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

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On Friday, June 4, 2021, after two very successful community pickets during both the day and night International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU) shifts, starting at 6:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M., the Israeli Apartheid Zim-chartered Volans ship left the dock at Berth 30, at approximately 6:00 P.M., with cargo still loaded!

Huge thanks to AROC (Arab Resource and Organizing Center) for their amazing network and community organizing capabilities!

Hundreds participated, six gates were successfully picketed, and a great shuttle service was organized by AROC to help get people to berth 30. Huge thanks to all the ILWU workers, who understood and respected our picket line!

Activists with SZAC (Stop Zim Action Committee,) the group I’ve been working with, have been monitoring the Volans ship since it left dock on Friday evening, and although the ship’s location had not been included on satellite reports for many hours afterwards, there has been no sign of the ship returning to the Oakland port—a victory!

Very proud to have played a small part in this amazing community resistance to Israel’s brutal oppression of Palestine. So proud of Oakland and the greater Bay Area! A people united will never be divided!

Thanks to everyone who participated!

“Resistance is Justified when People are Occupied!”

Ship forced to leave Oakland, California port after the International Longshore and Warehouse Union refused to unload its cargo. Other protests were planned against Israeli ships in Seattle, Los Angeles, New York and Vancouver Canada. #BDS (Photo: Asad Salameh, June 5 at 6:53 A.M.)
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Mass uprisings across the globe are not only gaining strength, they’re winning solidarity among the world’s working class.

In a May 18, 2021, New York Times article by Julie Turkewitz titled, “Why are Colombians Protesting,”

“The fuse for the protests was a tax overhaul proposed by Mr. Duque [Colombia’s president], which many Colombians felt would have made getting by in an economy squeezed by the pandemic even harder. But the outpouring quickly morphed into a widespread expression of anger over poverty and inequality—which have risen as the virus has spread—and over the violence with which the police have confronted the movement. Students, teachers, health workers, farmers, Indigenous communities, and many others have come together in the streets.”

In Peru, the ruling class was dealt a blow by the election of Pedro Castillo, a militant teacher trade unionist and a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist as the next president.

In Haiti, masses have protested a Yes or No vote on a new constitution because they don’t have a chance to read it ahead of the vote.

And in Myanmar, workers and students have come together in protest of the military coup that took control of their government in February.

All these protests are continuing and deepening and have brought together communities that were not united before. And they have included demands that resonate with workers everywhere—including in the United States—against repression, racism, economic inequality, poverty, police violence and war.

Capitalism is built on a foundation of inequality

The crisis of economic inequality that is fundamental to capitalism, is gaining widespread condemnation among workers everywhere. The worldwide pandemic has accentuated the failure of capitalism to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It also put the most pressure on the lowest paid workers—essential workers like hospital workers, delivery, transportation, grocery and construction workers—to continue working despite the health dangers of being on the job. And still, masses of workers remain unemployed or grossly underemployed.

The rich get richer

The rich get richer in part because they create the laws that allow them to under-report their earnings and avoid paying taxes. They create the laws that allow them to deploy the police and the military on all those who dare to protest their unjust laws.

“The 25 richest Americans including Jeff Bezos, Michael Bloomberg and Elon Musk paid relatively little—and sometimes nothing—in federal income taxes between 2014 and 2018, according to an analysis from the news organization ProPublica that was based on a trove of Internal Revenue Service tax data.”

And to emphasize the point, according to a June 13, 2021, article in the *New York Times* by Anand Giridharadas, titled, “Warren Buffett and the Myth of the ‘Good Billionaire’,”

“From 2014 to 2018, Mr. Buffett’s wealth soared by $24.3 billion, according to ProPublica. (To underline, this is just the amount the fortune grew.) The amount of taxes Mr. Buffett paid over this period? $23.7 million. If middle-class Americans in their 40s enjoyed such a low effective tax rate, they would have paid a few dozen bucks per household over this same time period.”

And in a 12-page article (I mention the length of the article because it reflects just how complicated the private equity laws are) that appeared in the *New York Times* on June 12, 2021, by Jesse Drucker and Danny Hakim titled, “Private Inequity: How a Powerful Industry Conquered the Tax System,”

“There were two weeks left in the Trump administration when the Treasury Department handed down a set of rules governing an obscure corner of the tax code. Overseen by a senior Treasury official whose previous job involved helping the wealthy avoid taxes, the new regulations represented a major victory for private equity firms. They ensured that executives in the $4.5 trillion industry, whose leaders often measure their yearly pay in eight or nine figures, could avoid paying hundreds-of-millions in taxes. ...People earning less than $25,000 are at least three times more likely to be audited than partnerships, whose income flows overwhelmingly to the richest 1 percent of Americans. ...The top five publicly traded firms reported net profits last year of $8.6 billion. They paid their executives $8.3 billion. ...Even if the agency’s budget were significantly expanded, veterans of the I.R.S. doubt it would make much difference when it comes to scrutinizing complex partnerships. ‘If the I.R.S. started staffing up now, it would take them at least a decade to catch up,’”

In other words, the complexity of the law is designed to allow only the wealthiest to get away without paying taxes. The poor get audited, fined and/or jailed for tax evasion for things like not reporting “under the table” income, or trying to deduct “work expenses” that don’t qualify under the law—the law of the capitalist class.

**International working-class unity**

Certainly, it’s clear the world’s ruling class is united in its assault on the livelihoods of the working class in every country in the world. From wars to police occupation of communities, to forced expulsions from lands, environmental exploitation and degradation, racism, sexism, inflation, food insecurity and, most of all, extreme income inequality—capitalism is proving itself to be the most vicious predatory monster ever. Nothing is sacred except their obscene personal wealth—wealth stolen from the masses of workers who created it in the first place.

The most important task in the days ahead is to form an international, working-class organization that is independent of the ruling classes that can not only fight for improvements in the living conditions of workers now, but to organize a mass movement to bring an end to war, bigotry, police repression and capitalist exploitation altogether and forever more.

**The law of the working class**

The working class, acting in solidarity against capitalist exploitation, and united in struggle for human dignity, equality, freedom, and justice for all, is the most profound expression of human democracy. Socialism is democracy in action. It is production for what people need and want instead of production for the private profit for the few at the expense of life, happiness, freedom and justice for all, and the health of the planet. It is a choice between a beautiful future and the descent into barbarism.
The victory of Pedro Castillo in the Peruvian presidential election is a major political earthquake, which reflects the enormous social and political polarization in the Andean country. The ruling class has been dealt a massive defeat by the masses, who have rallied behind a militant teacher trade unionist at the head of a party, Perú Libre, which calls itself Marxist, Leninist and Mariateguist (after Mariátegui, the founder of the Peruvian labor and socialist movement.)

The count was a slow and painful process, and the final result was not clear until the very end, three days after the closing of polls on June 6, 2021. At the time of writing, with 99.795 percent of the votes tallied, Pedro Castillo has 8,735,448 votes (50.206 percent,) giving him a small but irreversible advantage over his rival, the right-wing populist Keiko Fujimori, who got 8,663,684 votes (49.794 percent).

Even at this point, the official results have not been proclaimed, with Fujimori’s team alleging fraud and filing dozens of appeals. The masses are ready to defend the vote on the streets. There are reports of 20,000 ronderos (members of the peasant self-defense militias created during the civil war in the 1990s, of which Castillo is a member) travelling to the capital to defend the peoples’ will. A mass demonstration was called June 9, in Lima, where people have gathered for three nights in a row outside Castillo’s election headquarters.

It was the extreme fragmentation of the vote in the first round that allowed Castillo to go on to the run-off with only under 19 percent. However, his electoral success is not by chance. It is an expression of the deep crisis of the regime in Peru. Decades of anti-working-class policies of privatization and liberalization in a country that is extremely rich in mineral resources have left a legacy of a bourgeois democracy based on extreme disparity of wealth and pervasive corruption.

Five former presidents are either in jail or indicted for corruption. All of the institutions of bourgeois democracy are extremely discredited. Mass demonstrations in November 2020 were an expression of the deep anger accumulated in Peruvian society.

To this we have to add the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and capitalist crisis. The country suffered one of the worst economic contractions in Latin America at 11 percent, and has recorded the worst percentage of excess deaths, and the worst death rate anywhere in the world, while the rich and government politicians jumped the queue for vaccinations.

A vote for radical change

The masses of workers and peasants wanted radical change, and this is precisely what Pedro Castillo represents in their eyes. His campaign had two main policy planks: the renegotiation of terms of contracts with mining multinationals (and if they refuse, they would be nationalized,) and the convening of a Constituent Assembly to do away with the 1993 constitution written during the Fujimori dictatorship (Keiko’s father.)

His main election slogans: “no more poor people in a rich country” and “teacher’s word” resonated with the oppressed, the workers, the poor, the peasants, the downtrodden, the indigenous Quechua and Aymara, particularly in working-class and poor areas far away from Lima’s fair-skinned upper-class circles.

Castillo’s authority comes from having defied the trade union bureaucracy to lead the 2017 teacher’s strike. To the workers and peasants, he is one of their own. A humble rural teacher with peasant roots who has promised to live on his teacher’s wage when he becomes president. His appeal is precisely that of being an anti-establishment outsider from the left. His popularity reveals a
deep discrediting of bourgeois democracy and all political parties.

Even though Keiko Fujimori was not their favorite candidate, the whole of the Peruvian ruling class closed ranks behind her in the second round. Their campaign was vicious. Billboards in Lima proclaimed, “Communism is poverty,” and the people were threatened with the seven plagues if Castillo was to win the election. He was the candidate of violent Sendero Luminoso (the 1990s terrorist-guerrilla group,) they were told. Nobel prize winner Vargas Llosa, who in the past opposed Alberto Fujimori’s rule from a bourgeois liberal point of view, penned furious opinion articles claiming a victory for Castillo would spell the end of democracy.

Despite all of that, or perhaps precisely because of the hatred it provoked amongst the ruling class, Castillo started the second-round campaign 20 points ahead of his rival. That lead narrowed as election day came closer. Partly because the hate campaign pushed wavering voters towards Keiko Fujimori, but also partly because Castillo attempted to tone down his message and moderate his promises.

While in the first round he had promised to convene a Constituent Assembly come what may, now he said he would respect the 1993 Constitution and ask Congress (where he has no majority) to call a referendum on convening a Constituent Assembly. While in the first round he said he would nationalize the mines, now he stressed that he would attempt to renegotiate the contracts first. The more he did that, the more his lead narrowed, to a point where on election day his victory was only razor thin.

Class contradictions

The narrow victory, however, masks the sharp class polarization of the country. Fujimori has won in Lima (65-34) and even here her best results are in the richest districts: San Isidro (88 percent), Miraflores (84 percent) and Surco (82 percent.) Castillo has won in 17 out of the country’s 25 districts, with massive victories in the poorer Andean and southern regions: Ayacucho 82 percent, Huancavelica 85 percent, Puno 89 percent, Cusco 83 percent. He also won in his natal Cajamarca (71 percent), a region where there have been massive anti-mining protests.

Castillo’s authority comes from having defied the trade union bureaucracy to lead the 2017 teacher’s strike. To the workers and peasants, he is one of their own. A humble rural teacher with peasant roots who has promised to live on his teacher’s wage when he becomes president.

In the last days of the campaign, Keiko Fujimori, in a classic populist style, promised direct handouts of money from mining companies’ payments to the population in the towns where the mines are based. This was an attempt to lure away voters from Castillo’s proposal of changing the contracts to benefit the whole of the people. The voters chose Castillo massively in all of the mining towns: in Chumbivilcas (Cusco), 96 percent, Cotabambas (Apurimac), the base of the Chinese MMG Las Bambas, over 91 percent, Espinar (Cusco), where Glencore operates, over 92 percent; Huari (Áncash) where there is a joint BHP Billiton -Glencore mine, over 80 percent.

The masses of workers and peasants who support Castillo were ready to come out on the streets to defend his victory, as Fujimori cried fraud and appealed the results. In the days leading up to the election and immediately afterwards there have been rumors of a military coup. Prominent Fujimori supporters called on the Army to step in to prevent a Castillo take over.

There is no doubt that a section of the ruling class in Peru is in panic and played all the tricks in the book to prevent Castillo from winning the election. They see him as a threat to their power and privileges and the way they have ruled the country since its independence 200 years ago.

So far, it seems the most cautious elements in the ruling class have prevailed. An editorial in the main bourgeois paper La Republica described Fujimori as irresponsible for crying fraud. “We appeal to the sensible and thoughtful leadership of political leaders and authorities. We need to calm the streets of the interior of the country, which bustle between mistrust and fed up.” This is what they are worried about. Any attempt to steal the election from Castillo would bring the masses of workers and peasants out on the streets, further radicalizing them.

This gives you an indication of what Castillo will face once he is sworn in. The ruling class and imperialism will resort to all means necessary to prevent him from actually ruling. We have seen the same script being played in the past against Chavez in Venezuela. Prominent members of the coup-plotting Venezuelan opposition were in Lima to back Fujimori. They will use Congress and other bourgeois institutions, the media, the state apparatus (up to and including the army,) economic sabotage, to constrain his ability to implement his policies.

Defend the victory: prepare for battle

Castillo’s program, despite the references to Marx, Lenin and Mariategui in Peru Libre’s documents, is one of national capitalist development. He wants to use the country’s mineral wealth for social programs (chiefly...
education) and work with “productive national businessmen” to “develop the economy.” His model is Ecuador’s Correa and Bolivia’s Morales.

The problem is that such responsible “national productive” capitalists do not exist. The Peruvian ruling class, the bankers, landowners, capitalists, are closely tied to the interests of the multinationals and imperialism. They are interested not in any “national development” but in their own enrichment.

Castillo will now be faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, he can rule for the masses of workers and peasants who have elected him, which would mean a radical break with the capitalists and the multinationals. That can only be done by relying upon extra-parliamentary mass mobilization. Or he can give in, water down his program and accommodate to the interests of the ruling class, meaning he will be discredited among those who have voted for him, preparing his own downfall. If he attempts to serve two masters (the workers and the capitalists) at the same time he will please neither.

In an attempt to reassure “the markets,” which were jittery during the count, Castillo’s team issued a statement which is worth quoting at length:

"In an eventual government of Professor Pedro Castillo Terrones, Peru Libre’s presidential candidate, we will respect the autonomy of the Central Reserve Bank, which has done a good job keeping inflation low for more than two decades. We reiterate that we have not considered in our economic plan nationalizations, expropriations, confiscations of savings, exchange controls, price controls or import prohibitions. The popular economy with markets that we advocate promotes the growth of companies and businesses, particularly agriculture and SMEs (Peru’s Small and Micro Enterprise sector,) in order to generate more jobs and better economic opportunities for all Peruvians. We will maintain an open and broad dialogue with the various sectors of honest businessmen and entrepreneurs, whose role in industrialization and productive development is fundamental. Guaranteeing the right to health and education for all requires improving quality and increasing social spending, which must be based in mining tax reforms to increase collection within the framework of a fiscal sustainability policy, with a gradual reduction of the public deficit and respecting all commitments to pay the Peruvian public debt.”

The Peruvian ruling class, the bankers, landowners, capitalists, are closely tied to the interests of the multinationals and imperialism. They are interested not in any “national development” but in their own enrichment.

Castillo himself declared: “I have just had conversations with the national business community that is showing support for the people. We will create a government that is respectful of democracy, of the current Constitution. We will create a government with financial and economic stability.” All experience shows that what the ruling class describes as “financial and economic stability” in reality means making the workers and the poor pay for the crisis of their system while guaranteeing the best possible conditions for the realization of capitalist profits. Paying the debt is in contradiction to carrying out a social spending policy. Castillo should support the general interests of workers and peasants in opposition to this. There is no middle road.

For now, the Peruvian masses celebrate and remain on guard to defend their victory. The struggle has only begun. Every step forward which Castillo takes should be supported. His vacillations or retreats should be criticized. The workers and peasants can only trust in their own forces, and these should be mobilized to strike blows against the oligarchy.

Mariategui, in the conclusion to his “Anti-Imperialist Point of View,” a document which he presented to the Latin American Conference of Communist Parties in 1929, said:

“In conclusion, we are anti-imperialists because we are Marxists, because we are revolutionaries, because to capitalism, we oppose socialism as an antagonistic system, called to succeed it.”

His point of view is today more relevant than ever.

—In Defense of Marxism, June 9, 2021 https://www.marxist.com/castillo-s-election—a-major-political-earthquake.htm?fbclid=IwAR1ZkihHz_mTrG-5WjXajPiC-yErG5Yke4otDLvRSCCI2F83Aun5qNctH15s

Pedro Castillo
June 2, 2021—Over two weeks into a popular uprising that has spread to every corner of the country, Colombia remains in open revolt. Tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition have so far failed to deter the masses. They have drawn the conclusion that the only way out of their endless misery is mass struggle against the current right-wing government and the rotten system it represents.

The rebellion kicked off on the 28th of April with a general strike called by the National Strike Committee (a group made up of the major trade union federations and other organizations) as a response to right-wing president Ivan Duque’s proposed tax reform bill. The euphemistically named “Sustainable Solidarity Law” would have seen sections of the middle class and salaried workers pushed into a higher tax bracket. A Value Added Tax (VAT) was also to be expanded to cover a wider range of previously exempt goods and services. While dressed up as benefiting the most impoverished sections of society, it quickly became clear what it really meant: an attempt to force the costs of the pandemic on to the masses.

Yet the day has passed when such frontal attacks on workers and the poor can be implemented without grave consequences. The response of the Colombian masses powerfully demonstrates the type of resistance the ruling class can expect in this period of deep capitalist crisis.

Initial victory

Although initially one day of action was planned, the general strike set in motion a movement of a scale and intensity that went far beyond the expectations of the union leadership. Indeed, time and time again the bureaucracy and opposition parties have found themselves lagging behind the masses. On the 1st of May calls for more scaled down mobilizations were not heeded, and the protests continued to spread and gather momentum.

Militant demonstrations have erupted in 250 towns and cities. Much of the country remains paralyzed due to blockades. Drawing into its ranks all sections of the exploited and oppressed, the movement is a panorama of the diversity of struggles in Colombia. Workers, students, women, peasants, indigenous people, afro-Colombians, LGBTQ+ activists, environmentalists all united against a common enemy. The Colombian elite’s arsenal of divide and rule tactics—from racism to red-baiting—have proved ineffective in derailing the insurgency.

On the 2nd of May the movement scored its first victory when Duque withdrew the loathed bill. The following day its architect, finance minister Alberto Carrasquilla, resigned in disgrace. Any hope that these concessions would lead people off the streets quickly evaporated. The movement radicalized further and an array of other demands have been taken up, all of which reflect an understanding that the bill was only the tip of the iceberg. These include the halting of privatization of healthcare and pensions, free college education, ending state repression and for Duque to resign.

Pandemic inflames fury of the masses

What is taking place in Colombia is a reemergence, on a higher level, of the mass movement which took place in November 2019, and was part of the wave of anti-neoliberal revolts that shook Latin America and swept throughout the world. As elsewhere, the spread of COVID-19 interrupted developments, but this could only ever...
be a temporary arrangement. The discontent that burst on to the streets in 2019 has continued to smolder in the context of a pandemic that has wreaked havoc throughout the entire region.

With three million recorded cases of COVID and close to 80,000 deaths, Colombia has suffered one of the worst health crises in the world. Strict lockdowns have had a devastating economic impact on a country where 62 percent of the workforce are employed in the informal sector. Unemployment has more than doubled, 500,000 businesses have closed down, and in the last year the economy has contracted by seven percent. The ensuing social catastrophe forced another 3.6 million people into poverty, bringing the total number up to 21 million—42 percent of the population. Malnutrition and even starvation, neither of which are new to South America’s most unequal country, skyrocketed.

The pandemic has not only exacerbated the inequalities within nations but also deepened the divide between rich and poor countries. Although the former have not escaped a pummeling, the latter do not have the same resources to ameliorate the worst effects of the crisis. Colombia’s debt soared by $20 billion in the last year, but Duque’s right-wing government wanted to assure investors that there was no cause for concern. As one Bloomberg article put it:

“Unlike the many countries that continue to borrow and spend to spur growth amid the pandemic, Colombia has now prioritized keeping bond vigilantes at bay and convincing ratings companies it’s one of Latin America’s rare investment-grade credits.”

That is, the ruling class of Colombia, tied by a thousand threads to U.S. imperialism, did not dare insult the interests of the multinationals, banks and financiers. Instead, they threw their lot into emptying what little was left in the pockets of the working class and poor.

Of course, Colombia is not an isolated case. The pandemic has pushed the entire region into economic, social and political turmoil. In the last year, explosive protests from Guatemala to Paraguay revealed the rage that exists beneath the surface. Electoral successes for the left in Bolivia and Peru also show how more and more are searching for an alternative. Facing the same intolerable conditions as the Colombian masses, the workers, youth and oppressed throughout Latin America may well take up the same militant methods of struggle. All the inflammable material is there for a continent-wide social explosion and, as the title of a recent CNN article warned, “Colombia’s bloody protests could be a warning to the region.”

…the ruling class of Colombia, tied by a thousand threads to U.S. imperialism, did not dare insult the interests of the multinationals, banks and financiers. Instead, they threw their lot into emptying what little was left in the pockets of the working class and poor...

“The government is more dangerous than the virus”

Not even a raging pandemic could keep the masses off the streets. Colombia is enduring its darkest moment, currently recording some 15,000 cases and 400-deaths-per-day. That the movement has developed in spite of this situation gives an insight into the desperate conditions many face. The hope of a future without endless misery has been extinguished and there is a pervasive sentiment that there is nothing to lose.

Certain placards give an insight into this mood: “The government is more dangerous than the virus,” “We’re sick of surviving, we want to live,” “I’d rather die in struggle than live in misery.”

State repression

And, died in struggle many have. While official state figures are lower, human rights organizations report at least 40 deaths at the hands of state forces, over a thousand injured and hundreds of cases of protestors who have been “disappeared.” Police have sexually assaulted women—a vile but common method of deterring the most radical elements from taking to the streets.

Similar to the Carabineros in Chile, the Colombian riot police, ESMAD, have come to be recognized for their particularly brutal methods. The radical demand that they be disbanded has now become widespread. Shooting protestors pointblank, driving vehicles into demonstrations, and consciously terrorizing working-class neighborhoods are amongst the many forms of repression they’ve unleashed on the masses.

All of this is not a display of strength but of weakness, betraying a fear of a popular uprising that strikes at the heart of Colombian capitalism. To exert its control, the ruling class has only brute force to rely upon. But, every baton blow, every bullet fired and every gasp of tear gas drives home the realization that the state is not a neutral force but a tool of class domination. Far from breaking up the movement, these experiences have forced protestors to draw the most radical conclusions about what needs to be done.

Cali—the epicenter of struggle

It’s in Cali, Colombia’s third largest city, that the struggle has reached its most advanced stage. Working class barrios have been under control of neighborhood committees with ele-
ments of self-organization. In some, meals are collectively prepared for protesters and basic medical care provided. Unsurprisingly, it’s also where the state has come down hardest. The vast majority of recorded deaths have happened here and, as one video circulated on social media shows, police helicopters shot into crowds.

