Paris goes on strike against pension reform. They perform an excerpt from Swan Lake outside the opera house. Read France’s Biggest Strike in Decades on page 9.

Prisoners retain their free speech rights under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. That means you cannot legally suppress the expression and consideration of ideas. Prison walls do not form a barrier separating prisoners from the protection of the Constitution, according to the Turner v. Safley ruling. [482 U.S. 78, 107 Sct 2245 (1987)] If you exclude printed matter on an improper basis, or give a false pretext or rationale for its exclusion, because of the ideas expressed in it, you are breaking the law. The prisoner denied access to material he wants to read can bring a civil rights lawsuit against you with cause for seeking punitive damages. In the case of Police Department Chicago v. Mosley, 408 U.S. 92, 95, 92 Sct 2286, 2290 (1972) the court found that “[A]bove all else, the First Amendment means that government has no power to restrict expression because of its message, subject matter or content.”