To defend themselves the youth have repurposed scrap metal into shields to face down tear gas and bullets. Defense also came in the form of La Minga, a caravan of indigenous people who heroically made the journey to Cali to join the struggle and offer protection to other protesters. The inspiring unity between these sectors further alarmed the elite. Right-wing paramilitaries posing as scared ordinary citizens opened fire on the indigenous protesters, all under the watchful eye of the police.

The resistance in Cali has been so great that the president made two emergency visits and ordered an increased deployment of troops to dismantle the blockades that cordon off much of the city. Notwithstanding his low popularity ratings, Duque and his party, Centro Democratico (led by arch reactionary Alvaro Uribe) have doubled down in their demonization of the movement as thugs and vandals to justify the bloodshed.

### U.S. imperialism and the Colombian ruling class

The movement also puts Biden in a corner, who since taking office has attempted to distance himself from Trump’s more obviously belligerent foreign policy. Rebranding U.S. imperialism in a rhetoric of democracy and human rights he faces pressure to condemn the Duque government. On the other hand, the U.S. has important economic and geopolitical interests in Colombia that Biden wants to protect against an ascendent Chinese imperialism which has recently stepped up its influence in the region. “I’m the guy who put together Plan Colombia” boasted Biden in last year’s presidential race.

As an intensification of “the war on drugs” Plan Colombia was a counter-insurgency campaign against FARC and other left-wing guerrilla groups who were engaged in a decades long civil war with the Colombian state. The U.S. supplied successive right-wing governments with money, weapons and training to step up a military and ideological offensive against not just guerrilla groups, but the entire left and working-class movement. In fact, this also led to the creation of ESMAD, which today terrorizes protesters with US-made rifles and tear gas.

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“**The government is more dangerous than the virus,” “We’re sick of surviving, we want to live,” “I’d rather die in struggle than live in misery.”**

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A weakened FARC entered peace negotiations with the Santos government in 2012 and a historic peace treaty was signed in 2016 that led to the demobilization and disarming of the former guerrillas. Contrary to the oft-cited words of Benjamin Franklin the agreement was most certainly a “bad peace.” Since 2016, over 600 social movement leaders and ex-guerrillas have been massacred—a grisly reminder that the system is incapable of solving its own problems.

All of this is the latest chapter in the blood-soaked history of Colombian capitalism, praised by the ruling class around the world as Latin America’s most stable democracy. With the backing of U.S. imperialism, the levels of violence carried out by the Colombian state (and the right-wing paramilitary forces with whom it regularly colludes) exceeds that of some of history’s most despotic regimes. Those on the streets today understand that achieving a genuine peace is completely tied up with the struggle against Duque and Uribismo. Alvaro Uribe’s historical connections to the right-wing paramilitaries are well known, epitomizing the deep links between politicians, big business and the drug cartels.

### The left, the National Strike Committee (CNP) and the way forward

This protracted and bloody assault on the working class and its organizations has certainly taken its toll. Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist with over 3,000 murdered in the last three decades. Now, union density stands at a mere four percent. Likewise, the working class and oppressed lack any real political representation. While looking at Colombia today one could be forgiven for thinking otherwise, the masses do not possess infinite reserves of energy. At a certain point a political strategy is needed to bring things to a conclusion.

Many may hope that this will come in the form of Gustavo Petro, former member of guerrilla group M-19. Petro came second to Duque in the 2018 presidential race when he ran a bold campaign that gave expression to the bubbling discontent of workers’ and youth and broke an electoral deadlock for the left. That a former guerrilla—who faces a constant barrage of right-wing propaganda—is now favored to win next year’s election reflects a profound radicalization and shift to the left in society. Nevertheless, the consciousness of the most advanced layers in the current movement has leaped over Petro’s mild social democratic program and his lack of confidence in the masses to wage a revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

In the same way, the CNP led by the union bureaucracy, falls short of the leadership that the present moment
demands. On Monday the 10th of May it met with Duque but failed to reach any agreement. Mass mobilizations continued apace. Yet the fact that the committee even came to the table with the president while the country remains militarized, and the blood of protestors stains the streets provoked anger amongst many.

It highlights the chasm between the official leadership and the most militant sections of the movement that are actually driving the situation forward. The CNP have not properly coordinated action, have not put forward a strategy that draws on the strength of the masses, which, if mobilized to even half their potential, could take down Duque within minutes.

The embryonic forms of self-organization seen in Cali and elsewhere give an insight into the type of organization that is really needed. Popular committees should be established in neighborhoods, workplaces, universities, in peasant and indigenous communities to plan and coordinate local actions, including the organization of self-defense. These must then be connected through regional and national assemblies. In this way the real engine of the movement can take the initiative, democratically discussing the best way forward and collectively agreeing a program and strategy that can point a way out of the crisis.

For us, that means the extension of the strike to all sectors of the economy to bring production to a complete and indefinite halt and fight for a program including the following demands:

...every baton blow, every bullet fired and every gasp of tear gas drives home the realization that the state is not a neutral force but a tool of class domination...

- Down with repression! Investigation and punishment of those responsible! Disband ESMAD!
- No to the counter-reforms and other neoliberal measures! No to the privatization of health! Vaccines and public health guaranteed for all! Emergency aid for all who need it! Let the capitalists and super-rich pay for the crisis!
- Down with Iván Duque and the political and economic system that supports him!
- For a government of the workers and the oppressed masses!

Colombia Resiste—international solidarity

Solidarity from the international movement of the working class is absolutely crucial. Feeble words of condemnation from capitalist governments mean nothing. Biden and others are loyal defenders of an economic system at the root of all the suffering that the Colombian masses presently endure. But the heroism and ingenuity of protestors, particularly the youth, are a source of inspiration for the working class and oppressed throughout Latin America and beyond.

That is why International Socialist Alternative has committed to building a campaign of international solidarity in support of the mass revolt in Colombia and all those facing down vicious repression. Socialists, trade-unionists, anti-racist and feminist activists from across the world, stand in solidarity with the heroic uprising of the Colombian masses. We are struggling against the same global economic system that breeds only misery, violence and ecological destruction.

Precisely for this reason we organize internationally—a world party that connects the struggles of the working class and oppressed across every continent, united in a common movement to break with capitalism and imperialism.

—Socialist Alternative, June 2, 2021

https://www.socialistalternative.org/2021/06/02/general-strike-ignites-mass-uprising/

1 “There never was a good war or a bad peace.” (July 1783)

https://www.fi.edu/benjamin-franklin/famous-quotes
The facile right-wing talking point that the economic crisis facing Venezuela “proves” that “socialism always ends in failure” has become so hackneyed by overuse that it has attained its own tongue-in-cheek name. The *ad Venezuelum*, as it has come to be known, has slowly developed into such a tedious and predictable right-wing tactic that it seems to now serve as an all-purpose retort to try to discredit even the most modest of left-of-center proposals. In October 2018, for instance, then-President Trump responded to a plan by progressive Democrats in congress to introduce a bill to establish a system of universal public healthcare—something which every industrialized country other than the U.S. already has—by stating: “It’s going to be a disaster for our country. It will turn our country into a Venezuela.”

Analysts on the left have long toiled against the *ad Venezuelum* by pointing out the myriad genuine explanations behind the economic crisis that has been roiling the country since around 2014. Caleb Maupin, for instance, has argued that falling oil prices were a key factor in the collapse of Venezuela’s economy. This is hardly a controversial point given that Venezuela’s dependence on oil, which was first discovered in the 1920s, has led to a highly unstable economy featuring regular bouts of economic chaos caused by a sudden drop in the price of crude. In the early 1980s, during the government of Luis Herrera of the right-wing COPEI (Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee also referred to as the Social Christian Party) for example, there was a huge economic crisis with many of the same features as the one confronting the country today. Needless to say, no one at the time tried to pass this off as proof that capitalism doesn’t work.

Ryan Mallet-Outtrim, who himself lived in Venezuela for several years, has argued that the government’s monetary policy has been one of the main factors behind the crisis. In particular, he pointed out that the fixed exchange rate, which of course is hardly socialist in nature, had an unintended effect on demand for currency that in turn led to an inflationary spiral. He is not alone in his criticism of the fixed exchange rate; economist Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), who like Mallet-Outtrim is broadly sympathetic to the Chavista government, has argued for years that Venezuela should drop it in favor of a floating exchange rate.

I myself argued in a 2016 essay for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs that an economic war waged by a domestic societal elite, and abetted by the United States, has been a major cause of the crisis. Though dismissed by critics of Chavismo as a conspiracy theory, there is, in fact, ample evidence of an economic war against the Venezuelan government ever since Hugo Chavez was first elected in 1998. The so-called oil strike, for instance, (in reality a management-led lockout) was a transparent attempt to bring about regime change by crippling the economy. Cases of hoarding goods and deliberately disrupting supply chains on the part of the opposition-friendly private business sector, meanwhile, have been well-documented.

All of these explanations have undoubtedly formed part of the rich tapestry of causation behind Venezuela’s economic woes. But what is equally undeniable is that U.S.-imposed sanctions have augmented these factors as well as compounded the suffering felt by ordinary Venezuelans. As Roger Harris pointed out in a May 4 essay for *CounterPunch*, even a U.S. government-authored report admits that “sanctions, particularly on the state oil company in 2019, likely contributed to the steeper decline of the Venezuelan economy.” Now, in addition to the U.S. government itself, one its major organs of interventionist propaganda has conceded this exact same point.

In a May 30 article in *The New York Times* about how organized crime groups have stepped in to provide ser-
The lion in damage to Cuba’s economy, blockaded, has led to roughly $130 billion in damage to Cuba’s economy. This has been inaccurately described as an economic embargo against Cuba. This crippling tactic is illegal according to international law. It is a brutal form of collective punishment—something which America, has been particularly hard hit via its government and media, however, this claim is uncontroversial. In addition to the aforementioned U.S. government report that openly admits that U.S. sanctions have exacerbated the crisis, a 2019 CEPR study authored by Weisbrot, and development economist Jeffrey Sachs, found the number of deaths caused by these sanctions to have stood at 40,000 between 2017 and 2018 (that is, before the coup had even begun.) In early 2020, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur for Venezuela, Alfred de Zayas, estimated civilian deaths caused by sanctions to stand at around 100,000. This would almost certainly need to be revised up significantly as of June 2021—not least because Venezuela, like the rest of Latin America, has been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. government’s intention behind the sanctions, meanwhile, is straightforward. Its goal is to goad the country’s populace into turning against its government via a brutal form of collective punishment—something which is illegal according to international law. Since the 1960s, successive U.S. administrations in Washington have honed this tactic via the so-called trade embargo against Cuba. This crippling form of non-military warfare, more accurately described as an economic blockade, has led to roughly $130 billion in damage to Cuba’s economy. But regardless of the factors on which Washington bases its sanctions, some of the very alleged pathologies on which it relies behind the U.S.’s entire sanctions regime, whether it be against Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba or any other U.S. adversary. Concerns about alleged corruption, alleged organized criminal activity, alleged human rights abuses, alleged deficits in media freedom or women’s rights, or, indeed, alleged human rights abuses, increases in corruption and organized criminal activity in the countries they target. Writing in Quartz, political scientist Bryan R. Early of the University of Albany, SUNY, points out that: “Not only are sanctions…frequently ineffective, they also can be counterproductive…[because they] encourage government corruption and the development of transnational organized crime.” So, apparently the Times authors are oblivious to the fact that U.S. sanctions are ipso facto partly to blame for the phenomenon they describe in their article. Early adds: “Recent studies have shown…that sanctioned governments tend to become less democratic and are more likely to engage in human rights abuses, restrict women’s rights, and curb media freedoms.”

There is a degree of irony to the Times’ reference to corruption as well. Because academic studies have demonstrated that sanctions actually lead to increases in corruption and organized criminal activity in the countries they target. Writing in Quartz, political scientist Bryan R. Early of the University of Albany, SUNY, points out that: “Not only are sanctions…frequently ineffective, they also can be counterproductive…[because they] encourage government corruption and the development of transnational organized crime.” So, apparently the Times authors are oblivious to the fact that U.S. sanctions are ipso facto partly to blame for the phenomenon they describe in their article. Early adds: “Recent studies have shown…that sanctioned governments tend to become less democratic and are more likely to engage in human rights abuses, restrict women’s rights, and curb media freedoms.”

The Times’ other claim that corruption is a major factor in the economic crisis facing Venezuela also discredits the ad Venezuela. As international relations scholars point out, corruption is often endemic to resource rich countries, especially those in the developing world, and irrespective of the ideological stripe of their governments. Perhaps due to its indispensable importance for modern economies, of all the natural resources, oil seems to be the worst in its corrupting effects on a country in which it exists in abundance. Indeed, corruption hardly began in Venezuela upon Chavez’s election, but rather has been a recurring feature of its history that has debilitated the country’s economy under governments of both the left and the right.

Outside the Alice in Wonderland world of the U.S. corporate-owned media, however, this claim is uncontroversial. In addition to the aforementioned U.S. government report that openly admits that U.S. sanctions have exacerbated the crisis, a 2019 CEPR study authored by Weisbrot, and development economist Jeffrey Sachs, found the number of deaths caused by these sanctions to have stood at 40,000 between 2017 and 2018 (that is, before the coup had even begun.) In early 2020, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur for Venezuela, Alfred de Zayas, estimated civilian deaths caused by sanctions to stand at around 100,000. This would almost certainly need to be revised up significantly as of June 2021—not least because Venezuela, like the rest of Latin America, has been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

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Workers in the U.S. government’s intention behind the sanctions, meanwhile, is straightforward. Its goal is to goad the country’s populace into turning against its government via a brutal form of collective punishment—something which is illegal according to international law.

Worker-Student Alliance in Myanmar

*Left Voice* Interview with Two Student Activists

Students in Myanmar have played a vital role in resisting the military coup regime, since it took control of the government in February. *Left Voice* spoke with two student activists in Myanmar about their country’s history, their role in the current protest movement, and how the international Left can help. Both used pseudonyms to protect their identities.

**Left Voice:** How has Myanmar’s history of colonialism and imperialism affected the country?

**M:** In 1885 the last ruling dynasty in Myanmar came to its demise at the hands of the British colonists, who by then ruled virtually the whole of Myanmar. But the interesting thing to note is that the British never ruled Myanmar as a singular entity. The ethnic minorities were administered separately. For example, the British classified subjects into various ethnic groups. This strict distinction was somewhat artificial and arbitrary and still looms over today’s ethnic politics. The Burmese military ultimately came into being during the struggle for independence from Imperial Japan, which occupied Myanmar from 1943 to 1945. It’s quite a problematic legacy and one could say that Tatmadaw [official name of the Burmese military] has fascist seeds since its very inception.

**Left Voice:** As you described, Myanmar’s ethnic divides are largely a byproduct of foreign interference. How has the dynamic changed between the different ethnic groups living in Myanmar in the midst of the current struggle against the coup?

**M:** Before the Bamar [the ethnic majority in Myanmar] had been largely indifferent to the sufferings of other ethnic minorities. Now, because of the tragic predicament that the people are in, they’re much more sympathetic. Many young people came forward to apologize for turning a blind eye. Many now regret the hostile attitude towards the Rohingya people who were the damned of the damned. The door has opened to genuine reconciliation among all the oppressed to build a new society together where we can coexist meaningfully, but there are many challenges ahead.

**K:** A lot of young people have come to a realization that when apologizing to other ethnic groups, they usually leave out Rohingya people. They recognize that there can be a genocide, but still, they don’t accept them as a part of us. And it’s still happening. Our interim government, National Unity Government (NUG), has been cooperating with some minorities. But their promises and declarations in their federal charter and their actions are not very promising for the other ethnic groups. So, I’m afraid that there could be huge problems for people after we have won this revolution.

**Left Voice:** How did you get involved in activism and what has it been like taking part in this massive resistance?

**K:** For me I was not a part of the student unions or anything, but I was part of a student-led group. We shared political knowledge. So, I was familiar with this stuff and when the coup started, we protested and took part in organizing the protests.

**Left Voice:** I read somewhere that a lot of youth in Myanmar are inspired because they had lived through less military rule than other generations. Is that true? Is that driving a lot of the youth activism?

**K:** Even in colonial times, the key figures of the movement for independence were from the student union. I think the students were always the consciousness and the conscience of the country, even when the working class has been bewitched by the ideol-
ogy of the oppressors. There was this cult personality worship of figures like Aung San Suu Kyi. And even at the times they were popular, the students remained on the side of resistance.

**Left Voice:** I wanted to ask a little bit about the activism after the coup. What were the protests like? What have students done and what role has the working class played in the protests?

**M:** What’s interesting is that at the beginning of the coup, people were told that it is necessary to wait and sit still for 72 hours. A lot of people bought into such nonsense. But after three days, it became clear to the people that sitting still will not get them anywhere.

It was the working class people and the students who started the protests, and the protests only grew stronger and stronger. Right after the coup, the student union had meetings and discussed what we would be doing at the time. We decided that it is necessary to tell the people to spread the truth, to come to resist this, to counter propaganda.

At first the demands were pretty moderate and it’s partly because Aung San Suu Kyi and her government had bewitched the working class and the people. Protests merely asked to free the leaders, meaning Aung San Suu Kyi and the elected NPE (Ministry of Information) members of the parliament, and to give power back to the NLD (National League for Democracy) government in accordance with the outcomes of the election.

**Left Voice:** What do you see as some of the obstacles that the movement faces? You talked a little bit about the role of Aung San Suu Kyi in trying to co-opt the movement. How are the people on the streets organizing against that?

**M:** At the beginning of the protests, the military responded with violence. There were casualties, civilian casualties. There was this girl standing and I think she wasn’t even protesting. She was just standing there, and the police shot her in the head. You can search for those photos. It’s all over the internet. But even at the time when there were casualties, the violence was still restrained. But then the military panicked as the movement gained momentum and very bloody massacres ensued.

A lot of people died when the military cracked down on a student sit-in protest. The military and the police cracked down and the students ran away. Those from the neighborhood hid the students. At one house, the military knew that the students were hiding in the house. They asked the women from that house to turn them in and the woman refused to leave. She simply refused. So, she was shot point blank. She was shot dead on the spot just because she was helping the students.

In some areas the protest has evolved into armed conflict. Some people are doing an insurgency in some areas with their own handmade guns. They initiate defensive attacks on the military soldiers.

**Left Voice:** Do you think there’s going to be more of an armed conflict if things continue the way they are?

**M:** I think struggle in the form of armed conflict is the only resort if things continue the way they are. The military wants to hold onto power no matter how many people they have to massacre. To overthrow them we have no choice but to resort to an armed struggle. Many people in Myanmar are waiting. They’re waiting for there to be a United Liberation Army, perhaps the federal army that is still nowhere in sight. It is only by being united, united between the major ethnic group and other various minor ethnic groups and so on, that we can defeat our foe. The National Unity Government has announced the creation of the People’s Defense Force (PDF). We have no idea how credible it is, if it is merely a show.

**Left Voice:** I wanted to ask a little bit about the role of the working class in the strikes that have been going on. What has that been like?

**K:** Working class people are one of the most important parts of this revolution. Their revolutionary spirit is so strong that the military government has had to impose martial law in the areas and townships where workers live. And they also target the protests where the working class participates the most. Workers are also a huge part of the civil disobedience movement.

**M:** Especially railway workers. The military cannot run trains all over the country because all the working class people have been on strike. Working-class people have been crucial to our movement. And they will continue to be crucial if we are going to take up arms.

**Left Voice:** Myanmar is very geopolitically important because of its proximity to the Indian Ocean. And it’s become in some ways a strategic backdrop for the growing tensions between the United States and China, who both have economic interests in Myanmar. How is this shaping the con-
Conflict that’s going on right now?

K: China is probably a crucial part of these influences. They have a lot of economic interests here. China, along with Russia, supports the military. And they don’t just support the military. They also support the ethnic organizations when it comes to weapons. And they can also use their influence in the United Nations. That has done a lot to repress our revolution.

M: So far, a victory is still far from us. Regarding the Left in the United States, we could still use some help. There are capitalists in the United States and all around the world that still do business with Tatmadaw. And I think the University of Yangon Students Union is currently working on this project called Federal University to educate the masses and the students who are not going to school. It would be great if leftist academics in the United States were able to assist them. We could do the necessary translations to make it more accessible to the working class, and the children can get some proper education needed to fight against the official regime.

K: The military has been controlling us for decades. It’s not just several years or so. For the Left in the United States, I think the most important thing that you guys can do to help would be showing solidarity and not forgetting this revolution.

Left Voice: One last question, what would victory mean in Myanmar and how do you think it can be achieved?

K: Well, for most of the people, including us, a victory would mean the fall of the military institution and the emergence of a federal democracy. And then there would be the fall of cronyism. After one revolution, we need a strong judicial system to punish these oppressors.

M: Victory will mean that all the oppressed in the country will have a future in a new society that we have to build and achieve, it is not going to be possible with Tatmadaw around. We have lost so much during this revolution and many people have sacrificed their lives for freedom. And while we grieve, we will continue to take up the mantle of revolution.

—Left Voice, June 7, 2021

https://www.leftvoice.org/working-class-people-have-been-crucial-interview-with-students-in-myanmar/?fbclid=International Community Supports Illegal Power Grab in Haiti

By Jake Johnston

June 4, 2021—“New Constitution: We Will Vote.”

The billboards are plastered across Port-au-Prince and throughout the country, as the government launches an all-out push ahead of a referendum planned for next month. The government is holding televised “debates,” printing ballots, lobbying international organizations, and apparently laying the groundwork for what it claims is a necessary effort to put Haiti’s governance on a path to success.

The catch? The campaign is only happening on one side. The entire effort is contested by myriad civil society organizations, grassroots groups, and political parties, all of whom maintain that the referendum is an illegal power grab on the part of Haitian president, Jovenel Moïse. In fact, over the last week, a number of prominent political actors have called on the population to revolt against the referendum and use whatever means possible to prevent the vote from taking place.

The U.S. support for the illegal electoral council goes even further. Through USAID, the U.S. government has spent $12.6 million since Moïse was elected in support of “elections and political processes.”

Haiti is not the only country in the hemisphere currently debating constitutional reform. Last fall in Chile, voters overwhelmingly voted in favor of creating a new charter, and then earlier this month elected representatives responsible for drafting the new text. The constitutional convention’s work is expected to take many months, and the vote on the new text is not expected until sometime in mid-2022. There are regulations mandating the involvement of traditionally marginalized groups, including women and the nation’s Indigenous population.

By contrast, Haiti’s new charter was drafted by a small commission composed entirely of members handpicked by the president. On June 27, when Haitians are being asked to go to the polls, they will have to vote on the entirety of the new text with a simple “yes” or “no,” even though they have yet to see the final version. The commission did not issue a first draft of the proposed changes until January, and released it only in French, which the vast majority of Haitians do not speak. It released a revised version in late May, a month before the scheduled vote, and plans to issue one more version in June.
This week, after meeting with Moïse, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, reiterated the official position of the international community that, thus far, preparations for the referendum “have not been sufficiently transparent or inclusive.” The U.S.’s public position is that its preference is for the Haitian government to first focus on holding legislative and presidential elections this fall before tackling the constitution controversy. For the last 17 months, Haiti has been without a functioning parliament, allowing the entire referendum process to unfold with President Moïse ruling by decree and without legislative oversight.

For many in Haiti, Moïse shouldn’t be in the National Palace anymore, let alone oversee the creation of a new constitution. Legal experts, human rights organizations, religious entities, and a broad-based network of civil society organizations contend that Moïse’s presidential mandate ended on February 7, 2021. They maintain that not only is his reform effort illegal, but that there is no chance for free, fair, or credible elections to be held under his watch at all. Last month, 69 members of the U.S. Congress wrote to Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressing their agreement.

“We have repeatedly stated that constitutional reform is for the Haitian people to decide,” State Department spokesperson Ned Price told the press in late April. “We’ve emphasized to the Haitian government that the U.S. government will not provide financial support for a constitutional referendum.” But, while the U.S. isn’t providing direct support, that does not mean its policy is not de facto enabling the referendum.

The international community’s silent support
The international community has remained largely silent on the question of the referendum. The Core Group, which consists of the U.S., Canada, Brazil, France, the EU, the UN, and the OAS, among others, issued a statement in April noting that the process was not sufficiently transparent or inclusive. Nevertheless, international actors have refrained from explicitly calling for its cancellation or even its delay. Further, both the UN and the OAS are actively providing support for the referendum, despite their public statements of concern.

These two multilateral organizations have provided technical assistance to the commission tasked with drafting the new text since it was formed last fall. The OAS even helped with revisions to the text in an attempt to remove some of the more controversial aspects in the original. The UN, meanwhile, has helped to procure sensitive voting materials for the electoral council overseeing the referendum and has an agreement in place to provide logistics for holding the vote. The UN is also helping to advise the national police on an electoral security strategy.

But, more important than this technical assistance is the international community’s insistence on the holding of elections this fall. It is simply impossible to separate elections from the referendum, and donor support for the former is making the latter more likely by the day.

For starters, the new constitution would drastically alter the political landscape; for example, replacing the post of prime minister with a vice president, and abolishing the Senate altogether. Additionally, the draft text, if approved, mandates the government to institute a new electoral law. How can one speak of organizing elections in a few months when nobody even knows what posts will actually be contested, or under what laws? Clearly, the elections depend to a great degree on what happens in June.

Further, the international push for elections papers over valid criticisms of the broader voting process. The current electoral council was appointed by decree by the president, contrary to the law; the supreme court refused to swear in the new members. This is the electoral council that is set to oversee both the referendum and the elections later this year. By supporting their management of elections, one inherently supports their management of the referendum.

The U.S. support for the illegal electoral council goes even further. Through USAID, the U.S. government has spent $12.6 million since Moïse was elected in support of “elections and political processes.” Most of that money goes to U.S.-based entities like the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republic Institute (IRI), and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). The organizations implement their own programs, and so do not necessarily equate to “direct” support to the referendum or to elections.

But, in late March, acting Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere Julie Chung tweeted: “The U.S., via @USAID_Haiti, is helping the Haitian people prepare for elections by providing technical support to the @ cep_haiti, strengthening political parties and NGOs, and increasing the participation of women in Haitian politics.”

The U.S. may not be directly funding the referendum, but make no mistake, the policies of the international community are going a long way toward ensuring the controversial referendum takes place as scheduled.

—CounterPunch, June 4, 2021
End the U.S. Blockade Against Cuba

U.S. imperialists deprive Cuba of syringes that are needed now

By W.T. Whitney

Cuba, the first Latin America country to develop its own COVID-19 vaccines, presently is short of syringes for immunizing its population against the virus. It’s not feasible for Cuba to make its own syringes. The U.S. blockade prevents Cuba from importing them from abroad.

Syringes are lacking all over. The New York Times estimates an overall need of between “eight billion and ten billion syringes for Covid-19 vaccinations alone.” Manufacturing capabilities are increasing, but that’s of no use to Cuba.

According to Global Health Partners, “Cuba needs roughly 30 million syringes for their mass Covid vaccination campaign and they’re short 20 million.” Solidarity organizations are seeking donated funds to buy syringes and ship them to Cuba.

The shortage of syringes poses great hardship for the Cuban people. That’s not new. Calling for economic blockade in 1960, State Department official Lester Mallory was confident that making Cubans suffer would push them toward overthrowing their government.

The U.S. blockade causes shortages of basic materials. Buses lack fuel and spare parts; bus routes have been dropped. Food supplies are precarious. Cuban laboratories and production facilities have developed five kinds of COVID-19 vaccines despite short supplies of reagents and laboratory materials.

Cuba can’t buy ventilators needed for critically ill COVID-19 patients. Two Swiss manufacturers stopped selling ventilators to Cuba after a U.S. company purchased them. But Cuban technicians devised their own ventilator model which is in production now.

The impact of the blockade is by no means haphazard. Institutionalized processes involve laws, administrative decrees, regulations, officials’ interpretations of regulations, and caution on the part of third-country traders and financiers.

Authority for the ban on U.S. sales of goods to Cuba stems from legislation accumulating over many years. Then the Cuba Democracy Act of 1992 ensnared foreign companies into the blockade system. That law authorized the Treasury Department to license the foreign subsidiaries of U.S. corporations to export goods to Cuba. It actually created an opening for almost all applications for licensure to be denied.

Since then, the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), enforcer of the blockade, has found leeway to regulate the foreign corporations themselves. Foreign corporations contemplating sales to Cuba contend with U.S. sanctions if they have branches in the United States, partner with U.S. corporations, or handle U.S. dollars.

Most of the world’s syringes are manufactured by three U.S. companies and five companies elsewhere. Each of the latter has ties with a U.S. entity and is prohibited from exporting syringes to Cuba.

For example, Germany’s B. Braun Melsungen Corporation partners with Concordance Healthcare Solutions, “one of the largest independent, healthcare distributors in the U.S.” Tokyo-based Terumo Corporation has a headquarters in New Jersey. Osaka-based Nipro Corporation recently “announce[d] the creation of a Vascular Division in the U.S.” “Healthcare heavyweight Cardinal Health” is headquartered in both Ireland and the United States.

Hindustan Syringes and Medical Devices, in India, came under OFAC purview in January 2021 by virtue of associating with Envigo Global Products as its “digital marketing partner.” Envigo is headquartered in Indianapolis.

Photograph Source: Rinaldo Wurglitsch
Officers of foreign companies presumably seek legal advice. One lawyers’ group maintains that, “OFAC has long held that if a non-U.S. company engages in business transactions in U.S. dollars, the foreign party is availing itself of the U.S. financial system and hence becomes subject to the U.S. sanctions laws.”

Another indicates sanctions are likely, if “the foreign party has a requisite level of contacts with the U.S., such as engaging [with] U.S. products, software or technology.” The National Law Review recommends that, “Foreign companies...need to be aware of board members, directors, or employees who hold U.S. citizenship or U.S. green cards.”

President Barack Obama eased many blockade regulations and re-established U. S. diplomatic relations with Cuba. He never pushed to end the blockade. The Biden Administration chooses not to prioritize improved relations with Cuba. Biden recently upheld the Trump Administration’s reassignment of Cuba to the U.S. list of terrorist-sponsoring nations.

The Helms-Burton Law of 1996 required, for the first time, that Congress determine the fate of the blockade. Except for legislation in 2000 allowing U.S. food products to be exported to Cuba, Congress has protected that policy.

In February Oregon Senator Ron Wyden introduced his “United States-Cuba Trade Act of 2021,” which would end the blockade. The bill has four cosponsors. Senators Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, Jerry Moran of Kansas, and Patrick Leahy of Vermont on May 20 reintroduced the “Freedom to Export to Cuba Act.” That bill would facilitate U.S. exports to Cuba, especially agricultural products; allow some Cuban goods to enter the United States; and would retain sanctions imposed because of alleged human rights violations.

In March, 80 congresspersons sent a letter to President Biden urging him to use executive action to reverse restrictions imposed by President Trump.

The U.S. economic blockade of Cuba is calculated, systematic, all-encompassing, and savage. Opponents offer varying pleas. For some, the blockade is cruel and illegal. Others call for defending Cuba, because it’s a model both of human solidarity and of how to provide healthcare and education. Many insist on respect for Cuba’s sovereignty.

These arguments are disconnected, one from the other. Blockade critics appear to lack a central focus on root causes. Having such would be essential, it seems, for fashioning a cohesive strategy. Were that in place, new possibilities might exist for recruitment and unity. Anti-racism struggle in the United States displays similar dynamics, and maybe offers lessons.

Reacting to various symptoms of oppression, defenders of racial equality have gone from pillar to post opposing police killings, an unjust criminal justice system, and Black people’s high poverty and death rates. Now, increasingly, analysts link manifestations of racial oppression with durable systems of repression involving capitalism. Writing about a notorious slave-trading firm, historian Joshua Rothman captures that association in the title of his new book, *The Ledger and the Chain*.

Similarly, if the campaign against the blockade paid more attention to the long history of U. S. ambition to dominate Cuba, it might gain strength by going to the heart of the matter. The premise would be that the European powers and the United States have long sought to draw Cuba and other dependent Latin American territories into their capitalist orbit.

The syringe story reflects U.S schemes in the 19th century to absorb Cuba, U.S. control of Cuba after Spain’s departure in 1902, and U.S. determination after 1959 to restore hegemony lost to the Revolution.

W.T. Whitney Jr. is a retired pediatrician and political journalist living in Maine.

—CounterPunch, June 4, 2021

https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/06/04/u-s-imperialists-deprive-cuba-of-syringes-that-are-needed-now/

1. Readers may donate by contacting Global Health Partners: https://ghpartners.org/syringes4cuba/ or visiting here: https://rebelion.org/se-necesitan-millones-de-jeringas/
Pentagon Papers Failed to Cure Pro-War Media

By James Bovard

Fifty years ago, the *New York Times* began publishing excerpts from a massive secret report called the “History of U.S. Decision-Making Process on Vietnam Policy.” Those excerpts, which quickly became known as the *Pentagon Papers*, provided shocking revelations of perennial government deceit and spurred an epic clash over the First Amendment. Unfortunately, many of the media outlets that will celebrate the *Pentagon Papers* anniversary have long since become lap dogs of perfidious politicians dragging America into new foreign conflicts.

The report that became the *Pentagon Papers* was a secret study begun in 1967 analyzing where the Vietnam War had gone awry. The 7,000-page tome showed that presidents and military leaders had been conning the American people on Southeast Asia ever since the Truman administration. Like many policy autopsies, the report was classified as secret and completely ignored by the White House and federal agencies that most needed to heed its lessons. *New York Times* editor Tom Wicker commented in 1971 that “the people who read these documents in the *Times* were the first to study them.”

The mainstream media nowadays often show more distrust and indignation about peace than about war.

Unfortunately, few Washingtonians bothered to read the *Pentagon Papers* after their disclosure and missed lessons that could have spared the nation fresh debacles. More than 30 years before the Bush administration exploited the 9/11 attacks to invade Iraq, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations dishonestly exploited alleged terrorist attacks to justify boosting U.S. military intervention in Vietnam. After its troops gunned down dozens of people at a Buddhist protest in 1963, the government of South Vietnam falsely claimed it was a Viet Cong terrorist attack. President Lyndon Johnson told Congress on May 18, 1964, that “the Viet Cong guerrillas, under orders from their Communist masters in the North, have intensified terrorist actions against the peaceful people of South Vietnam. This increased terrorism requires increased response.” At that time, the U.S. was carrying out an array of “non-attributable hit-and-run” raids against North Vietnam, including providing American planes that Thai pilots used to bomb and strafe North Vietnamese villages a few months later.
But U.S. aggression was kept secret from both Congress and the American people.

The Pentagon Papers detailed how President Johnson invoked a supposed North Vietnamese attack on a U.S. destroyer in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964 to ram a resolution through Congress to give him unlimited authority to attack North Vietnam. Johnson had decided earlier that year to attack North Vietnam to boost his election campaign, and the resolution had been written months earlier and was awaiting a pretext for introducing it on Capitol Hill. The Pentagon and White House quickly recognized that the core allegations behind the Gulf of Tonkin resolution were false but continued exploiting the charges to vastly expand the war. The Pentagon Papers noted that Johnson’s first massive bombing of North Vietnam in August 1964 resulted in “virtually no domestic criticism.”

Deceit became institutionalized

The Pentagon Papers should have spawned permanent, radical skepticism concerning the candor and competence of U.S. foreign interventions. Philosopher Hannah Arendt observed that the Pentagon Papers revealed how “sheer ignorance of all pertinent facts and deliberate neglect of postwar developments became the hallmark of established doctrine within the Establishment.” That internal study also revealed how deceit became institutionalized. Daniel Ellsberg, who wrote a portion of the papers, noted that the documents reveal “a general failure to study history or to analyze or even to record operational experience, especially mistakes. Above all, effective pressures for optimistically false reporting at every level, for describing ‘progress’ rather than problems or failure, concealed the very need for change in approach or for learning.” Georgetown University professor Derek Leebaert observed that the U.S. military floundered in Vietnam in part because “it had forgotten everything it had learned about counterinsurgency in Korea.” The accolade of “The Best and the Brightest” received far less derision than it deserved.

Ellsberg, a former Pentagon official, risked life in prison to smuggle the report to the media after members of Congress were too cowardly to expose it. The Nixon Justice Department speedily secured a court injunction blocking the New York Times from continuing to publish excerpts. The Washington Post and other newspapers quickly began publishing additional classified excerpts, setting up a Supreme Court showdown on the First Amendment.

In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration dropped an iron curtain around federal agencies and the number of classified government documents increased tenfold.

The Nixon administration claimed the president had “inherent authority” to censor news related to national security, regardless of the First Amendment. On June 30, 1971, the Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that the newspapers had the right to publish the classified documents. Justice Hugo Black wrote that the First Amendment protected the media because “only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government.” Black declared, “The Government’s power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the Government.” Many pundits and professors responded to the “forever free” dicta like Confederate enthusiasts who believed General P.T. Beauregard’s victory at the Battle of First Bull Run settled the outcome of the Civil War.

Conning the public

The Pentagon Papers proved that politicians and bureaucrats will brazenly con the American public into unnecessary wars. But that lesson vanished into the D.C. memory hole—conveniently for obsequious journalists like Post superstar Bob Woodward. In 2002 and 2003, the Post buried pre-war articles questioning the Bush team’s hysterical allegations on Iraq. The Post’s award-winning Pentagon correspondent Thomas Ricks complained, “There was an attitude among editors: ‘Look, we’re going to war, why do we even worry about all this contrary stuff?’” Instead, before the war started, the Post ran 27 editorials in favor of invasion and 140 front page articles supporting the Bush administration’s case for attacking Saddam.

Television networks out-groveld print media. CNN chief news executive Eason Jordan boasted that he went to the Pentagon shortly before the invasion of Iraq and got “a big thumbs-up” for the generals he planned to use as cheerleaders for the war. Before the war, almost all the broadcast news stories on Iraq originated with the federal government. PBS’s Bill Moyers noted that “of the 414 Iraq stories broadcast on NBC, ABC, and CBS nightly news, from September 2002 until February 2003, almost all the stories could be traced back to sources from the White House, the Pentagon, and the State Department.” NBC news anchor Katie Couric stated that there was pressure from “the corporations who own where we work and from the government itself to really squash any kind of dissent or any kind of questioning of it.” The same elite journalists who portrayed themselves as champions of truth laughed heartily at the 2004 Radio and Television Correspondents annual dinner when President Bush performed a skit featuring slides showing him crawling around the Oval Office peeling behind curtains as he quipped: “Those weapons of mass destruction
have got to be somewhere...Nope, no weapons over there...Maybe under here?” The Post headlined its report on the evening: “George Bush, Entertainer in Chief.” Greg Mitchell, the editor of Editor and Publisher, labeled the performance and the press’s reaction that night as “one of the most shameful episodes in the recent history of the American media, and presidency.”

Five years ago, Washington Post reporter Dana Priest, who broke some of the most damning stories of the George W. Bush era, asked in the Columbia Journalism Review, “Did the Pentagon Papers Matter?” Priest noted, “In honor of the Pentagon Papers, perhaps the first item on that long list of things we still don’t know should be finding the truthful analysis of America’s war on terrorism 15 years later, with no end in sight.”

Don’t hold your breath: the game is rigged worse than ever. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration dropped an iron curtain around federal agencies and the number of classified government documents increased tenfold. Federal agencies are now creating trillions of pages of new secrets each year, and each page is backed by a federal fist waiting to crush anyone who makes an unauthorized disclosure. Official secrecy enabled the deceit that led to the Iraq War, sweeping illegal surveillance, a worldwide torture regime, and the Syrian Civil War debacle—in which Pentagon-backed Syrian “rebels” battled CIA-backed Syrian “rebels.”

H.R. Haldeman, Nixon’s White House chief of staff, warned Nixon in 1971 that the Pentagon Papers might make people believe “you can’t trust the government; you can’t believe what they say; and you can’t rely on their judgment. And the implicit infallibility of presidents, which has been an accepted thing in America, is badly hurt by this.” Unfortunately, much of the media continue to presume that presidents are infallible when attacking foreign nations. As Jon Schwarz wrote in 2016 in The Intercept, “Time and again, the Washington press corps has credulously accepted officials’ lies and misinformation, and passed them on to their readers as the truth. Their real-time skepticism is almost nonexistent. And they keep doing it.”

“The 90 percent of the people killed in airstrikes [of Obama’s drone assassination program] were not the intended targets” and included many innocent civilians.

The mainstream media nowadays often show more distrust and indignation about peace than about war. The Trump administration faced thunderous media backlash for its attempts to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan, Syria, and even Germany. Columnists from the New York Times and Washington Post openly championed the deep state because the CIA, FBI, and other intelligence agencies appeared to be undermining President Trump.

Ellsberg’s courage will rightly be celebrated by many of the same media outlets that totally abandoned or condemned whistleblowers such as Assange, Manning, and Snowden. Biden’s Justice Department recently coerced former intelligence analyst Daniel Hale into pleading guilty to “retention and transmission of national security information.” Hale leaked documents to a journalist in 2014 and 2015, revealing that nearly “90 percent of the people killed in airstrikes [of Obama’s drone assassination program] were not the intended targets” and included many innocent civilians. Hale continues to face charges of Espionage Act violations. Perhaps because most of the media continues to revere former President Obama, Hale’s case has received minimal coverage.

In his 1971 opinion on the Pentagon Papers case, Justice Hugo Black declared that a free press has “the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people and sending them off to distant lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shot and shell.” Unfortunately, much of the media nowadays prefer to trumpet official lies instead of fighting them. It would be criminally naive to trust media outlets that championed Biden’s candidacy last year to police his presidency—especially when it comes to any wars or bombing campaigns he launches.

—CounterPunch, June 9, 2021

https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/06/09/pentagon-papers-failed-to-cure-servile-pro-war-media/

...a free press has “the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people and sending them off to distant lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shot and shell.”
I recently came across a print with an unwieldy name. It’s listed on both Amazon and Etsy as “Hustle Weekly Schedule Canvas Print Motivational Wall Office Decor Modern Art Entrepreneur Inspirational Rise Grind Entrepreneurship Success.”

The CEO-name doesn’t roll off the tongue, but it does convey the spirit of the object. It’s a rectangular print—a 36 x 24-inch version will cost you $120 on Amazon—with black text on a white background. “WEEKLY SCHEDULE” is written across the top. “Rise and Grind 24/7” follows in smaller lettering below, then “New week, new goals!” Below that comes the schedule, which reads as follows:

Monday: HUSTLE
Tuesday: HUSTLE
Wednesday: HUSTLE
Thursday: HUSTLE
Friday: HUSTLE
Saturday: HUSTLE
Sunday: HUSTLE

At the bottom is a line of fine print: “You can’t have a million-dollar dream with a minimum wage work ethic.”

I came across this decor while doing one of my frequent internet dives into hustle culture, a world of people convincing themselves to work harder and longer. The hustle weekly schedule might be comical in its grinning embrace of self-exploitation, and plenty of people would find it ridiculous, but it’s also a reflection of how the demands of work are experienced by a growing number of people: constant, with weekends nonexistent, and second and third jobs a necessity.

Working time is expanding into every nook and cranny of people’s lives, and it’s killing hundreds-of-thousands of people each year.

WHO findings

That’s the finding of a new report by the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labour Organization (ILO) which analyzes the health outcomes of people who work fifty-five or more hours-per-week. The organizations analyze data from around the world and find that in 2016, working fifty-five or more hours a week resulted in 745,194 deaths, up from roughly 590,000 in 2000. Of these deaths, 398,441 are attributable to stroke and 346,753 to heart disease. This puts those working these hours at an estimated 35 percent higher risk of stroke and 17 percent higher risk of heart disease compared to people working thirty-five to forty-hour weeks. Men and middle-aged adults are particularly exposed, and the problem is most prevalent in Southeast Asia.

As for how overwork kills us, the report identifies two pathways. For some, the stress of overwork may cause the body to release excessive stress hormones that trigger cardiovascular problems. For others, the stress may lead to unhealthy habits, such as smoking, heavy drinking, a poor diet, a lack of exercise, and bad sleep, which in turn contribute to cardiovascular risk.

The prevalence of the problem makes overwork more dangerous than other occupational hazards. Exposure to carcinogens kills fewer people than a long workweek. It’s certainly not the only way that work kills—deaths on the job still claim a lot of lives globally—but it’s a growing problem. A lot of us are exposed to the grind: in 2016, 8.9 percent of the global population, around 488 million people, worked at least fifty-five hours per week.

Why?

Why are we being worked to death? The expansion of the gig economy and decline of stable work—and the reduction in worker power that both results from and gave rise to so-called gig work—is largely to blame.

In the decades following the Industrial Revolution, there had been a
downward trend in the number of hours worked on average, even if this was unevenly experienced around the globe and across segments of the working class. Much of that is thanks to the efforts of workers themselves to gain control over their lives. “If you love the weekend, thank a union,” as they say.

The martyring of radicals at Haymarket in 1886 took place at a rally for the eight-hour day, for instance, which itself followed from decades-long efforts to impose the first-ever limits on the workday, as well as on child labor. As Samuel Gompers, the first AFL-CIO president, said during the fight for the eight-hour day, “However much they may differ upon other matters…all men of labor…can unite upon this.”

But in recent years, the trend toward shorter working hours has halted, and in some cases, reversed. A 2018 International Labor Organization (ILO) report found that there has been a bifurcation of working hours, “with substantial portions of the global workforce working either excessively long hours (more than 48-hours-per-week,) which particularly affects men, or short hours/part-time work (less than 35-hours-per-week), which predominately impacts women.”

The link between overwork and underwork, or unemployment, is not new. As Karl Marx describes it in Capital, “the overwork of the employed part of the working class swells the ranks of the reserve while, conversely, the greater pressure that the reserve by its competition exerts on the employed workers forces them to submit to over-work and subjects them to the dictates of capital.”

The reserve army of labor

The reserve here is the reserve army of labor, the people who stand outside the factory gates, serving as a useful tool for the employer when a worker complains (“If you don’t want this job, there are plenty of people who would gladly take it off your hands!”) Overwork couples with underwork: in retail, for example, the majority of jobs are now part-time, a major shift from a few decades ago, when some 70 to 80 percent of such jobs were full time.

These connections make the fight for shorter working hours, and greater control over scheduling, strategically generative: the demand unites people across positions in the broader society, and, much to the bosses’ chagrin, can meld the interests of the employed, underemployed, and unemployed.

There must be a reduction of working hours for those who are worked to death, and guarantees on minimum working hours for those who are struggling to scrape together enough income to stay afloat.

Jon Messenger, the author of the 2018 ILO report, links the rise in working hours to a few developments. There has been “a diversification of working time arrangements,” he writes, “with a movement away from the standard workweek consisting of fixed working hours each day for a fixed number of days and towards various forms of ‘flexible’ working time arrangements (e.g., new forms of shift work, hours averaging, flexi-time arrangements, compressed workweeks, on-call work).” With these arrangements comes the expectations that one always be on call—Rise and Grind 24/7.

Always on call

These new standards around availability are entangled with the growing use of new information and communication technologies, the proliferation of smartphones, laptops, and tablets. Now, whether it’s a white-collar worker in the United States or a rideshare driver in India, there is no clear boundary between being on the clock, and being off of it. Not only one’s personal time, but one’s personal spaces—think: a Zoom call with your boss, which virtually places him inside your home—are colonized by work.

This is an emergency for the working class, one that demands action. There must be a reduction of working hours for those who are worked to death, and guarantees on minimum working hours for those who are struggling to scrape together enough income to stay afloat. We need stronger boundaries between work and the rest of our life, as well as paid leave and sick day laws to ensure that workers aren’t forced to shape themselves around the demands of employers. And there must be worker organization strong enough to enforce these laws and standards.

Work, at least as it currently exists, sucks. There’s a reason they have to pay you to do it. With overwork killing nearly a million people a year, now is the time to double down on the struggle for less time to the boss, and more time for what we will. Our lives should not be centered around production for profit. Should we relax the grip work discipline has on our use of time, wrote E. P. Thompson, we might “relearn some of the arts of living … how to fill the interstices of their day with enriched, more leisurely, personal and social relations.” Or, as one writer of a post-work manifesto put it, “It’s time to get a life.” It’s either that or we drop dead. New week, new goals!

—Jacobin, May 24, 2021
As of June 25, 2021, only 45 percent of Americans have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, which leaves over 150 million people, including all children, unprotected. As of May 25, 2021, the risk of infection for the unvaccinated is high to extremely high across most of the country.1

To reduce viral spread and diseases, the science of public health demands isolation, quarantine, social distancing, masking and avoiding nonessential travel. Tragically this science is being thrown to the wind by the politicians. As reported in the New York Times, June 1, 2021, “…the nation is opening back up…” and the public health restriction are being abandoned leaving over 150 million Americans at increased risk for disease. As the pandemic rages out of control around the world, creating more contagious variants, and before 70 -90 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, Americans are being encouraged to “return to normal.” Lifting public health restriction while vaccines are being delivered puts millions at risk. This social policy decision will result in tens of thousands more preventable, infections, illness and deaths.2

Such governmental policy has been described by the British Medical Journal as “social murder.”3 Those responsible must be held accountable.

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Abolish Policing and Militarism

By Destiny Harris

Policing and militarism are a two-headed monster that protects and upholds the foundation upon which racial capitalism was built—exploitation of the lives of poor Black and Brown people.

Although much attention has been placed on recent expansions of police militarization, these threads have long been intertwined. For Black Americans, police have always acted as an occupying force within our communities. But during the 1960s, a decade of unprecedented Black radical resistance, the lines between police and military and national defense became even more blurred.

On December 8, 1969, the SWAT unit of the Los Angeles Police Department raided the Black Panther Party’s headquarters in Los Angeles, California. Four days prior, the Chicago Police Department had violently raided the home of and assassinated Fred Hampton, the chairman and leader of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party, based out of my hometown of Chicago. It is in the legacy and practice of militarism that SWAT teams were created—as a means to decentralize and suppress Black resistance.

As a Black femme abolitionist and organizer from the west side of Chicago, I fight in the spirit of Fred “Baba” Hampton, in a movement that is built upon the community-based power around which the Panthers mobilized to combat militarism, colonialism and occupation.

Since the start of the 1033 Program, around 10,000 law enforcement agencies have received around $7.4 billion worth of equipment.

The attack on the Black Panther headquarters in 1969 was one of the first publicly known uses of newly emerging SWAT teams, but they quickly spread. Throughout the past two decades, SWAT units have become more heavily armed and funded and used all too regularly as a tactic of instant response in predominantly Black cities, particularly in response to uprisings. The 1033 Program, created as a part of the 1977 National Defense Authorization Act, allows the Department of Defense to supply local authorities with its military-grade equipment. War weaponry, such as assault rifles, riot gear, grenade launchers and military tanks, is awarded to police departments and used to perpetuate harm against Black and Indigenous people putting their lives on the line to oppose colonization, white supremacy and policing.

The facts are simple: When masses of Black people mobilize, gangs of police move in, and terrorize. Since the start of the 1033 Program, around 10,000 law enforcement agencies have received around $7.4 billion worth of equipment.

This equipment funds the type of raids that killed Breonna Taylor, it funds teargas being used against Black people in Kenosha and Minneapolis, it funds the batons the Chicago Police Department uses to beat youth in the streets, it funds the water cannons used at Backwater Bridge at Standing Rock.
It funds the murder of millions at the hands of policing, war, militarism, colonialism and imperialism. It is a never-ending cycle of violence.

Given all of this, calls to defund police and end wars are bigger than just targeted demands; they are calls to invest in life, abundance and an abolitionist world in which we don’t depend on the military-industrial complex, the prison-industrial complex or policing to sustain our communities.

This struggle is very personal to me. I am an abolitionist from a city that spends $4.8 million a day and about $2 billion a year on policing—and a city in which taxpayers spend about $38 million yearly to arm, aid, and fund apartheid, genocide and state-sanctioned violence against Palestinians.

Militarism is a strategy of using violence to keep people in positions of power in control and to maintain the racial, economic and other social hierarchies that uphold this power.

$4.8 million a day is the allowance police are given daily to uphold militarism in Chicago.

Divesting from education, mental health services, violence prevention that addresses the root causes, housing, and all other necessities of life keeps the racial, economic and social hierarchies in place that justify the supposed need for police.

This is why in this same city the yearly budget for mental health services is around $9.4 million—equal to less than two days of the police budget.

This is why the budget for substance abuse treatment is only 2.6 million—a half-day worth of police budget on any given day. And only $1.5 million is spent yearly in violence prevention—a proactive way to combat violence without the reactionary nature of police.

This is why in 2013, my elementary school and nearly 50 others—all of which were located on the predominantly Black South and West Sides of the city of Chicago—were closed down in one of the largest public school closures of United States history. The city claimed the closures were due to lack of funding, but four years later, the city proposed spending $95 million to build a police training academy in my neighborhood—where they previously closed schools that they supposedly could not afford to keep open.

When masses of Black people mobilize, gangs of police move in, and terrorize.

It is why, as a 12-year-old in 2013, I went to community hearings begging then-mayor Rahm Emanuel to keep my elementary school open. It is why five years later, I joined #NoCopAcademy, a youth-led campaign against the city-proposed police academy—and for a change in the notion that community safety is directly tied to policing. And it is why, today, I am organizing around demands to defund police and to get the cops—who are being prioritized for funding above education—out of Chicago Public Schools.

It is why, as I joined other #NoCopAcademy organizers on the day of the vote over whether to build the police academy, I was beaten in the stairwells of city hall, while Mayor Lori Lightfoot awarded the Chicago Police Department with a new $95 million police school. The violence perpetrated against my being was accompanied by the violence of more resources being poured into state-sanctioned violence.

It is why my voice was ignored in 2013, and again in 2019 when the cop academy was approved. Now, as I scream Rekia Boyd’s name in the street, chant in her legacy and demand divestment from the institution, which was responsible for her death, I am again ignored.

The 2022 fiscal budget under President Joe Biden requests $753 billion in national security funding. This is a 1.6 percent increase that includes $715 billion for the Department of Defense. In 2016, the military utilized about $610 billion. Just as national defense budgets continue to increase drastically year by year, local police
department budgets continue to rise as wars are waged in poor Black communities via hyper-policing, surveillance and police torture.

Many of my closest comrades from the hood experience trauma from witnessing and experiencing police violence and torture. For nonwhite people—for people who live in neighborhoods flooded by police and abandoned in every other way, and for those of us who watched our sisters and brothers be tortured and targeted by police on a daily basis—conversations about “defund,” “divest” and “abolish” are not new. They are demands, necessities, discussions we’ve been having in our communities for years, and even decades. And for Black Chicagoans, this is about our lives. This violence happens daily. We don’t need another video of Black trauma. We didn’t need to see George Floyd, or Rekia Boyd, or Adam Toledo, or Laquan McDonald or Breonna Taylor be murdered to know policing is violence. We didn’t need to see genocide, war and crisis unfold in Palestine, Yemen or Nigeria to know militarism is violence.

Police and the military operate under the same practices of militarism. Police move into external communities and occupy. Military forces move into external communities and occupy. The idea that Black and Brown communities need “law and order” and that these institutions implement it alongside safety is flawed. Safety for Black, Brown and Indigenous people doesn’t look like more police. It looks like access and abundance, because when you think about the safest place in the world and the places where you feel most safe, it is very likely that they are places with the most resources and the fewest police.

As campaigns to defund and divest from death and to fight for liberation continue, the struggle for an abolitionist world lives on through every chant at an action; every ancestor that shows us the way; every community relationship we build; and all the steps we take to become a global community connected in love, liberation and abundance.

Destiny Harris, a student at Howard University, is a member of Generation Green and Dissenters and her work is at the intersection of abolition, environmental liberation, anti-militarism and antiwar efforts.

—Truthout, June 9, 2021

https://truthout.org/articles/policing-and-militarism-go-hand-in-hand-we-must-abolish-both/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eid=35f6478a-4fcb-44cd-bd67-f60d21f657e5

1. Rekia Boyd was a 22-year-old black American woman who was fatally shot in Chicago, Illinois by Dante Servin, an off-duty Chicago police detective, on March 21, 2012.


High School Valedictorian Speaks Out on Abortion Rights

By Paxton Smith

“I’m not usually very good at expressing my gratitude for the people that I care about. But I would like to say “thank you” to Coach. I think he’s had a bigger role in my life than he realizes. OK

“As we leave high school, we need to make our voices heard. Today I was going to talk about TV and media and content because it’s something that’s very important to me, however, under light of recent events, it feels wrong to talk about anything but what is currently affecting me and millions of other women in this state. Recently, the Heartbeat Bill was passed in Texas. Starting in September, there will be a ban on abortions after six weeks of pregnancy, regardless of whether the pregnancy was a result of rape or incest. Six weeks. That’s all women get. And so, before they realize, most

On May 30, 2021, in Dallas, Texas, Lake Highlands High School Valedictorian, Paxton Smith, delivered a powerful speech instead of the school-administration’s pre-approved one. Here is the text of her speech:

Paxton Smith
of them don’t realize that they’re pregnant by six weeks, so before they have a chance to decide if they are emotionally, physically, and financially stable enough to carry out a full-term pregnancy, before they have the chance to decide if they can take on the responsibility of bringing another human being into the world, that decision is made for them by a stranger. A decision that will affect the rest of their lives is made by a stranger.

“I have dreams and hopes and ambitions. Every girl graduating today does, and we have spent our entire lives working towards our future, and without our input and without our consent our control over that future has been stripped away from us. I am terrified that if my contraceptives fail, I am terrified that if I am raped, then my hopes and aspirations and dreams and efforts for my future will no longer matter.

“I hope that you can feel how gut wrenching that is. I hope you can feel how dehumanizing it is to have the autonomy over your own body taken away from you. And I’m talking about this today, on a day as important as this, on a day honoring 12 years of hard academic work, on a day where we are all gathered together, on a day where you are most inclined to listen to a voice like mine, a woman’s voice, to tell you that this is a problem, and it’s a problem that cannot wait. And I cannot give up this platform to promote complacency and peace when there is a war on my body and a war on my rights, a war on the rights of your mothers, a war on the rights of your sisters, a war on the rights of your daughters. We cannot stay silent.

“Thank you.”

—NPR, June 3, 2021

Decades of War Against the MOVE Families

BY LINN WASHINGTON

As a journalist, I’ve covered MOVE for more than 40 years. During that time, I’ve witnessed repeated demented decisions by Philadelphia authorities against MOVE with bloody impacts, including those on May 13, 1985.

A revelation last month about the mistreatment of remains belonging to two children killed in the horrific 1985 police brutality incident ripped open long-festering emotional and psychic wounds still oozing from that explosive event.

Reactions ignited by the April revelation from a whistleblower include rage from the public, regrets from authorities and ruined reputations of people involved in the mistreatment of the remains.

However, while those revelations were shocking, they didn’t surprise me.

On May 13, 1985, the day after Mother’s Day, I watched Philadelphia police drop a bomb on a row house occupied by MOVE members during an eviction effort. Authorities compounded that abhorrent act with an outrageous decision to deliberately allow the blaze sparked by that bomb to rage into a firestorm.

The inferno incinerated 11 MOVE members, including five children.

I heard the police sniper fire that trapped MOVE members inside their burning row house, where investigators determined temperatures exceeded 2,000 degrees.

Only one adult MOVE member and one child escaped that blaze, both burned badly.

The inferno also destroyed 61 homes in a predominantly Black neighborhood. That destruction left 250 people homeless, their life possessions callously destroyed by decisions of governmental authorities.

Protesters commemorate the 36th anniversary of the 1985 MOVE bombing by carrying signs listing names of MOVE members who perished during that incident.
While watching that conflagration, I didn’t know Philly’s police commissioner had ordered firefighters not to fight the fire. At the time, I wondered why firefighters did nothing as a community burned down.

While covering a fatal 1978 clash between MOVE and police, I witnessed the arrests of three MOVE mothers whose four children were among the five children who perished on May 13. In June 2019, two of those mothers I saw arrested held a news conference. They had spent 41 years in prison.

During that news conference, I remember heart-wrenching accounts by Janet Africa and Janine Africa revealing for the first time publicly the insensitivity they experienced the day after the fiery 1985 incident.

Prison guards taunted them, mocking the deaths of their children.

Janet didn’t know in 2019 that the mistreated child bones included those of her dead daughter.

The events of the last few weeks epitomize the disregard for Black life in Philadelphia, a city with a despicable record of abusive policing against Black people.

In April, the first revelation exposed how two anthropologists with the University of Pennsylvania Museum mistreated the children’s charred bones. The second revelation regarded the mistreatment of fragments from other unidentified MOVE bodies kept by Philadelphia’s morgue.

Hearing reactions from Philadelphia officials, it struck me that irrespective of their sincerity, those reactions obscured a critical concern that a plethora of apologies and possible payment of reparations to MOVE do not address.

Will this reckoning really result in righting wrongs that radiate from the institutional racism embedded deeply in the soul of Philadelphia, long defined as the City of Brotherly Love?

Not holding racists accountable for wrongful acts against Black folks is a historic scourge in Philadelphia and across America.

I know the repeated confrontations between MOVE and Philadelphia authorities, beginning in the mid-1970s, erupted largely from authorities penalizing MOVE for any infraction, yet refusing to punish law enforcement personnel for acts of brutality against MOVE. That brutality included beatings where law enforcers kicked female MOVE members in their genital areas and caused miscarriages.

Weeks after the April revelation, a tearfully apologetic Mayor James Kenney ordered an investigation into the mistreatment of MOVE remains. Days later, he fired Philadelphia’s health commissioner, who acknowledged separate mistreatment of MOVE remains held by the city’s morgue.

Kenney’s termination of his health commissioner exhibited some accountability. However, last year Kenney initially opposed the City Council issuing a formal apology to MOVE and others devastated on May 13, 1985. That City Council action is the first formal apology from Philadelphia’s government for the 1985 debacle. It’s another step toward accountability.

The University of Pennsylvania launched its own investigation into the actions and inaction of the two Penn Museum anthropologists.

Decades ago, Philadelphia’s morgue retained those anthropologists to help identify body parts of MOVE members recovered from the inferno. Instead of returning the remains to city authorities or MOVE, those anthropologists shuffled the children’s bones between the museum and Princeton University. One of those anthropologists even employed the bones in an online course she taught through Princeton.

Although the scandal caused Princeton to cancel that online course, anthropologist Janet Monge retains her positions at the Penn Museum and on the university’s faculty.

MOVE, activists in Philadelphia and a national coalition of Black people in anthropology, archeology and bioanthropology have requested removal of this anthropologist. Lack of action on those removal requests, according to MOVE, renders the University of Penn’s apology hollow.

The coalition condemned the mistreatment of MOVE remains as a “painful reminder of anthropology’s history with the Black dead.” The coalition, in a public statement, also blasted the barbarity of all entities that “effectively monetized the remains of Black children murdered in a state terrorist attack.”

The American Anthropological Association condemned the misuse of the children’s remains in that online course. “Such a use clearly violates the principles of ethical conduct established by the AAA,” the organization noted in a posting on its website.

Two years before the April revelation, during that 2019 MOVE news conference, the organization announced what it wanted from authorities to achieve justice in the deaths of its children.
Rejecting apologies, Janet and Janine Africa declared that justice for the MOVE family required ending the injustice of a key MOVE supporter, imprisoned journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Many view Abu-Jamal, incarcerated for a 1981 killing of a Philadelphia police officer, as a political prisoner. I’ve covered his case for decades. Authorities ignored MOVE’s request for the release of Abu-Jamal. Indignant dismissal of MOVE’s requests is a pattern I’ve also observed for decades.

Persistent failures of authorities to ensure accountability for racist wrongs drives distrust of “the system” among persons of color.

Many see what Malcolm X observed in a famed 1964 speech: “I don’t see any American dream; I see an American nightmare.”

And this nightmare must end.

Linn Washington Jr. is a journalism professor at Temple University. He is a graduate of the journalism fellowship program at the Yale Law School.

—The Undefeated, May 26, 2021


1. MOVE is a Black liberation, environmental activist organization.

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City of Bones

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

Can these bones live? From the book of the prophet Ezekiel 37:3. For several weeks, the city of Philadelphia has been immersed in the remnants of the MOVE bombing, May 13, 1985. It’s about bones: the bones of babies bombed into oblivion and then likely, easily carried away in suitcases, exhibited in college classes in anthropology.

For years, for decades, they were shocked and bombed away from life, and then they were treated as playthings, trinkets for students. Then, just as easily, they were lost, then found. The remnants of babies, little Black girls, just like the babies bombed in a Black church by the Klan, bombed for their Blackness in cities north and south.

And while the Klan did their dirt in the south, the cops did the same up north, here in the city of brotherly love. What made this possible? Was it dehumanization projected by the city’s corporate media, for MOVE, they argued, was subhuman. So, media sounded the alarm, and America answered. Thirty-six-years have passed, and still, they play with bones.

Write to Mumia at:
Smart Communications/PADOC
Mumia Abu-Jamal #AM-8335
SCI Mahanoy
P.O. Box 33028
St. Petersburg, FL 33733

Community Rallies Behind Teachers and LGBTQAI+ Students

By Adam Ritcher

Solon Springs is a picturesque village of about 600 people nestled in the forests of northern Wisconsin. One of its claims to fame is being the site of a Brule-St. Croix Native American portage, which connected the watersheds of Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. It’s also one of a shrinking number of rural communities in the state that has been able to keep alive its own school district. But unfortunately, the small Solon Spring School has become the site of battle over the existence and rights of trans students.

Earlier in this school year the school counselor, Russ Nelson, addressed students about gender identity. The Counselor, and the other teachers who helped, were seeking to address ongoing issues of bullying and insensitive behavior by some students towards non-binary students. Their goal was to try and help create a safe and inclusive space within the school. But this simple act elicited a backlash by a group of reactionary parents and community figures.

Spearheaded by Ashley Nelson, a local business owner, and Ben Kidder, pastor at The River Church in nearby Minong, about twenty people packed the otherwise sleepy School Board meeting in April. They expressed outrage that the topic of gender identity was even being discussed in the school. Many insisted there were no non-binary students in the area. Some speakers were upset because the curriculum used by the teachers was developed by the Southern Poverty Law Center—which they deemed to be an “anti-Christian” group. And others spewed forth a truly bizarre conspiracy theory that gender dysphoria was some kind of plot by Black Lives Matter to divide and weaken whites.
Reactionary ideas can sound absurd to those who don’t subscribe to them, but that doesn’t make them any less dangerous. And here we have an example of reactionary ideas being given legitimacy by prominent members of a community. The sudden appearance of a group of angry parents cowed the School Board into issuing an apology, and agreeing to investigate whether or not to discipline or fire the school staff for daring to acknowledge the existence of non-binary students.

In the aftermath of the ugly April School Board meeting though, the Wisconsin teacher’s union issued a statement defending the Solon Springs teachers, and calling for support for the teachers and LGBTQAI+ students. This galvanized an outpouring of solidarity.

Over 1200 people from throughout the region signed on to a solidarity statement written by Kim Kohlhaas, the Wisconsin AFT president. This was followed up by a call for a solidarity picket at the May 17 meeting of the School Board. Somewhere between 40-50 parents, students, LGBTQAI+ youth, education workers, healthcare workers, retired teachers and others responded to the call, signs in hand. And adding an amazing artistic component to the picket was an array of larger-than-life puppets of LGBTQAI+ historical figures and role models that were brought by Mary Plaster of Duluth. The picket was endorsed by a wide range of groups, including the Northwoods Socialist Collective, Twin Ports Black Lives Matter, Duluth Teachers Federation, Northland Allies, the Justice City Coalition, Politics Off My Body, and the Northern WI Activism Action Hub, and the Northwoods Worker blog.

More than 50 subsequently packed the School Board meeting itself, with dozens more attending online. There were numerous speakers in support of the teachers, school counselor and LGBTQAI+ students, and this time, there weren’t any from the reactionary faction. Dorothy Wolden, the parent of a non-binary adult, kicked off the speeches with a powerful call for the need to have inclusive and welcoming schools. Alexa Connolly, a local mental health worker, spoke about the difficulties LGBTQAI+ students often have, and mentioned actual scenarios of parents and students being abusive to LGBTQAI+ students in the area. A statement was read in support of the school counselor that was signed by 20 teachers at the school. But most powerful of all were the speeches by trans students themselves, speaking about their experiences. Alex, one of the last speakers of the evening, made the powerful point about how important it was that non-binary students be acknowledged and seen, and not treated as being invisible.

All in all, it was a beautiful display of solidarity that saw unions, parents, students and community members coming together. This fight is not over yet—the School Board has yet to make its final decision after all. However, this was an important outpouring of support for equality and inclusivity—and was a demonstration of an effective and powerful way to respond when bigotry and reaction rears its head.

Adam Ritscher is Vice President of United Steelworkers Local 9460.

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Hate’s Memory Hole

By Dr. Nayvin Gordon

1939
Nazism lit the fuse
To exterminate the Jews
Set the world afire
History is no liar
Millions fill cemeteries
Atrocity seared memories

2017
Charleston Nazis fuss and cuss,
‘The Jews will not replace us’
Remember what swastikas beget
Violence, murder, we cannot forget

2021
Jewish Israeli mobs shout ‘get out,’
‘Death to Arabs,’ blood lust devout
Inhumanity, lies, and genocide
Our memories now defiled

Divide and rule
The class tool
Capitalism so cruel
Why tolerate its rule?
Why They’re Not Saying Ma’Khia Bryant’s Name

By Fabiola Cineas

After watching 15 seconds of police body camera footage last week, viewers of various races and political affiliations had made a decision: 16-year-old Ma’Khia Bryant was “the aggressor”—the “fat,” “huge,” “knife-wielding attacker” and “maniac” who deserved to be fatally shot by the police on April 20, 2021, in Columbus, Ohio.

According to these viewers, Nicholas Reardon, the police officer who immediately shot and killed Bryant, who was holding a knife, was justified. That she was a teenager in the middle of an altercation, in which she was presumed to be defending herself, did not matter.

Reardon shot Bryant dead about 20 minutes before a judge announced that a jury found former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin guilty of murdering George Floyd, a killing that catalyzed worldwide protests against police violence. For a moment, those seeking justice for Black life exhaled in relief, knowing that the officer who callously took Floyd’s life would be imprisoned.

But the cries for justice that applied to George Floyd did not ring out as loudly for Bryant. Even after it was discovered that Bryant was living in foster care, that she was in the middle of a fight with older women when police arrived, and that she was allegedly the one who summoned the police for help, people—some of the same people who called for justice in Floyd’s case—used police talking points to justify the four bullets that Reardon unloaded into Bryant’s chest. She was brandishing a knife, many pointed out, which meant the other Black women needed to be protected.

Crisis response experts noted, however, that deescalation tactics—like commanding Bryant to drop the weapon, physically getting between the women, or simply communicating with her—could have kept everyone alive. In many recorded encounters between the police and white people carrying weapons, for instance, officers didn’t shoot first or even reach for their guns—they successfully managed to peacefully apprehend the suspect.

Bryant’s death has become a debate that questions a child’s actions—and worthiness to live—instead of another example of the racism of policing and the institution’s failure to provide wholesome support, care, and safety for the communities it serves. The insistence that Reardon had no other option than to take Bryant’s life to save others—though he risked everyone’s life in the process—displays the lack of consideration and value that society places on the lives of Black girls and women.

Treva Lindsey, a professor of African American women’s history at Ohio State University, told Vox that there are those who won’t see Bryant as a victim but as someone who brought this on herself. And even for those who do see her as a victim, they’ll still victim-blame, erasing the systemic oppression—including that Black children are far more likely to be in foster care than their white counterparts, and kids in foster care are often exposed to high levels of violence—that brought her to being killed at the hands of the police.

“People will say ‘I’m really sad this whole scenario happened, but had she not had that knife …’ That becomes the ‘but,’ the qualifier, the caveat. And too often we have a caveat when it comes to defending, protecting, and caring for Black girls,” Lindsey said.

The debate over whether police should have shot a child

On the afternoon of April 20, Ma’Khia Bryant reportedly dialed 911. The call was dominated by screams, but the caller said that someone was “trying to stab us” and “put hands” on their grandmother. “We need a police officer here now,” the person said. Body camera footage shows that when officer Reardon exited his vehicle, there were seven people outside of the home.

There was yelling, and a girl could be seen falling to the ground after being attacked by Bryant and kicked by an unidentified man standing nearby. Bryant, holding a knife, then lunged toward a woman dressed in pink who was standing up against a vehicle. Just moments after asking “What’s going on?” Reardon pulled out his gun yelled, “Hey! Hey! Get down! Get down!” (prompting the woman in pink to run...
away) and fired four shots at Bryant. Bryant immediately slumped to the ground next to the vehicle.

Interim Columbus police chief Michael Woods called the shooting a terrible tragedy for all those involved but said department policy states that an officer can use deadly force against someone when they appear to be inflicting harm on another person. He explained that the officers did not use a taser because there was an immediate threat of death. In addition, the chief said that officers aren’t required to verbalize to bystanders that they are about to fire their weapon.

The Columbus Police Department has long disproportionately used excessive force against Black people, coming under fire in recent months for the police killings of Andre Hill, a Black man police shot in a garage, and Casey Goodson Jr., a Black man who was entering his home.

Almost 55 percent of the department’s use-of-force incidents targeted Black people who make up less than 30 percent of the population. Other reports show how racism is rampant within the department’s ranks. With renewed attention on the department, the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation is conducting a third-party investigation of Bryant’s shooting that will answer questions like what might have happened if Reardon did not shoot and what information he had upon approaching the scene.

Still, many have already drawn their own conclusions. Bryant’s death sparked debate across media and social media about whether the officer should have shot the 16-year-old.

On Face the Nation, Representative Val Demings (D-FL), a former Orlando police chief, vehemently defended the officers’ actions, saying that police are forced to make calls in the heat of the moment. “Everybody has the benefit of slowing the video down and seizing the perfect moment. The officer on the street does not have that ability. He or she has to make those split-second decisions, and they’re tough.”

On the popular radio show The Breakfast Club, host DJ Envy stated, “The whole situation is tragic and it’s sad because that system failed that young lady.” But he also added, “Every case is different, and in this case, if I pull up to a scene and see a girl chasing another girl about to stab a girl, my job as a police officer is to make sure that girl doesn’t get killed. And the law allows me to stop that killing or that stabbing by any means necessary.”

But as crisis interventionists pointed out, the police officer could have taken steps to deescalate the situation, savings all lives in the process. Psychologist Merushka Bisetty explained in an essay for Vox that children like Bryant may “present with aggression and an inability to self-regulate their emotions and, consequently, engage in behaviors that can seem aggressive or involve weapons,” but that doesn’t mean that these situations “require or should be met with violent force.” Instead, it’s the role of intervening professionals to stop an aggressive interaction from becoming fatal.

That the reaction to Bryant’s killing has turned into a debate about whether the use of force is justified is an attempt to “displace blame onto the victim and their family rather than on the systems that created situations that led to her death,” Bisetty, who has provided services in shelters, schools, and jails, wrote. “It is worth considering whether Bryant might have still been alive today if a mental health expert—or someone else trained in nonviolent deescalation—had responded to the call.”

It’s also worth considering whether the police officer would have fired shots if Bryant or the people involved in the altercation were white. There are countless examples of police peacefully apprehending white boys and men wielding weapons. Just last year police officers in Kenosha, Wisconsin, handed water bottles to and thanked 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse, a self-described militia member who carried an AR-15-style rifle during the unrest that followed the police shooting of Jacob Blake. Rittenhouse was allowed to leave the scene after fatally shooting two people and harming another, though the police had been informed that he was the shooter.

In other cases, white men have verbally threatened police officers and pointed weapons at them. In those situations, the police did not reach for their guns at all or ever use them. In 2019, 19-year-old Matthew Bernard who killed two women and a child led Virginia authorities, who tried to stop him with mace and a stun gun, on a naked chase before they eventually took him into custody.

White women, too, often get a softer side of law enforcement handling. Several white women who were part of the Capitol insurrection on January 6 could be seen on video being peacefully escorted down the steps of the Capitol building amid the chaos. In a tense July 2020 Detroit-area encounter, a white woman in a minivan pointed a gun at a Black mother while the Black woman’s 15-year-old daughter watched and screamed nearby. When the police arrived after six 911 calls, they ordered the white woman out of the van, put her on the ground, handcuffed her, and took her gun, according to the police.

Black women aren’t treated with the same patriarchal protections, however problematic, that are afforded to white women, Lindsey points out. The idea that Black women should be handled with care because they are women just doesn’t exist.

“We see an incredibly disparate treatment gap between what white women experience with police and what Black women experience with police,” she said.
In police encounters, racism and sexism work against Black girls and women

The level of dismissal and scrutiny that Black female victims face when they die at the hands of the police is unmatched. Bryant’s name is no longer trending, and even though her funeral was Friday, April 30, 2021, headlines about the fatal incident have dwindled. What narrative there is surrounding fatal police violence and police brutality often centers Black cisgender men and boys, leaving out Black women, girls, and trans people.

The focus on Black men and boys is warranted since they face the highest risk of being killed by the police: About one-in-1,000 Black men and boys in America can expect to die at the hands of police, according to a 2019 study, a risk that is 2.5 times higher than for white men.

Likewise, the same study found that out of all women, Black women face the highest risk of being killed by the police. Black women make up 20 percent (48 total) of the 247 women fatally shot by the police and 28 percent of unarmed killings since 2015, according to a 2020 Washington Post analysis. All of this research does not include violent encounters between Black women and the police that do not result in death—such as cases of sexual harassment and assault.

But the realities of these statistics often don’t make the front page, or any pages at all. The invisibility of Black girls and women persists, many scholars note, because they stand at the complex intersection of their gender and Black racial identity. When it comes to their blackness, they’re not recognized as a group that needs protection. And this coupled with their status as women means that they cannot be trusted or believed.

“We still read blackness through the lens of masculinity,” Lindsey told Vox. “The strange fruit hanging from the tree is still Black men.” As a result, when Black women end up in encounters with police, society always asks, “Well, what did she do wrong?”

Lindsey said that we’re entrenched in a narrative that the police violence against Black women “is more of a blip and not a pattern for an investment,” though police violence always had a penchant for Black life across all genders.

These ideas go back to slave patrols, progenitors of policing in the United States. It was Black women who were on “wanted” posters for escaping, Lindsey explained—like, for example, Harriet Tubman, who would have been killed by patrols for defying the state. And as Michelle F. Jacobs wrote in “The Violent State: Black Women’s Invisible Struggle Against Police Violence,” both Black men and women were killed, maimed and mutilated at the will of slave holders, but Black women were violently raped and sexually abused by both the slave holder and his employees as an economic necessity.

Jacobs points out that by the time the country gets to the Jim Crow era, stereotypes about Black women (they’re governed by libido and loose morals, are liars, and are aggressive) are solidified and become cemented in state policy. “Public benefits law, educational law, delinquency and neglect policy, and all aspects of criminal law have embedded the stereotypes as the normative foundation for how government evaluates, judges, and punishes Black women,” she wrote.

While state violence against Black bodies is often seen through the narratives of Emmett Till, Amadou Diallo, Mike Brown, and George Floyd, “What about Carol, Denise, Addy, and Cynthia—the four little girls bombed in Alabama?” Lindsey said.

Black women’s experience with the police—and the police’s desire to avoid accountability for killing—even gave birth to the intentionally passive term “officer-involved shooting.” In 1979, Los Angeles police officers shot Eula Love eight times in her front yard. The two officers were escorting a gas company employee to cut off her service.

According to the police, Love had a $22.09 money order for the gas company in her purse and a kitchen knife in her hand. One of the officers described Love as a “raging, frothing at the mouth, knife-wielding woman” and newspapers described her as “unemployed and overweight.” Love’s killing was one of the earliest instances in which police used the phrase “officer-involved shooting” to blur the truth, as opposed to the more direct language—that the police shot and killed Love—that is being advocated for today.

This decentering of the Black women’s experiences when it comes to state violence detracts from the bigger trends, forcing Breonna Taylor, whose name and face turned into a meme and unit of commodification, to become an exceptional case and not an example of a larger issue, Lindsey said.

Taylor’s death, in fact, only rose to prominence after video of Floyd’s death went viral. She was also perhaps the closest example we have of “perfect” Black woman victimhood since she was asleep in her bed when the encounter began. And yet people still found ways to blame her, claiming that she should not have engaged with a drug dealer who led police officers to her door that night.

Sandra Bland, another one of the more well-known recent cases of police violence against a Black woman, was blamed for being “combative” with the police when she was pulled over on a Texas road in 2015 for failing to signal a lane change. Police took Bland into custody at a local jail where she was pronounced dead, her death ruled a suicide. Right-wing commentators, white liberals, and people within the Black community itself said that Bland should have followed the police’s directions and not been confrontational in order to save her life.
For Black girls, criminalization and adultification start early. According to the 2017 Georgetown Law study “Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls’ Childhood,” Black girls face “adultification bias” from as young as five, which means adults perceive them to be less innocent and thus less worthy of nurturing, protection, and comfort. This too stems back to slavery, the report noted, since Black children were put to work as young as two and three years old and were punished for showing child-like behavior.

This can be seen in other instances of police violence against Black girls caught on camera. In a 2015 case of police brutality that went viral, an officer tackled, dragged, and pinned 15-year-old Dajerria Becton to the ground at a pool party in McKinney, Texas, after officers were called to the home over alleged trespassing. In February, police in Rochester, New York, pepper sprayed a nine-year-old Black girl after they responded to a report about “family trouble.” Video footage shows that the girl repeatedly screamed for her father as police handcuffed her. “Don’t do this to me” she exclaimed, and officers responded, “You did it to yourself.”

It is also how people have referred to Bryant. When Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther shared the news of Bryant’s killing on Twitter, he wrote of the 16-year-old, “a young woman tragically lost her life.” People immediately reminded him that she was “just a girl.”

As scholar and activist Brittany Cooper noted, it was a Black girl that helped the world see what happened to Floyd. Darnella Frazier was 17 when she recorded Floyd’s death and accompanied by her eight-year-old cousin who also witnessed the murder so that the world could eventually see it. Without these Black girls, the small dose of justice that brought many people relief last week would have likely never happened.

**Justice begins with visibility and accountability**

A reason why there is debate over Bryant’s death is that it is difficult to educate the public if stories like hers rarely make the news—so when they do, there are preconceived notions that preclude nuanced views about policing and the sanctity of Black girlhood.

“There’s definitely an internalization of misogynoir inside and outside of our communities,” Lindsey said, referring to the term coined by Moya Bailey to explain how anti-Blackness and misogyny manifest in Black women’s lives. “So even beyond the sheer hatred of Black women, people really don’t understand these stories. [Black women and girls] are not legible. So even when we gain visibility, like in the Ma’Khia Bryant case, her story will remain illegible to folks.” People will continue to see a knife-wielding suspect as opposed to a traumatized 16-year-old girl.

To address this problem, Black legal scholars and feminist activists, primarily Kimberlé Crenshaw and Andrea J. Ritchie, launched the #SayHerName campaign in 2014 and released a corresponding report, “Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women,” to bring awareness to the forgotten victims of police brutality.

The report pointed out that Black girls as young as seven (Aiyana Stanley-Jones) and women as old as 93 (Pearlie Golden) have been killed by the police, with officers escaping prosecution or conviction. “Say Her Name sheds light on Black women’s experiences of police violence in an effort to support a gender-inclusive approach to racial justice that centers all Black lives equally,” Crenshaw and Ritchie wrote.

But in the years since the campaign launched, people have muddied the meaning behind #SayHerName, even if inadvertently. The phrase has morphed into #SayHisName whenever a Black boy or man is killed by the police, and the collective #SayTheirNames became widespread in 2020 in the months following Floyd’s death to further elevate the movement for Black lives. But the crowding out of #SayHerName in favor of these other versions, takes away from the campaign’s original purpose and furthers the erasure of Black girls and women.

According to Lindsey, protests since Bryant’s death led by Black women, Black queer folks, and Black gender non-binary folks, have been ongoing. “There’s a good amount of non-Black allies and accomplices who have been present in this, but it still looks nothing like what we tend to see when Black men or boys are killed by police, in terms of sheer number,” she said.

Each time a Black girl, woman, trans, or gender non-binary person is killed, it’s an uphill battle to bring awareness to their story. For Lindsey, the goal should never be to debate whether Black people are human or matter.

“It’s important for us to continuing highlighting and vocalizing how the inhumanity of white supremacy shows up in the lives of Black women and girls,” Lindsey said. “When we’re equipped with the full truth of how it operates, we have a better chance at rooting out the operating system of white supremacy and anti-Blackness.”

—Vox, May 2, 2021

1 “The Violent State: Black Women’s Invisible Struggle Against Police Violence” https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1828&context=facultypub

2 “Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women” http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b068045158d8ce/t/5606068ee4b0af2672741df/1443628686535/AAPF_SMN_Brief_Full_singles-min.pdf
In the Spirit of Mandela

International Tribunal on U.S. Human Rights Violations

spiritofmandela.org

The “In the Spirit of Mandela Coalition” invites your participation and endorsement of a planned October 22-24, 2021 International Tribunal, which will be charging the U.S. government with human rights violations against Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.

The Tribunal charges, to come in the form of a criminal indictment based on international law, will cite violations based on:

- Racist police killings of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people,
- Hyper incarcerations of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people (including Constitutionally affirmed “legal slavery” enshrined in the 13th Amendment),
- Political incarceration of Civil Rights/ National Liberation era revolutionaries and activists, as well as present day activists,
- Environmental racism and its impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people,
- Public Health racism and disparities and its traumatic impact on Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, and
- Genocide of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people because of the historic and systemic charges of all the above.

The legal aspects of the Tribunal will be led by Attorney Nkechi Taifa along with a skilled team of seasoned attorneys from all the above fields. A panel of jurists of both international and national stature will preside over three days of testimonies. Testimonies will be elicited from impacted victims, expert witnesses, and attorneys with firsthand knowledge of specific incidences raised in the charges/indictment.

The 2021 International Tribunal builds upon the shoulders and wonderful work of past Tribunals, including the 1990 “Special International Tribunal on the Violation of Human Rights of Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War in United States Prisons and Jails.” Similarly, it is not only an educational political event, but also a people’s judicial proceeding which will establish a strong foundation to launch international solidarity campaigns, civil and legal proceedings in U.S. Federal and State Courts, and potential Congressional legislation.

The international community, including the United Nations, has been historically ineffective and non-responsive to the issues of oppression, racism, and exploitation of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people in the United States. In the context of the 1951 “We Charge Genocide” documentation, and the Organization of Afro-American Unity’s attempts to bring these issues before the world arena, and subsequent efforts, the 2021 International Tribunal plans to go beyond basic presentation of the findings and verdict to the UN. Though these results will be presented to the UN at the close of the Tribunal on October 25th, the coalition has a unique set of outcomes which provide an opportunity for organizing on a mass level across many social justice arenas.

“We are our own liberators!” This empowering statement by Jalil Muntaqim, recently released Black Panther Political Prisoner, co-founder of the National Jericho Movement, and Tribunal organizer, clarifies in a word what we the people must do. The Spirit of Mandela coalition strongly agrees with this sentiment and plans to build the Tribunal as a powerful and effective organizing tool to mobilize people from all walks of life. The charges are expansive yet focused enough to embrace and address much of the oppression experienced by Black, Brown, Indigenous, poor, and working-class people throughout history to today. The 2021 International Tribunal not only vets the facts and proclaims a demand for justice; it is also a plan of action!

Immediately after the Tribunal event, we plan to hit the ground running. There is a progressive people’s plan of action moving forward. Upon the completion of the proceedings and announcement of the verdict, we will:

- Codify and publish the content and results of the Tribunal to be offered in High Schools and University curriculums,
- Provide organized, accurate information for reparation initiatives and community and human rights work,
- Strengthen the demand to free all Political Prisoners and establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission mechanism to lead to their freedom,
- Provide the foundation for civil action in federal and state courts across the United States,
Growing Palestinian Solidarity Across Israel

BY MAHA NASSAR

The world’s attention has turned again to deadly scenes of Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip and the launching of rockets by the militant group Hamas into Israel. It follows two weeks of protests in East Jerusalem against attempts to forcibly displace Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah and Israeli police raids on worshippers in the al-Aqsa mosque compound.

But in towns across Israel, another important—and underreported—development is taking place. And it could change how we talk about Palestinians and Israelis.

Since May 9, 2021, thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel, numbering some 1.9 million people and often referred to as “Arab Israelis,” have taken to the streets to express support for their fellow Palestinians in Gaza and Jerusalem. Protests are taking place in both mixed Arab-Jewish cities like Haifa, Jaffa and Lod, known as Lydda to Palestinians, as well as in predominantly Palestinian cities and towns like Nazareth and Umm al-Fahm.

The size and scope of the demonstrations have surprised many political analysts who usually discuss these Palestinians as part of the Israeli social and political fabric, separate from Palestinians elsewhere.

But as a historian of the Palestinian citizens of Israel, I’m not surprised by this recent turn of events. Palestinian citizens of Israel have a long history of identifying with their fellow Palestinians, though rarely on this scale.

Policy of isolation, integration

As I argue in my book Brothers Apart, following the establishment of Israel in 1948, state officials tried to cultivate a sense of loyalty among the minority of Palestinians who remained in their homeland. It was part of a larger Israeli effort to isolate them from the vast majority of Palestinians who either fled or were expelled from the newly established state.

These “Arab Israelis” were placed under military rule until 1966 and were unable to directly contact family members living in refugees’ camps. Most were granted Israeli citizenship in 1952, but they faced a host of discriminatory laws that denied them access to their land, limited their economic opportunities and restricted their movements. While they could vote, form political parties and hold public office, extensive government surveillance—and punishment of those who criticized the state—created a pervasive climate of fear among these Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Discrimination and economic disadvantage continue today. Palestinian towns and villages in Israel face housing shortages and economic underdevelopment. Hiring practices that require job applicants to live in certain areas or to have served in the military—something very few Palestinian citizens do—end up pushing Palestinians into precarious low-wage jobs.
While direct housing discrimination was banned by the courts, Jewish communities often set up admissions committees that effectively limit the number of Palestinian citizens living in majority Jewish towns.

This de facto segregation is also reflected in Israel’s school system. Students in Arab state schools receive less funding per capita than those in majority Hebrew state schools.

In addition, Palestinian citizens are subjected to “stop-and-frisk” police policies. And professionals face everyday forms of racism from some Jewish Israeli colleagues who are surprised by their level of education.

Palestinian citizens of Israel have been protesting these conditions since the founding of the state, but within limits. In 1964, the Arab nationalist Ard group called for “a just solution for the Palestinian question...in accordance with the wishes of the Palestinian Arab people.” In response, the Israeli government banned the group and arrested its leaders on charges of endangering state security.

**Centering Palestinian identity**

Despite these restrictions, their expressions of Palestinian national identity have grown louder.

Following Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem in 1967, Palestinian citizens of Israel and those under occupation met one another regularly, leading them to develop a sense of joint struggle.

That joint struggle was on display in October 2000 when thousands of Palestinian citizens rallied in Palestinian towns and mixed cities across Israel in support of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories during the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising. Israeli security forces killed 12 unarmed protesting Palestinian citizens of Israel and arrested over 600, undermining the idea that Palestinian citizens could achieve full equality in Israel.

Since then, Israel has launched several economic development and civil service initiatives aimed at integrating Palestinian citizens into the state. But these initiatives have not done much to alleviate the discrimination that Palestinian citizens still face. Moreover, the right-wing shift in Israeli politics has led to even more explicitly racist rhetoric from some quarters, including growing support for expelling Palestinian citizens from Israel altogether.

In response, more Palestinian citizens identify themselves as belonging to one people who are collectively resisting settler colonial rule. A younger generation of grassroots organizers has taken the lead, as seen in the annual commemorations of the Nakba—the loss of Palestine in 1948—every May 15.

This centering of Palestinian identity was on display in March 2021 in the Palestinian town of Umm al-Fahm. Protests against seemingly local problems—crime and gun violence—turned into an expression of Palestinian national identity as protesters waved Palestinian flags and sang Palestinian songs.

The latest protests around Sheikh Jarrah and incursions in the al-Aqsa compound likewise promote a common Palestinian cause. At a rally in the mixed city of Lydd, a few miles south of Tel Aviv, one Palestinian citizen protester scaled a lamppost and replaced the Israeli flag with a Palestinian one.

Meanwhile, the funeral of Lydd protester Moussa Hassoun on May 11 drew 8,000 mourners as he was laid to rest wrapped in a Palestinian flag. Since then, protests have swelled even further, leading Israeli security officials to impose a curfew on the town and call in reinforcements.

**Fragmented no more?**

The current protests suggest that Israeli government attempts to isolate Palestinian citizens of Israel from Palestinians in the occupied territories and in exile and to integrate them into the Israeli state have failed. And any heavy-handed reaction to demonstrators could only serve to further alienate Palestinian citizens from the state of Israel.

Scenes of police violently breaking up peaceful protests, Israeli security forces being deployed into Palestinian neighborhoods inside the country, and armed Israeli Jewish vigilantes attacking Palestinians in mixed cities could also, I believe, further reinforce the image of Israel as a colonial power in the minds of not only its marginalized Palestinian minority, but also their international supporters as well.

What could result is a new type of Palestinian mobilization, one that belies the idea of a fragmented people and unites all Palestinian people in a joint struggle.

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—Truthout, May 14, 2021

https://truthout.org/articles/protests-across-israel-signal-growing-palestinian-solidarity/

The “Palestinian Revolt of 2021” will go down in history as one of the most influential events that irreversibly shaped collective thinking in and around Palestine. Only two other events can be compared with what has just transpired in Palestine: the revolt of 1936 and the First Intifada of 1987.

The general strike and rebellion of 1936-39 were momentous because they represented the first unmistakable expression of collective Palestinian political agency. Despite their isolation and humble tools of resistance, the Palestinian people rose across Palestine to challenge British and Zionist colonialism, combined.

The Intifada of 1987 was also historic. It was the unprecedented sustainable collective action that unified the occupied West Bank and Gaza after the Israeli occupation of what remained of historic Palestine in 1967. That legendary popular revolt, though costly in blood and sacrifices, allowed Palestinians to regain the political initiative and to, once more, speak as one people.

That Intifada was eventually thwarted after the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993. For Israel, Oslo was a gift from the Palestinian leadership that allowed it to suppress the Intifada and use the then newly invented Palestinian Authority (PA) to serve as a buffer between the Israeli military and occupied, oppressed Palestinians.

Palestinians won because, once more, they emerged from the rubble of Israeli bombs as a whole, a nation so determined to win its freedom at any cost.

Since those years, the history of Palestine has taken on a dismal trajectory, one of disunity, factionalism, political rivalry and, for the privileged few, massive wealth. Nearly four decades have been wasted on a self-defeating political discourse centered on American-Israeli priorities, mostly concerned with “Israeli security” and “Palestinian terrorism.”

Old but befitting terminologies such as “liberation,” “resistance” and “popular struggle,” were replaced with more “pragmatic” language of “peace process,” “negotiation table” and “shuttle diplomacy.” The Israeli occupation of Palestine, according to this misleading discourse, was depicted as a “conflict” and “dispute,” as if basic human rights were the subject of political interpretation.

Predictably, the already powerful Israel became more emboldened, tripling the number of its illegal colonies in the West Bank along with the population of its illegal settlers. Palestine was segmented into tiny, isolated South-African-styled Bantustans, each carrying a label—Areas, A, B, C—and the movement of Palestinians within their own homeland became conditioned on obtaining various colored permits from the Israeli military. Women giving birth at military checkpoints in the West Bank, cancer patients dying in Gaza while waiting for permission to cross to hospitals, and more, became the everyday reality of Palestine and the Palestinians.

With time, the Israeli occupation of Palestine became a marginal issue on the agenda of international diplomacy. Meanwhile, Israel cemented its relationship with numerous countries around the world, including countries in the Southern hemisphere which have historically stood beside Palestine.

Even the international solidarity movement for Palestinian rights became confused and fragmented,
Opposing Israel’s War Crimes is NOT Antisemitic

By Jonathan Cook

Here is something that can be said with great confidence. It is racist—antisemitic, if you prefer—to hold Jews, individually or collectively, accountable for Israel’s crimes. Jews are not responsible for Israel’s war crimes, even if the Israeli state presumes to implicate Jews in its crimes by falsely declaring it represents all Jews in the world.

Very obviously, it is not the fault of Jews that Israel commits war crimes, or that Israel uses Jews collectively as a political shield, exploiting sensitivities about the historical suffering of Jews at the hands of non-Jews to immunize itself from international opprobrium.

But here is something that can be said with equal certainty. Israel’s apologists—whether Jews or non-Jews—cannot deny all responsibility for Israel’s war crimes when they actively aid and abet Israel in committing those crimes, or when they seek to demonize and silence Israel’s critics so that those war crimes can be pursued in a more favorable political climate.

Such apologists—which sadly seem to include many of the community organizations in Britain claiming to...
represent Jews—want to have their cake and eat it.

They cannot defend Israel uncritically as it commits war crimes or seek legislative changes to assist Israel in committing those war crimes—whether it be Israel’s latest pummeling of civilians in Gaza, or its executions of unarmed Palestinians protesting 15 years of Israel’s blockade of the coastal enclave—and accuse anyone who criticizes them for doing so of being an antisemite.

But this is exactly what has been going on. And it is only getting worse.

**Upsurge in antisemitism?**

As a ceasefire was implemented late last week, bringing a temporary let-up in the bombing of Gaza by Israel, pro-Israel Jewish groups in the UK were once again warning of an upsurge of antisemitism they attributed to a rapid growth in the number of protests against Israel.

These groups have the usual powerful allies echoing their claims. British prime minister Boris Johnson met community leaders in Downing Street on Thursday, May 27, 2021, pledging, as *Jewish News* reported, “to continue to support the community in the face of rising antisemitism attacks”.

Those Jewish leaders included Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, a supporter of Johnson who played a part in helping him win the 2019 election by renewing the evidence-free antisemitism smears against the Labour party days before voting. It also included the Campaign Against Antisemitism, which was founded specifically to whitewash Israel’s crimes during its 2014 bombardment of Gaza and has ever since been vilifying all Palestinian solidarity activism as antisemitism.

In attendance too was the Jewish Leadership Council, an umbrella organization for Britain’s main Jewish community groups. In an article in Israel’s *Haaretz* newspaper on this supposed rise in antisemitism in the UK, the JLC’s vice-president, Daniel Korski, set out the ridiculous, self-serving narrative these community groups are trying to peddle, with seemingly ever greater success among the political and media elite.

**Popular outrage over Gaza**

Korski expressed grave concern about the proliferation of demonstrations in the UK designed to halt Israel’s bombardment of Gaza. During 11 days of attacks, more than 260 Palestinians were killed, including at least 66 children. Israel’s precision air strikes targeted more than a dozen hospitals, including the only Covid clinic in Gaza, dozens of schools, several media centers, and left tens-of-thousands of Palestinians homeless.

The sense of popular outrage at the Israeli onslaught was only heightened by the fact that Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, had clearly engineered a confrontation with Hamas at the outset to serve his immediate personal interests: preventing Israeli opposition parties from uniting to oust him from power.

In his naked personal calculations, Palestinian civilians were sacrificed to help Netanyahu hold on to power and improve his chances of evading jail as he stands trial on corruption charges.

But for Korski and the other community leaders attending the meeting with Johnson, the passionate demonstrations in solidarity with Palestinians are their main evidence for a rise in antisemitism.

**“Free Palestine” chants**

These community organizations cite a few incidents that undoubtedly qualify as antisemitism—some serious, some less so. They include shouting “Free Palestine” at individuals because they are identifiable as Jews, something presumably happening mostly to the religious ultra-Orthodox.

But these Jewish leaders’ chief concern, they make clear, is the growing public support for Palestinians in the face of intensifying Israeli aggression.

Quoting David Rich, of the Community Security Trust, another Jewish organization hosted by Johnson, the *Haaretz* newspaper reports that “what has really shaken the Jewish community...‘is that demos are being held all over the country every day.
about this issue’ [Israel’s bombardment of Gaza].”

Revealingly, it seems that when Jewish community leaders watch TV screens showing demonstrators chant “Free Palestine,” they feel it as a personal attack—as though they themselves are being accosted in the street.

One doesn’t need to be a Freudian analyst to wonder whether this reveals something troubling about their inner emotional life: they identify so completely with Israel that even when someone calls for Palestinians to have equal rights with Israelis they perceive it as a collective attack on Jews, as antisemitism.

**Exception for Israel**

Then Korski gets to the crux of the argument: “As Jews we are proud of our heritage and at the same time in no way responsible for the actions of a government thousands of miles away, no matter our feelings or connection to it.”

But the logic of that position is simply untenable. You cannot tie your identity intimately to a state that systematically commits war crimes, you cannot vilify demonstrations against those war crimes as antisemitism, you cannot use your position as a “Jewish community leader” to make such allegations more credible, and you cannot exploit your influence with world leaders to try to silence protests against Israel and then say you are “in no way responsible” for the actions of that government.

If you use your position to prevent Israel from being subjected to scrutiny over allegations of war crimes, if you seek to manipulate the public discourse with claims of antisemitism to create a more favorable environment in which those war crimes can be committed, then some of the blame for those war crimes rubs off on you.

That is how responsibility works in every other sphere of life. What Israel’s apologists are demanding is an exception for Israel and for themselves.

**Lobby with the UK’s ear**

In another revealing observation seeking to justify claims of an upsurge in antisemitism, Korski adds: “We don’t see the same kind of outpouring of emotion when it comes to the Rohingyas or the Uighurs or Syria, and it makes a lot of Jews feel this is about them [as Jews].”

**During 11 days of attacks, more than 260 Palestinians were killed, including at least 66 children. Israel’s precision air strikes targeted more than a dozen hospitals, including the only Covid clinic in Gaza, dozens of schools, several media centers, and left tens-of-thousands of Palestinians homeless.**

But there are many reasons why there aren’t equally large demonstrations in the UK against the suffering of the Rohingyas and the Uighurs—reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with antisemitism.

The oppressors of the Rohingyas and the Uighurs, unlike Israel, are not being generously armed by the British government or given diplomatic cover by Britain or being given preferential trade agreements by Britain.

But equally importantly, the states oppressing the Rohingyas and Uighurs—unlike Israel—don’t have active, well-funded lobbies in the UK, with the ear of the prime minister. China and Myanmar—unlike Israel—don’t have UK lobbies successfully labelling criticism of them as racism. Unlike Israel, they don’t have lobbies that openly seek to influence elections to protect them from criticism. Unlike Israel, they don’t have lobbies that work with Britain to introduce measures to assist them in carrying out their oppression.

The president of the Board of Deputies, Marie van der Zyl, for example, pressed Johnson at the meeting this week to classify all branches of Hamas, not just its military wing, as a terrorist organization. That is Israel’s wet dream. Such a decision would make it even less likely that Britain would be in a position to officially distance itself from Israel’s war crimes in Gaza, where Hamas runs the government, and even more likely it would join Israel in declaring Gaza’s schools, hospitals and government departments all legitimate targets for Israeli air strikes.

**Pure projection**

If you are lobbying to get special favors for Israel, particularly favors to help it commit war crimes, you don’t also get to wash your hands of those war crimes. You are directly implicated in them.

David Hirsch, an academic at the University of London who has been closely connected to efforts to weaponize antisemitism against critics of Israel, especially in the Labour party under its previous leader Jeremy Corbyn, also tries to play this trick.

He tells *Haaretz* that antisemitism is supposedly “getting worse” because Palestinian solidarity activists have been giving up on a two-state solution. “There used to be a struggle in Palestine solidarity between a politics of peace—two states living side by side—and a politics of denouncing one side as essentially evil and hoping for its total defeat.”

But what Hirsch is doing is pure projection: he is suggesting Palestinian solidarity activists are “antisemites”—his idea of evil—because they have been forced by Israel to abandon their long-favored cause of a two-state solu-
tion. That is only because successive Israeli governments have refused to negotiate any kind of peace deal with the most moderate Palestinian leadership imaginable under Mahmoud Abbas—one that has eagerly telegraphed its desire to collaborate with Israel, even calling “security coordination” with the Israeli army “sacred”.

A two-state solution is dead because Israel made it dead not because Palestinian solidarity activists are more extreme or more antisemitic.

In calling to “Free Palestine,” activists are not demanding Israel’s “total defeat”—unless Hirsch and Jewish community organizations themselves believe that Palestinians cannot be free from Israeli oppression and occupation until Israel suffers such a “total defeat.” Hirsch’s claim tells us nothing about Palestinian solidarity activists, but it does tell us a lot about what is really motivating these Jewish community organizations.

It is these pro-Israel lobbyists, it seems, more than Palestinian solidarity activists, who cannot imagine Palestinians living in dignity under Israeli rule. Is that because they understand only too well what Israel and its political ideology of Zionism truly represent, and that what is required of Palestinians for “peace” is absolute and permanent submission?

**Better informed**

Similarly, Rich, of the Community Security Trust, says of Palestinian solidarity activists: “Even the moderates have become extremists.” What does this extremism—again presented by Jewish groups as antisemitism—consist of? “Now the movement [in solidarity with Palestinians] is dominated by the view that Israel is an apartheid, genocidal, settler-colonialist state.”

Or in other words, these pro-Israel Jewish groups claim there has been a surge in antisemitism because Palestinian solidarity activists are being influenced and educated by human rights organizations, like Human Rights Watch and Israel’s B’Tselem. Both recently wrote reports classifying Israel as an apartheid state, in the occupied territories and inside Israel’s recognized borders. Activists are not becoming more extreme; they are becoming better informed.

**when someone calls for Palestinians to have equal rights with Israelis they perceive it as a collective attack on Jews, as antisemitism**

And in making the case for a supposed surge in antisemitism, Rich offers another inadvertently revealing insight. He says Jewish children are suffering from online “abuse”—antisemitism—because they find it increasingly hard to participate on social media.

“Teenagers are much quicker to join social movements; we’ve just had Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion, #MeToo—now Jewish kids find all their friends are joining this [Palestinian solidarity] movement where they don’t feel welcome, or they are singled out because they’re Jewish.”

Fancifully, Rich is arguing that Jewish children raised in Zionist families and communities that have taught them either explicitly or implicitly that Jews in Israel have superior rights to Palestinians are being discriminated against because their unexamined ideas of Jewish supremacy do not fit with a pro-Palestinian movement predicated on equality.

This is as preposterous as it would have been, during the Jim Crow era, for white supremacist Americans to have complained of racism because their children were being made to feel out of place in civil rights forums.

Such assertions would be laughable were they not so dangerous.

**Demonized as antisemites**

Zionist supporters of Israel are trying to turn logic and the world upside down. They are inverting reality. They are projecting their own racist, zero-sum assumptions about Israel on to Palestinian solidarity activists, those who support equal rights for Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East.

As they did with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition, these Jewish groups are twisting the meaning of antisemitism, skewing it from a fear or hatred of Jews to any criticism of Israel that makes pro-Israel Jews feel uncomfortable.

As we watch these arguments being amplified uncritically by leading politicians and journalists, remember too that it was the only major politician to have demurred from this nonsensical narrative, Jeremy Corbyn, who became the main target—and victim—of these antisemitism smears.

Now these pro-Israel Jewish groups want to treat us all like Corbyn, demonizing us as antisemites unless we fall silent even as Israel once again brutalizes Palestinians.

—CounterPunch, May 26, 2021

[https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/05/26/groups-that-aid-israels-war-crimes-cant-deny-all-responsibility-for-those-crimes/](https://www.counterpunch.org/2021/05/26/groups-that-aid-israels-war-crimes-cant-deny-all-responsibility-for-those-crimes/)
Boeing’s $735 Million Bomb Sale to Israel

By Jake Johnson

The Biden administration has reportedly granted Boeing an export license for the sale of $735 million in advanced weaponry to the Israeli government, news that came as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday pledged $5.5 million in emergency aid to help Gaza recover from the latest Israeli bombing campaign.

Citing an unnamed congressional staffer, Alex Kane of Jewish Currents reported Tuesday, May 25, 2021, that the U.S. State Department approved the export license on May 21, a necessary step in the planned delivery of Joint Direct Attack Munitions and Small Diameter Bombs to Israel.

As Kane pointed out, the “two kinds of laser-guided munitions...were reportedly used by Israel in the 11-day attack on the Gaza Strip that ended on Friday with a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas.”

The Biden administration notified Congress of the proposed $735 million sale in early May, just days before Israel launched its latest onslaught against Gaza. The nearly two-week aerial and artillery campaign—which Biden administration officials and the president himself publicly defended—killed more than 240 Palestinians, displaced tens-of-thousands, and further decimated Gaza’s critical civilian infrastructure.

Warning that selling additional weapons to the Israeli government would deepen U.S. complicity in war crimes, a small coalition of progressive lawmakers last week mounted a late bid to block the agreement with so-called resolutions of disapproval.

But neither the House nor Senate resolution—led by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), respectively—has received a vote as the Biden administration plows ahead with the sale. The lawmakers say Congress still has a chance to stop the deal before the weapons are delivered.

Jewish Currents reported Tuesday that after being notified of the export license, Sanders “responded by placing a hold on all State Department nominees, blocking Congress from considering them for diplomatic posts.”

“After the administration committed to humanitarian aid for the rebuilding of Gaza, Sanders lifted the hold,” according to Jewish Currents.

Raed Jarrar, advocacy director of human rights group Democracy for the Arab World Now, said in a statement Tuesday that the State Department’s secretive approval of the export license “is all you need to know about its apparent anxiety at proceeding with this troubling deal while Israeli war crimes and apartheid rule continue unabated.”

“Rather than secretly approving arms sales to Israel ahead of his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu,” Jarrar added, “Secretary Blinken should do his due diligence and travel across Gaza to see exactly what kind of harm and destruction American weapons are causing Palestinians.”

After his meeting with Netanyahu in Jerusalem on Tuesday morning, Blinken visited the occupied West Bank and vowed that the U.S. will “provide $5.5 million in immediate disaster assistance for Gaza and a little over $32 million for [the U.N. Relief and Works Agency’s] emergency humanitarian appeal.”

In remarks to the press alongside Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, Blinken said the U.S. is committed to helping realize “the aspirations of the Palestinian people,” which “are like those of people everywhere: to live in freedom; to have their basic rights respected, including the right to choose their own leaders; to live in security; to have equal access to opportunity for themselves, for their children; to be treated with dignity.”

But human rights advocates and progressive members of Congress have stressed that selling weapons to the regime currently occupying and brutalizing the Palestinian people is at odds with any serious effort to secure lasting peace and justice in the region.

“The State Department should immediately revoke approval for this arms sale to, at minimum, allow for proper debate in Congress,” Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich.) told Jewish Currents. “Remember that these are weapons of war and destruction that will be used to kill children, bomb hospitals, homes, and schools—lives literally hang in the balance.”

—Common Dreams, May 26, 2021

In recent weeks, there have been unprecedented movements around the world in solidarity with the people of Palestine. Though Israel has been a racist, violent occupier of Palestine since its inception in 1948, the massive public support for the Palestinian cause is new. Much of this new support comes in response to Palestinians’ use of social media to document and publicize the regular abuse that they have long been resisting.

If this sounds familiar, it’s because roughly this time last year, a similar dynamic played out in the very heart of the U.S. empire. After decades of police violence against Black communities, people around the world took to the streets in solidarity with the call that Black Lives Matter. These protests came primarily in response to the gruesome video of Minneapolis cop Derek Chauvin murdering George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for eight minutes.

The Free Palestine movement in the Middle East and the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States are not mirror images—both have their own dynamics rooted in the unique histories of the oppressed groups leading them. However, there’s no denying that they share much in common. Both struggles are closely connected by the fact that Israel’s military, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), provides significant support to the institutions of policing that disproportionately target Black and Brown communities in the United States.

**We must demand that the United States not provide one more penny or bullet to Israel.**

**IDF and policing**

The IDF’s influence over U.S. police departments is well-documented. Hundreds of police departments throughout the United States have travelled to Israel to train with the IDF, oftentimes paid for by U.S. citizens. IDF soldiers have also trained thousands more police departments within the United States. These programs are not new. For example, the Atlanta police department, which is eleven times more likely to kill Black people as it is to kill white people, has received training from the IDF since 1992.

The IDF’s influence is not the original source of the racism and violence of police departments in the United States—an institution which evolved from slave patrols and union busting. The IDF, however, can test and then teach high-tech methods for occupation and repression. This includes murdering civilians, denying medical care, aggressively detaining children, attacking protests, and targeting journalists. All of these Israeli abuses are also staples of police departments in the United States.

**IDF and immigration**

In addition to the long history of the IDF training police departments, Israel’s military has lent its experience as a colonial occupier to ramp up militarization along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Since 2004, Elbit Systems, an Israeli private military technology company, has been the leading provider of surveillance equipment used in the increasingly deadly war against migrants from Latin America. Elbit Systems owes its success to years of the IDF testing its technologies on occupied Palestinians in Gaza.

The collaboration between Israeli military tech companies and border militarization in the United States has only grown. As investigative journalist Tom Engelhardt highlights in his reporting for *TomDispatch*, the state of Arizona has developed a particularly close relationship with Israeli tech firms that deploy their technology at the U.S. border. The same report also reveals that IDF brigadier general Roei Elkabetz spoke at a 2012 border technology conference in El Paso, Texas.

Along with providing surveillance technology, the IDF trains Immigration
and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers who have a reputation for inflicting terror on immigrant communities in the United States. In fact, Peter Edge, the Acting Deputy Director of ICE under Trump, trained in Israel as part of a seminar on counter-terrorism. The IDF has trained other federal agencies in counter-terrorism, including the FBI and the CIA.

Shared struggles

Under capitalism, systems of oppression are global. The relationship between the IDF and U.S. police highlights this perfectly. While many workers in the United States have correctly been pointing out our government funds the Israeli occupation of Palestine, it is important to understand that this relationship works both ways: the United States provides equipment and funding to the IDF to commit crimes against Palestinians, and the IDF teaches what they’ve learned to police in the U.S. to more effectively terrorize Black and immigrant communities.

This is why the working class must always take a consistent and non-negotiable stand against imperialism. The Black Lives Matter protests last year succeeded in forcing Minneapolis to prosecute and even sentence Derek Chauvin. The protests in support of Palestine recently forced Israel to agree to a ceasefire. But these are single victories—the violence against Black communities did not end with the Chauvin sentencing, and Israel’s violent occupation of Palestine is not ending with the recent ceasefire.

Here in the United States, workers can play an important role in the Palestinians’ struggle to free themselves from the Zionist occupation. Workers in the United States can and should use the power of strikes to stop the imperialist war machine. We must demand that the United States not provide one more penny or bullet to Israel. This is not just a demand in solidarity with Palestine, but a demand in solidarity with Black communities resisting police violence, immigrants who have a right to live in peace, and all oppressed communities fighting injustice under capitalism.

—Left Voice, May 24, 2021

https://www.leftvoice.org/israel-tests-repression-on-palestinians-then-teaches-u-s-cops/

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A Gazan’s View on Hamas: It’s Not Complicated

By Basma Ghalayini

When I was nine-years-old, I was shot by the Israel Defense Forces. Most people I grew up with in Gaza have a story like this: a near miss, a face-to-face confrontation with a fatal bombing, a massacre. Mine is nothing special.

It was 1992, during the first intifada, and I was coming home from the afternoon shift at an overcrowded school for refugees. In those days, there were regular scenes of defiance and confrontation outside the school entrance, between the Israeli militarized vehicles doing their rounds and the kids from the secondary school nearby. To my nine-year-old self, the clashes were a huge inconvenience.

My favorite show, the American soap opera “The Bold and the Beautiful,” started ten minutes after my last class, on Israel Channel 2. I looked forward to it all day, to watching it before my father, who wholly disapproved, returned home from his clinic.

I had to cross the street to get home. That day was a typical school day: Israeli jeeps on my right, classmates on my left. Barricades had been set up, tires were on fire, thick black smoke filled the air. Gunshots would burst out frequently. I waited for what felt like a reasonably long lull and then I ran across. I heard the bang at the same time that I felt a burning sensation in my calf. I blacked out with the image of Ridge and Brooke, the main protagonists of the show, finally reuniting.

A neighbor took me to the hospital. Thankfully the injury wasn’t severe: A glancing shot, a mere flesh wound. But the pain was immense for weeks. I never did get to see that episode.

Now it’s 2021, and I’ve been living in Britain for 12 years, happily married with two young children. I was, and am, a lucky one. Luckier than lucky. Waking each morning for most of the last two weeks to scroll through the latest lists of the dead and swipe through pictures of my old neighborhood, school, university buildings and the places of my childhood destroyed, I asked myself: What’s so hard for people to understand? Home is a universal concept, isn’t it? You only have one home, and it’s precious. So why are some people still rotely saying that the situation in Gaza is complicated, or that it’s about religion? For many of us, it’s neither of these things.

And it’s not about Hamas either.

President Biden’s announcement about the cease-fire on Friday empha-
sized the diplomatic efforts conducted with Israel, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Egypt, as mediator. He said that Gaza would be rebuilt with international help and that “we will do this in full partnership with the Palestinian Authority—not Hamas, the Authority—in a manner that does not permit Hamas to restock its arsenal.” But by pointedly excluding Hamas, the Biden administration only perpetuates the myth that Hamas is the central problem.

Hamas was democratically elected—in elections foisted upon Gaza by the Bush administration in 2006 with the blithe assumption that the mainstream secular party Fatah would win, led by the United States’ proxy hard man there, Mohammed Dahlan. Years of corruption—not to mention torture and human rights abuses—meant that many Gazans had lost faith in Fatah by then and weren’t prepared to vote the way Washington wanted them to. Hamas had been a militant Islamic resistance movement, born in the late 1980s, partly from Israel’s occupation of Gaza, and since it was a highly religious party, many of us assumed that at least it would be less corrupt.

Unfortunately, we don’t get elections every four years in Gaza, and Hamas’s victory was something that Gazans soon learned to regret. Critics of the government regularly are beaten, sometimes half-to-death, and freedoms are restricted. But we haven’t had a chance to vote Hamas out of power; 2006 was the last election we had.

...to focus on Hamas is to miss the point, and to reinforce the myth that the conflict is, in some fundamental manner, about the group. The conflict is about the Israeli occupation...

Which is perfect for the Israelis. Hamas, with its iron grip and rocket attacks, is the ideal hook on which to hang all blame. Its popularity has declined since 2006, though that has been buoyed lately—but that, too, actually is irrelevant. What Palestinians think of Hamas has nothing to do with what they think of the right to a legitimate resistance. And most of us believe in the latter. Who wouldn’t in our position?

We knew that the rickety rockets shot from Gaza were all that the Israel Defense Forces and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu needed to redirect public attention on Israeli self-defense and away from the harms inflicted on Palestinians. This isn’t Hamas’s first rodeo. And the provocation that started all this, the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes in East Jerusalem, wasn’t just a provocation. It was an attack on the very last stand of everything Palestinians have ever fought for: home.

Hundreds-of-thousands of Palestinians live in refugee camps, many elsewhere in the Middle East, often forgoing citizenship rights in that second country and passing on their statelessness to their children and grandchildren in the name of one thing. Home. No elected Palestinian government at this point is going to forget that and simply roll over just because some wannabe international peacemaker wants them to, for their career-boosting photo op in the Rose Garden. That’s been done already.

If any party other than Hamas were in power in Gaza right now, it might have tried to lobby for international support for the Palestinians of East Jerusalem a few days or weeks longer before launching rockets on Israel. But seeing its fellow countrymen and women made homeless, time and time again, would ultimately have forced the hand of even a non-Hamas government in Gaza, either drawing it into the fight or making it so unpopular for not getting involved that it’d be forced out of power. That’s why to focus on Hamas is to miss the point, and to reinforce the myth that the conflict is, in some fundamental manner, about the group. The conflict is about the Israeli occupation.

To focus on Hamas is also to sanitize the conflict, and in that way become
complicit in it. It allows people to express sympathy for ordinary Palestinians while blaming a few people at the top of the Palestinian leadership. But the right to self-defense against Israel’s continued aggression belongs to all Palestinians; legitimate resistance cannot be a right only for those Palestinians who believe exclusively in nonviolent self-defense—not in the face of the violence we endure. We, Palestinians, are in this together.

For others to pretend that Israel is waging a war against Hamas, rather than against all Palestinians, is what allows the kinds of attacks and crimes of recent days to be repeated every few years.

And now, if the cease-fire does hold, the spectacular violence of the last two weeks will slip out of the news cycle as Palestinians go back to suffering, largely out of view, the slow-motion violence of Israel’s continued oppression—its blockade of Gaza, its militarization of the West Bank, more evictions of Palestinians.

As kids, one of our favorite games was “shuhada’a.” It was a bit like “doctors and nurses,” in that one kid had to just lie there, doing nothing. But “shuhada’a” means “martyrs,” and in our game, one of us would lie perfectly still in a pretend coffin while the others carried it around chanting “Filistin Hurra” (Free Palestine).

What do you expect from a people who are shot at as kids and given only a prison, or a camp, to live in as adults, instead of their home? It’s not complicated.

Basma Ghalayini is a translator from the Arabic and the editor of “Palestine +100: Stories From a Century After the Nakba.”

—New York Times, May 24, 2021

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/24/opinion/israel-hamas-gaza-ceasefire.html?referringSource=articleShare

Solidarity with the Palestinian Freedom Struggle

Statement Issued by Jewish Voice for Peace

The following statement was issued by Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) on May 14, 2021. JVP describes itself as “a national, grassroots organization inspired by Jewish tradition to work for a just and lasting peace according to principles of human rights, equality, and international law for all the people of Israel and Palestine. JVP has over 500,000 online supporters, over 70 chapters and 15 student chapters, a Rabbinic Council, an Artist Council, an Academic Advisory Council, and an Advisory Board made up of leading U.S. intellectuals and artists.”

We are witnessing a watershed moment of Palestinian resistance in the face of unspeakable Israeli violence. The rampant brutality against Palestinians by the Israeli military, police and mobs—aided, orchestrated and encouraged by the Israeli government, and funded, supported and defended by the U.S. government—is horrifying in its inhumanity. In response, Palestinians across all of Palestine/Israel are rising up. Our grief and rage build with every new atrocity—and from the depths of horror, we honor the steadfastness of Palestinian resistance.

What we are witnessing is not a “conflict,” a “clash,” or a “war” between two equal parties. There is no mistaking the massive disparity of power between the Israeli government and the Palestinians it targets. Backed by $3.8 billion in annual military funding from the U.S. government, the Israeli government controls, dominates and dispossesses Palestinian lives and lands—from Sheikh Jarrah to Lydd/Lod to Gaza City.

This systematic oppression is by design. The Nakba—“catastrophe” in Arabic, referring to the forced displacement of more than 750,000 Palestinians—began in 1948 with the establishment of Israel, and never ceased. For 73 years, the Israeli govern-

Jews and others demonstrate in the U.S., mid-May, in solidarity with Palestinian struggle for self-determination. Sheikh Jarrah is the East Jerusalem neighborhood where Zionist settlers recently tried to evict Palestinians, triggering the current Palestinian uprising. (Photo: Jewish Voice for Peace)
ment has systematically stolen and demolished Palestinians’ homes, illegally seized their land, and separated them from each other. In this totalizing system of violence against Palestinians, no one is safe. We deplore the catastrophic loss of Palestinian life, and we grieve for the loss of all lives—Palestinian and Israeli.

We are on the side of unconditional commitment to justice, equality, freedom and dignity for all people, no exceptions. To achieve a future where all are safe and free, we must end the Israeli government’s settler-colonial apartheid regime.

Palestinian protester Mariam Afifi asked, “Do you want your kids to grow up defending the side of the oppressors?” Jews around the world must contemplate this question. We know our answer: We want our children to grow up defending oppressed people and fighting for a vision of collective liberation.

To achieve a future where all are safe and free, we must end the Israeli government’s settler-colonial apartheid regime.

Jewish communities must make a choice. Do we accede to a future rooted in denial and continue to allow apartheid, ethnic cleansing and massacre in our names? Or do we engage with hard truths and bring our whole selves to the struggle of teshuva, of repair for these harms?

We choose the struggle for justice over silence and complicity. We choose to join with Palestinians and the growing global movement in support of the right of return for Palestinians, as part of a shared future of justice, equality and freedom for all people.

Join us: Support the Palestinian-led call for Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS), demand an end to U.S. military funding to Israel, and help us build a Judaism and Jewish community beyond Zionism.

—World-Outlook.com, May 19, 2021


The Price of War

**Israeli newspaper publishes photos of all 67 Palestinian children killed in Gaza onslaught**

**By Julia Conley**

Human rights advocates and journalists applauded the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* for its “unprecedented” cover story Thursday, May 27, 2021—one featuring the photos and stories of 67 Palestinian children killed in the latest bombardment campaign by the Israel Defense Forces.

“This is the price of war,” the headline read.

The article came a day after the *New York Times* published its own extensive account of the youngest victims of Israel’s most recent 11-day offensive, in which the IDF frequently targeted residential areas of Gaza, known as the world’s largest open-air prison.

*Haaretz*’s focus on the children killed in Gaza was especially noteworthy, said author and Brooklyn College professor Louis Fishman, considering the newspaper’s “readers also send their children to fight in Israel’s wars.”

“This is unprecedented,” Fishman tweeted.

While *Haaretz* leans to the center-left editorially, Israeli’s mainstream media has traditionally not covered the Palestinian casualties of the IDF’s military campaigns and the Israeli government’s violent policies, said journalist Khaled Diab.

As Diab tweeted, previous attempts by organizations in Israel to publicize the human cost of the IDF’s assaults have been repressed.
Haaretz’s front page represented “a bold move,” tweeted journalist Saima Mohsin, adding, “Will it make a difference?”

Others on social media took note of the unprecedented cover story.

“Conversations around Israel/Palestine are changing in Jewish communities across the globe,” tweeted rabbi and author Abby Stein. “It’s about time.”

As Jewish Currents editor-in-chief Arielle Angell wrote last week in The Guardian, since Israel’s 2014 50-day assault on Gaza, which killed more than 2,100 Palestinians, rights advocates have “seen the growth of a small but committed Jewish anti-occupation movement [and] the last week and a half have brought an even larger circle of the community to a place of reckoning.”

We’ve seen Jewish politicians, celebrities, rabbinical students and others speak up loudly for Palestine. We’ve seen a powerful display of solidarity from Jewish Google employees, asking their company to sever ties with the IDF. At Jewish Currents, the leftwing magazine where I am now editor-in-chief, we asked for questions from readers struggling to understand the recent violence. We’ve been deluged. These questions taken in aggregate paint a striking portrait of a community at a turning point.

In Israel the Haaretz front page appeared to touch a nerve, garnering at least one outraged response from Oded Revivi, head of the Efrat Regional Council in an Israeli settlement in the West Bank, who said Haaretz’s article was evidence that “people pity the wrong mothers.”

On social media, Mairav Zonszein of the International Crisis Group said rather than the “price of war,” the Haaretz front page specifically shows the price of “Israel’s continued military rule, dispossession, discrimination, and violence.”

—Common Dreams, May 27, 2021
By Mona El-Naggar, Adam Rasgon and Mona Boshnaq, May 26, 2021

Jews Against the Occupation

U.S. Jews are increasingly breaking with Israel to support Palestine liberation
By Jay Saper and Noah Habeeb

The bombs Israel has dropped on Palestinian homes have reverberated around the globe, fueling a seismic shift within the U.S. Jewish community. More than ever, U.S. Jews are condemning the violence and calling upon Congress to end U.S. military funding to Israel.

Thanks in part to decades of grassroots activism, a generation is increasingly awakening to the gruesome sights in Gaza, and American Jews of all ages are recognizing that support for Palestinians is not incongruous with embracing a Jewish identity but rather consistent with it.

On May 14, 2021, over 700 people joined a Shabbat service held in the streets of Brooklyn, where protestors read the names and placed stones in remembrance of Palestinians killed by Israel’s latest attacks. Rabbi Miriam Grossman of Congregation Kolot Chayeinu led those gathered in reciting the Mourner’s Kaddish, the Jewish prayer spoken in honor of those who have died.

The following day, thousands more joined massive Palestinian-led protests in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn—the heart of Palestinian New York—to express solidarity and rage alongside New Yorkers of all backgrounds.

“Palestinians are doing every single thing they can to survive,” said Morgan Bassichis, a member of Jewish Voice for Peace, an anti-Zionist grassroots organization with over 70 chapters across the country. “Our duty and our responsibility and our commitment is to do every single thing we can do in solidarity with the Palestinian people.”

At the same time, the sheer horror of the Israeli bombardment of Gaza leading to the deaths of at least 66 children, the destruction of thousands of peoples’ homes, and targeting of media and medical infrastructure, including the only COVID testing site in Gaza, has driven people all over the world—including

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“Arielle Angel, editor of Jewish Currents, was astonished by the scale of the demonstrations.

“I felt alone as a Jew attending a Palestine solidarity rally in 2014,” she said. “I don’t feel alone anymore.”

The making of this moment

The courageous acts of Palestinians defending their homes in Sheikh Jarrah, fending off mob attacks in cities like Lod/Lydd, and resisting siege in Gaza have served as a catalyst for Jews taking to the streets.

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diaspora Jews—to speak out on Israel in ways they may not have before.

“I wanted to take action now as I finally felt the internal courage—and duty—to do so. I’ve historically been told the ‘conflict’ is too complicated,” said Emily Schacter who joined pro-Palestine protests for the first time in May, in Brooklyn. “In learning, listening and watching more, I’ve grown to feel confident and unafraid in voicing that Zionism is wrong, and that Israel is an apartheid state.”

The swelling of support for Palestinian liberation in this moment also reflects a deeper shift that has been underway in the Jewish community and beyond.

In January, B’Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, released a report acknowledging, as Palestinians have long expressed, that Israel’s treatment of Palestinians constitutes apartheid conditions. Human Rights Watch soon reached the same conclusion. In March, a group of 200 academics released the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, clarifying that antisemitism does not constitute antisemitism. Prominent Jewish studies and Israel studies scholars soon followed by condemning Israeli violence.

In April, liberal Zionist groups like J Street and T’ruah took the unprecedented action of supporting Minnesota Representative Betty McCollum’s bill to condition U.S. funding to Israel. In May, J Street held a national conference that included much conversation about the topic. As Mari Cohen reported, “While there was no audience to applaud, the conference’s virtual chat lit up with approval. ‘We love aid restrictions!’ wrote one attendee.”

A liberatory Jewish future demands full freedom for all.

While there is still a considerable distance between groups like J Street, which oppose the Palestinian-led call for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS), and Jewish Voice for Peace, which both embraces BDS and supports the Palestinian right to return, Jewish organizations across a wide spectrum are increasingly speaking out against Israeli human rights violations.

The pressure continues to mount, with over 500 Democratic staffers and former campaign staff signing an open letter urging President Biden to “hold Israel accountable.”

These shifts are not just happening in New York City, Washington, D.C. and on Twitter. Recent mobilizations in Chicago, Milwaukee, Birmingham and San Diego show the surge of support for Palestinian human rights is in fact a national phenomenon, reminiscent of last summer’s sweeping racial justice uprisings.

“I don’t deserve applause because I am too late”

As organizations take sharper stands and new individuals are moved to speak out for Palestinian rights, even long committed activists are leveling up their commitment in the wake of the recent attacks.

Talia, a Mizrahi Jew and member of Jewish Voice for Peace, shares in a video that has been viewed over 600,000 times, “This is the first time I am using my full real name to stand in solidarity with Palestinians. I don’t deserve applause because I am too late. Because every single day that we don’t speak out as Jews in support of Palestinian liberation is another day too late.”

Speaking with one’s name often comes with a price. Palestinian solidarity activists have lost jobs and faced estrangement from their families for their politics. Just days after Israeli bombs demolished the Associated Press offices in Gaza, a Jewish AP reporter Emily Wilder in Arizona was fired due to her past activism with Students for Justice in Palestine, a move which elicited outrage from fellow journalists.

Yet more and more people are willing to take such risks as activists strengthen their mutual support net-
works and the Palestine solidarity movement grows in size and strength.

Elena Stein, a staff organizer with Jewish Voice for Peace, captures this sentiment: “For all of those who have taken risks and who have lost significant things, we honor your risk. For all those considering taking a risk, we want you to know, we have your back. You call on us. We want to have your back.”

In fact, a significant infrastructure exists to organize those who are becoming politicized on Palestine. Jewish Voice for Peace has 500,000 online supporters and over 70 chapters. While IfNotNow, a growing youth movement opposed to the occupation, is in the midst of an extensive reevaluation process, the group will surely continue to play an important role.

Additionally, emerging Jewish religious and spiritual communities offer meaningful connection for non-Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews. These spaces include Jewish Voice for Peace’s Havurah Network, synagogues like Tzedek Chicago and Kehilla Synagogue in California, as well as organizational Rabbinical Councils that offer pastoral care to Jewish Palestine solidarity activists.

Increasingly, Jews can continue to participate in Jewish communal life while speaking out against Israeli apartheid. In fact, many Jews are finding deeper spiritual connection in communities that do not over-emphasize Israel at the expense of other components of Jewish identity.

“All of our struggles for liberation are intertwined”

A week after the initial Shabbat action, 700 New York Jews gathered again to decry the violence and march to the doorstep of Senator Schumer’s home, calling upon him to support the resolution introduced by Senator Sanders to disapprove of the U.S. sale of military weapons to Israel.

This time, Audrey Sasson, executive director of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, felt moved to share that while her organization was founded to focus on domestic issues, its first public event served to honor Nelson Mandela after the anti-apartheid hero who was recently freed from prison at the time was snubbed by the establishment Jewish community for his expression of solidarity with Palestinians.

“I want to say clearly and for the record we believe in speaking out and taking action in support of Palestinian rights and freedom and in demanding an end to Israeli apartheid, occupation, displacement, annexation, aggression, and ongoing assaults,” said Sasson. “All of our struggles for liberation are intertwined.”

...anti-Zionism does not constitute antisemitism...

In a year that began with neo-Nazis storming the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, donning attire glorifying Hitler’s genocide, the question of Jewish safety amidst a spike in antisemitism is pertinent.

According to the May 2021 Pew Research Poll, 75 percent of American Jews believe there is more antisemitism in the United States today than five years ago, a result of President Trump utilizing his time in the White House to embolden white supremacists.

Yet, Israel’s blatant disregard for basic human dignity has led the American Jewish community to recognize that support for Israel is not a tenable answer to the question of how to seek safety for Jewish people.

In fact, according to Emma Saltzberg of Data for Progress, Trump’s overzealous support of Israel’s rightwing, often encouraged by Christian Zionists, “Has opened up new space for progressives to criticize Israeli policies more sharply, calling special attention to the human rights crisis facing Palestinians.”

According to Pew, the vast majority of American Jews do not strongly oppose the Palestinian-led call for BDS. Instead of aligning with the Israeli state, which is backed by billions of dollars in U.S. military funding, the unprecedented numbers of American Jews spilling into the streets right now believe that a demilitarized and decolonized future means a safer world for us all, and recognize BDS as a viable tactic in that pursuit.

On May 18, 2021, the world witnessed Palestinians leading a historic general strike. Responding to their call for solidarity demonstrations across the globe, New York Jews joined Palestinians in marching from the Israeli embassy to the offices of AIPAC and the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, calling out the complicity of the organizations in the violent attacks on Palestinians. Police arrested several demonstrators as they disrupted business as usual in Midtown Manhattan.

We’ve simply reached a point of no return. The signs of a watershed moment surround us: gracing the cover of the New York Times and ricocheting through the halls of Congress.

Unconditional support for Israel has been broken. An end to U.S. military funding is on the horizon. A liberatory Jewish future demands full freedom for all.

—Truthout, May 28, 2021
https://truthout.org/articles/us-jews-are-increasingly-breaking-with-israel-to-support-palestinian-liberation/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=1d1e6a7de3cd-4a92-9cf0-ddb6b292b8a4

...Zionism is wrong, and Israel is an apartheid state...

Vol. 21, No. 4 SOCIALIST VIEWPOINT 53
Israel: New Leader, Same Occupation

Naftali Bennett takes over as Israeli prime minister

By Mirta Pacheco

Benjamin Netanyahu’s 12-year reign as Israeli prime minister has ended. On Sunday, the Israeli Knesset (parliament) gave a vote of confidence to the coalition of opposition parties, paving the way for Naftali Bennett to take over as the country’s leader. Bennett, a religious tech entrepreneur and leader of the right-wing Yamina party, will serve as prime minister for two years. The post will then be taken up by Yair Lapid, a former TV presenter and journalist who founded the Yesh Atid party. The vote of confidence was 60-59, with one abstention.

The new Israeli regime is betting on overcoming the political crisis and gridlock that led the country to hold four elections in two-and-a-half-years. After the violent offensive against the Palestinian people and the bombings in Gaza last month, Israel encountered a new reality: an Arab resistance that, alongside Israel during the last operation in Gaza, Guardian of the Walls, Palestinian people. The new government will aim to preserve national unity, although he focused on the ultra-Orthodox sector.

On the other hand, the Zionist regime has also observed how the Israeli ultraright and settlers terrorize—in some case even murder—Palestinians in mixed Israeli cities. The Netanyahu government and other Israeli political forces encouraged these actions, and the police itself let them take place. But the attacks on Palestinians again aroused international opposition and marches, as well as demonstrations by Jewish Israelis, albeit small ones.

Bennett was referring to this situation when he said, ahead of Sunday’s vote, “This time, at the decisive moment, we have taken responsibility. We understood that we have to safeguard our home. To continue on in this way—more elections, more hatred, more vitriolic posts on Facebook—is just not an option. Therefore, we stopped the train, a moment before it barreled into the abyss.” In the last sentence, Bennett criticized Netanyahu without naming him, since, logically, the latter was this train’s conductor.

Against this backdrop, Bennett made clear in his swearing-in speech where his policies will be oriented.

He referred to Iran, stating that it “has established terrorist outposts—from Syria, through Gaza and Lebanon, and to Yemen.” He added, “Israel will not allow Iran to be equipped with nuclear weapons. Israel is not party to the [U.S. nuclear agreement with Iran], and will maintain full freedom to act.” This was a message for the Iranian state, but perhaps also a warning for the U.S. government, given that President Biden intends to reestablish the U.S. nuclear agreement, albeit with certain conditions.

Bennett thanked the U.S. government, highlighting the strategic alliance that the imperialist country maintains with Israel. He also mentioned Biden’s position in the face of the criminal Zionist attack on the Gaza Strip: “On behalf of us all, I want to thank the president of the United States of America, Joe Biden, for standing alongside Israel during the last operation in Gaza, Guardian of the Walls, and for his long-standing commitment to the security of Israel.”

Bennett staunchly supports illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the Occupied West Bank, and he once helmed Yasha, the West Bank settler council. Unsurprisingly, he has affirmed that he will expand the settlements in Area C of the West Bank, an area of Palestinian land where Israel has absolute military and administrative control thanks to the Oslo Accords. This is consistent with his career-long push to fully annex the area. His announcement came hand-in-hand with the proposal to economically reinforce the Israeli army. This can only mean a deepening of the attacks and oppression that the Israeli Defense Forces maintain over the Palestinian people.

Finally, as a response to the increase in unemployment in Israel, Bennett generically proposed a plan for jobs, especially in the tech sector, and economic aid for small businesses, such as kosher restaurants.

In general, Bennett appealed to national unity, although he focused on the ultra-Orthodox sector.

What is clear is that for the Palestinian people, the new government will mean more of the same brutal repression, occupation, apartheid, and violence. Fundamentally, Bennett’s new government will aim to preserve the foundations of the “Jewish National State of Israel.” We must continue to show our solidarity with Palestine and to demand the end of all foreign support to the oppressive Israeli regime.

—Left Voice, June 15, 2021

June 11, 2021—In the wake of the final demise of the Keystone XL pipeline earlier this week, Indigenous leaders and climate activists on Friday implored President Joe Biden to use his executive authority to pull the plug on other destructive fossil fuel transport projects advanced during the Trump administration—from Line 3 to the Dakota Access Pipeline.

“We shuttered that zombie pipeline,” Joye Braun, national pipelines organizer with the Indigenous Environmental Network, said of Keystone XL during a press call with fellow climate champions. “It’s time for the Biden administration to make good on his promises. They promised they wanted to get it right with tribal leaders.”

On the first day of his presidency, Biden fulfilled his campaign vow to rescind a Trump-issued federal permit that allowed construction of the Keystone XL pipeline in the United States. But in signing the “NoKXL Pledge” on the campaign trail, Biden also committed to halting the Dakota Access Pipeline—which the Trump administration granted final approval—as well as other oil and gas projects that would “exacerbate our climate crisis.”

Biden, however, has been conspicuously silent on major fossil fuel projects such as Enbridge’s Line 3, a tar sands pipeline whose construction has sparked mass protests and civil disobedience in northern Minnesota.

“How can anyone with a straight face not reject Line 3. It’s exactly the same size and it’s carrying the same stuff [as Keystone XL],” 350.org co-founder Bill McKibben said Friday.

On Monday, June 7, 2021, around 2,000 Indigenous water protectors and allies converged near a Line 3 construction site near Minnesota’s Itasca State Park, where they were met by local law enforcement and a low-flying Department of Homeland Security helicopter. Nearly 250 demonstrators were reportedly arrested during the day of action against the pipeline, a multi-billion-dollar expansion project that would have the equivalent climate impact of 50 new coal-fired power plants and 38 million new gasoline vehicles on U.S. roads.

During Friday’s press call, climate leaders called on Biden to apply the same standard to Line 3 and other “Trump pipelines” that he applied to Keystone XL, which the president characterized as a threat to the planet that also “disserves the U.S. national interest.”

“This is about our life and our wildlife and our water,” said Winona LaDuke of Honor the Earth, emphasizing that direct action against the Line 3 expansion will continue until the project is killed. “This pipeline made no sense seven years ago. It makes less sense now.”

Mike Brune, head of the Sierra Club, added that the crucial question facing the administration is, “Will these Trump pipelines become Biden pipelines?”

“We are in a hole. Will we stop digging?” Brune continued. “We know that to solve a problem, you have to start by not making it worse. If we want to address historical inequities, we have to stop perpetuating them. If we want to have clean water, we have to stop poisoning it. If we want to solve the climate crisis, we can’t make it worse.”

To the dismay of climate justice campaigners, the Biden administration has recently gone to bat for Trump-era fossil fuel initiatives in court, including an Alaska drilling project that is expected to produce up to 160,000 barrels of oil a day over 30 years. Biden’s Army Corps of Engineers has also formally opposed a shutdown of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which carries hundreds-of-thousands of barrels of oil per-day from North Dakota to Illinois.

Environmentalists have warned that such actions by the administration run directly counter to Biden’s already-inadequate pledge to slash U.S. carbon emissions by at least 50 percent compared to 2005 levels by the end of the decade and transition away from planet-warming fossil fuels.

Jane Kleeb, the founder and president of Bold Nebraska, said Friday that “we are asking President Biden and Kamala Harris to stand with us.”

“If there’s a simple ask of the Biden administration, it’s to revoke any permits that were granted under Trump for these risky pipelines,” added Kleeb. “We want to see action on climate, and we want to see action for our families.”

—Common Dreams, June 11, 2021
**Anti-Imperialist Manifesto in Defense of the Environment**

*By La Via Campesina International Peasants’ Movement*

*The planet before profits—Only one Earth*

Despite our adventures into space, we know that, for now, we humans have only one planet to call home. Our survival here is dependent on the survival of all living things here—plant and animal.

The unrestrained extraction and exploitation of natural resources for profit by the large corporations, and the logic of the capitalist system have depleted our planet.

The destructive power of the current stage of capitalism—financial capitalism—is unprecedented. Transnational companies continue to increase their capacity to exploit common goods, pushing forward in mining projects, deforestation, and the private appropriation of water among other things. In agriculture, transnational companies apply the model of agribusiness based on mono-crops and pesticide use, that destroy biodiversity and change the climate. The imperialists of the USA and other global north countries attack peripheral countries looking to privatize common goods that the people, the real owners of natural resources, used to take care of in each country.

The result is clear: we are experiencing the worst environmental crisis in the history of humanity and all of humanity will be affected if this unhealthy dynamic of capital continues. Climate change is already affecting people’s lives all across the world, and this is not the only consequence of the environmental crisis. The world’s water is contaminated by plastics and pesticides and the springs are drying up. We are also seeing dramatic rates of extinction of the planet’s biodiversity as well as large scale biopiracy—where commercial interests patent naturally occurring biochemical or genetic material imposing limits on how they can be used even in their naturally occurring environments. The soil is being degraded by deforestation and mono-cropping, and large regions are being completely destroyed by large-scale mining.

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**Putting a stop to capitalist barbarism is the central task of our time.**

The COVID-19 pandemic is the latest manifestation of this environmental and systemic crisis. The origin of these super pathogens is directly related to the destruction of ecosystems historically conserved by peasant and traditional communities. Environmental devastation liberates microorganisms that are in equilibrium in their natural habitat. When these microorganisms encounter large industrial installations, overpopulated with various animals that are confined and bombarded with antibiotics and hormones, they reproduce like pathogens, then they come into contact with large human populations, including people with reduced natural immune defenses due to the constant agrochemical contamination from the industrially produced food they eat. This process, in addition to deforestation and the elimination of the habitats of wild animals provokes the migration of pathogens to human beings. If this mode of production continues, we will have many new viruses, leading to new pandemics.

All human beings are being affected by this degradation of our planet, especially women, children, Indigenous and the poorest people of the world. Today we also have more than 134,000 species of flora and fauna that are under threat of extinction.

It is important also to highlight the nefarious role that military activities play in the destruction of the planet. In addition to carrying out constant attacks on the lives of the people themselves, the US military, with its allies, is one of the biggest contaminators in the world, through its toxic legacy of depleted uranium, and its use of oil, fuel for airplanes, pesticides and defoliants like Agent Orange and lead.

Some corporations, instead of combatting the causes of planetary destruction, focus on green capitalism, converting natural resources into commodities and new areas for market speculation, like carbon credits, environmental preservation credits, and other false solutions that will not resolve the social
and ecological needs of the people. The empire has tried to restructure its economic base with market-based projects that are built around the increased exploitation of natural resources in the global south to produce a new supposedly “green” technological base.

This path will inevitably lead to the destruction of humanity and of nature as we know it. It is a project of death, domination and destruction.

All human beings are being affected by this degradation of our planet, especially women, children, Indigenous and the poorest people of the world.

The solution is in the rebuilding of the relationship between human beings and nature, where life, collective well-being, and ecological rhythms—not greed and profit—guide the actions of nations and peoples. It is a solution focused on agroecological production of food; the democratization of the access to land through agrarian reform; the protection and care of common goods such as water, biodiversity and land; and the transition to an energy model that responds to the real needs of the working class with social and environmental justice, overcoming patriarchy and racism.

Putting a stop to capitalist barbarism is the central task of our time. We need to put an end to the domination of capital over life in order to create a world that is just, egalitarian and vibrant, so that we all can live well and in peace.

—La Via Campesina, June 2, 2021

Kevin Cooper, a leading death penalty abolitionist, who has been serving a very long prison term on California’s death row—over 37 years!—has just won an important milestone on his road to exoneration and freedom.

Governor Gavin Newsom, in an executive order issued on May 28, 2021, appointed a prestigious law firm to “conduct a full review of the trial and independent records in the case and of the facts underlying the conviction.” Newsom’s order directs the law firm—Morrison and Foerster—“to investigate, report, and make a recommendation” concerning Kevin Cooper’s application for clemency and his claims of innocence, plus to evaluate “recently conducted DNA tests.”

This publication has been following Kevin Cooper’s struggle for many years, printing articles by him and about his case of innocence in the brutal homicide of a family, the Ryans, and their young guest, Christopher Hughes, in 1983 in Chino Hills, San Bernardino County in Southern California. The evidence of Cooper’s innocence is extensive.

The one surviving victim of the murders, eight-year-old Josh Ryan, signaled to investigators that three white men had killed his family, Kevin Cooper is a Black man. Witnesses reported seeing three white men driving in the Ryan’s vehicle the night of the murders and other witnesses reported three white men in bloody clothing acting strangely in a nearby bar. Also, the girlfriend of one of the possible killers turned in a pair of bloody coveralls belonging to the boyfriend to the sheriff’s department, who subsequently discarded them and lied about who ordered them to be discarded. The Ryan’s car was found with blood on three seats in the vehicle. These are only a few examples in a case rife with evidence of corruption and misconduct by the sheriff’s department, the D.A., and judges who ruled against Kevin Cooper in the trials and appeals which upheld his conviction. Evidence in the case, Kevin Cooper’s attorneys have pointed out, was mishandled, tampered with, and destroyed.

One of the really shocking facts about this case is that the victims had been stabbed or slashed a combined 140 times with at least three different weapons and that the murders were completed in a very short period of time—only a few minutes—an impossibility for one perpetrator.

And, at a time when frame up convictions are being questioned and re-examined throughout the country, due in large measure to revelations of racist frame ups against Black and Latinx people by police and district attorneys, the San Bernardino DA’s office continues to defend its conduct and calls Governor Newsom’s order “inappropriate.” The SBDA office continues to defend their role in the frame up of Kevin Cooper even when sheriff depu-
ties involved in the case were found to have stolen large quantities of heroin, stolen a huge number of guns from police lockers, lied about lab results of evidence tested, mixed blood of more than one person in an evidence test tube, lied in court about evidence, and so much more.

It has taken major national attention from important media sources such as the New York Times, which printed a lengthy investigation of Cooper’s case by Nicholas Kristof, and the CBS television documentary program, 48 Hours, directed by Erin Moriarty, as well as articles in the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and several others, including the San Francisco Bay View, several internet publications such as ScheerPost, and many leftwing periodicals. Socialist Viewpoint has printed many essays by Kevin Cooper, who is acknowledged within the community of death penalty abolitionists and prison reformers as a leading spokesman for abolition and justice. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund had called on the governor to investigate the case, saying that “it was marred by racial discrimination.”

The defense attorneys and investigators of Mr. Cooper’s case have continued their investigation of the facts and evidence over the years of the appeals and subsequent requests for clemency from three different governors. So, supporters hope the investigation by the law firm appointed by Governor Newsom will be conducted expeditiously and that Kevin Cooper will walk out of San Quentin State Prison this year. It’s well past time for a full exoneration!

Learn more about his case at: www.kevincooper.org
Write to:
Kevin Cooper #C-65304 4-EB-82
San Quentin State Prison
San Quentin, CA 94974
www.freekevincooper.org

“Prisons transcend what people who are not behind the wall can imagine. The U.S. is setting a new standard for desensitizing society to inhumane treatment, especially with regards to solitary confinement, because it methodically kills all that is human within us—our most basic need for social interaction—and drives prisoners to the abyss of insanity.”

—Mumia Abu-Jamal

I’ve been incarcerated for 14 years and out of those 14 years, eight were spent in solitary confinement. That’s a majority of my incarceration spent in isolation. While I was in solitary confinement, oftentimes I would go to outside recreation escorted by two guards handcuffed and shackled. Once outside, I’d be locked in an individual dog cage as were my peers, where we’d talk about what’s going on in the units, sports, politics, TV shows, etc. Mental health wasn’t a topic we discussed despite the fact that these conditions of confinement we were subjected to was explicitly designed to deteriorate our mental health. It’s hard enough for one to be incarcerated in prison’s general population. For those in solitary confinement each day is a fight to maintain their sanity. The conditions of solitary confinement are well known to create or worsen ones’ anxiety, depression, paranoia, irritability, withdrawal, hallucinations, hypersensitivity, self-mutilation, and thoughts of suicide.

Given all that is widely known of the negative effects of solitary confinement, it begs to raise the question: Why do prisons continue such practice which has been deemed cruel and unusual punishment? The answer is relatively simple. Such brutality is not only consistent with the history of Amerika, but it’s as American as apple pie. Other than solitary confinement, another example is the death penalty. A lot of innocent men and women have been wrongfully convicted and murdered by the state or the federal prison system, while many continue to languish on death row despite all evidence proving their innocence. Case in point: Kevin Cooper in California.

In my personal experience, the worse part of being in solitary confinement was year-after-year going by without ever knowing when I would be released. Upon my arrival at Red Onion State Prison in 2012, Virginia’s Supermax, I was reminded that I’d never see General Population again, so as the years went by, inevitably, I began to believe.

Nonetheless, after eight years, I was finally released. When I got to General Population, it was the first time in nearly a decade that I was around so many people, moving in all directions, the noise and chaos of the prison environment. I instantly noticed how uncomfortable I was around so many people to the point I would self-isolate and withdraw. I was constantly anxious and sporadically depressed. In the midst of my attempt to readjust to my being in General Population after such an extensive period of time, my grandfather passed away. I was under tremendous stress. Yet even though I was no longer in solitary confinement, what I was subjected to continued to haunt me—the assault by 13 guards while I was handcuffed, the electric stun belt, being strapped down and left immobile for days, deprivation of meals, outside recreation, no showers, the violent cell extractions, being incommunicado from family, comrades and friends, vivid images of when I observed a peer’s lifeless body being carted out of the cell after he committed suicide. All these things plus more took a toll on my mental health.
Because I didn’t want those closest to me to worry, I would suppress my vulnerability and what I was going through and opted to deal with it on my own. I’d externally project an image of someone who is strong but deep inside I was suffering in silence. It’s a terrible feeling to suppress, even deny, your own pain and feelings. You constantly worry about your vulnerability being seen as some form of weakness or you worry about how people’s perception of you may change. Whatever it could be, none of it is worth the psychological toll it takes on you.

At the risk of sounding contradictory, I also fathom why most people, specifically those in solitary confinement and prison population are faint-hearted about seeking help for their mental health. I understand that in many cases, talking to the prison’s mental health professionals (I use this term loosely) can be used against us in some capacity at some point of our incarceration. Therefore, this legitimate hesitancy to discuss our mental health with anyone is a survival mechanism. I’ve long ago learned that talking to those trusted people close to me about my struggles has been cathartic and therapeutic in many ways.

Anxiety and sporadic depression is something I deal with. I acknowledge that solitary confinement has had an impact on my mental health. No one subjected to years in solitary confinement comes out unharmed. Here’s what George Jackson said about that: “There are only two types of people released from these places. The rebels and the broken. The broken ones are so damaged that they will never again be suitable members of any social unit. Everything that is good when they entered the joint is gone when they leave. It brings out the very best in a person or destroys them entirely, but none are unaffected.” It certainly brought out the very best of me, but I wasn’t unaffected either.

Whether incarcerated or not, we all go through things in life. Some events create wonderful memories, whereas others leave us traumatized and prison is traumatizing, for it does nothing to ameliorate one’s mental health, but merely exacerbates it. I share my story in hopes to encourage others to share theirs and to know that mental health isn’t some taboo conversation. We are all in this struggle together. Let’s share our stories, educate the public and break the stigma on mental health.

All power to the people!
Peter Kamau Mukuria #1197165
Red Onion State Prison
P.O. Box 1900
Pound, VA 24279

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**Interstate Prison Transfers**

**Weapons of political repression**

*By Kevin “Rashid” Johnson*

That indictment enumerated several categories of political imprisonment practiced by the U.S. government. Under “Count III: Cruel, Inhumane, and Degrading Treatment,” it identified Amerika’s use of interstate prison transfers as a form of political repression against political prisoners. It stated:

“Retaliatory Transfers: Political prisoners, including those who have become politicized since their incarceration, are transferred from one prison to another in retaliation for the exercise of their right to free speech and/or association in the prisons, and/or to isolate them from outside friends and supporters. Most states and the federal government are now parties to an interstate compact permitting a prisoner in one state to serve his/her sentence thousands of miles away from home and family.”

**Politically in captivity**

Since 2012, I have been transferred between states under interstate compacts five times because of my political activities: from my home state of Virginia to Oregon, Texas, Florida, then back to Virginia, and now to Indiana. In my transfer to Indiana, I was traded for Shaka Shakur, another prisoner who has been politically active for a number of years and a thorn in the side of Indiana prison officials. He wrote about our swap in a 2019 article.¹

I’d spent the first decade of my imprisonment physically warring against abuses of myself and other prisoners in the Virginia prison system. I was first exposed to revolutionary ideas and history, and began my political journey in 2001, and from there began writing and working with outside activists.

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¹ Additional detail about Kevin "Rashid" Johnson's political activities and transfers can be found in his writings and articles. For more information, please refer to his published works or official statements.
In addition to writing political articles, I wrote about the abuses I and others suffered and witnessed, and contributed to developing several prisoner support organizations, national and state-based protest actions, cofounded the New Afrikan Black Panther Party (NABPP, now the Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party, or RIBPP,) and other efforts.

In 2009 I was labeled a “domestic terrorist threat” in a “2009 Virginia Terrorism Threat Assessment Report,” written by the Virginia State Police’s fusion center in collaboration with the Feds. According to the report, the reason for this slanderous classification and blatant political targeting, was the proven “influence” of my writings in rallying “prisoners and their associates on the outside to unite against law enforcement and the correctional system,” and my cofounding an organization (the NABPP) that sought “to continue the mission of the original Black Panthers.”

With my work and publicizing prison abuses to the public, the repression I faced changed qualitatively and intensified in comparison to the repression I experienced when I’d responded with isolated physical resistance. I continued writing and organizing and was able to counter a lot of this repression by mobilizing outside supporters and through legal efforts.

I was also repeatedly targeted with trumped up criminal indictments for physical resistance to guard abuses, including multiple counts of attempted capital murder against guards and felonious assaults, all of which were thrown out in turn with me representing myself.

**Retaliatory transfers**

It was then, in early 2012, that Virginia officials first transferred me without prior notice or hearing to another state—Oregon—where Oregon officials attempted to incite racial violence against and between me and various white supremacist prison groups, many of whom I ended up politicizing.

I wrote about my Oregon experiences in a 2013 article, “Political Struggle in the Teeth of Prison Reaction.”

My political work and writings about abusive conditions continued in Oregon. I was subjected to repression there through the mentioned attempts to incite violence, bogus disciplinary actions, being thrown in solitary confinement, and so on, which did nothing to deter me. Consequently, Oregon officials demanded Virginia move me elsewhere.

I was then transferred in 2013 to the notoriously abusive Texas prison system, where as soon as I arrived and while still in chains and defenseless, I was assaulted by guards in riot gear, then by ranking officials (an assistant warden, major and prison guard captain,) and had my dreadlocks forcibly cut off.

As soon as the restraints were removed, several physical altercations followed with their riot teams (who retreated,) and I was promptly transferred from their reception center to a maximum-security prison and thrown into solitary. This all occurred on my first day in the Texas prison system.³

As in Oregon, my political work and writing exposing inhumane prison conditions continued in Texas. Again, repression followed which I resisted, and which had no deterrent effect on me. Texas officials ordered Virginia to remove me.

This time, during 2017, I was sent to Florida, the country’s most violently and notoriously abusive prison system, and held in that state’s most notoriously abusive prisons, prisons acknowledged by Florida’s own Congressional representatives to be run by the Klan.

As Kimberly Daniels, a Black Florida Congresswoman stated after touring one such Florida prison and the terrifying treatment even she received from the staff in 2018 said, “I couldn’t sleep for two days after leaving that place. It’s a culture. That’s a city where the KKK lived. And they work in the prison.”⁴ She was talking about the Reception and Medical Center in Lake Butler, Florida, the first prison I was held at when I was first sent to Florida in 2017.

Compared to my prior interstate placements, repression against me and abuses I witnessed were greatly
increased in the Florida prison system. My writing and political work also intensified—again I was not curbed.

In Florida, officials also tried to hide my location from the public and outside supporters, and frustrate my ability to communicate with the outside. I was not listed in the state’s online prisoner locator system, and people who called the prisons about me including attorneys were told I was located elsewhere.

The deliberate concealment of my location, added a particularly sinister and illegal aspect to my domestic exile, applying a German Nazi tactic of wartime political repression (enforced disappearance.)

Secret detention is a form of enforced disappearance which has been a crime under international law since the 1946 judgment of the Nuremberg Tribunal against Nazi war criminals. In relevant part, that tribunal convicted Nazi Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel for his role in enforcing Adolf Hitler’s “Night and Fog” decree issued in December 7, 1941, that called for secretly detaining and disappearing people deemed a threat to German security, but “who were not to be immediately executed.”

After a physical altercation between me and guards, which was prompted by me speaking out about their routinely refusing meals and assaulting a neighboring prisoner who suffered obvious mental illness, Florida officials demanded that Virginia remove me “within five days.”

Because Virginia officials didn’t have any other state willing to accept me within that timeframe, they had to temporarily take me back in Virginia. Upon my return I was housed so as to keep me isolated from other prisoners. They admittedly feared my influence on others and exposing their mistreatments to the public.

Initially I was held alone in a completely empty cellblock in the state’s super-maximum security Red Onion State Prison. Then I was moved to the state’s death row at Sussex One State Prison, where only three death row prisoners remained. They were ordered by the warden not to communicate with me. When these prisoners openly defied the warden, I was then moved into another isolated cellblock and denied outside exercise and other basic entitlements.

Efforts to isolate me continued until Virginia officials finally negotiated with Indiana to take me. Here in Indiana, where I remain, officials have again tried to hide my location by not listing me in the state’s online prisoner locator system.

Upon our being traded, both Shaka Shakur and I have been targeted with various well-established “counterintelligence” tactics, calculated to discredit and isolate us and incite conflict with prisoners, including official efforts to falsely portray us as informants (putting “snitch jackets” on us) to other prisoners in these “alien” states where we are relatively unknown to other prisoners.

Snitch jacking is a particularly sinister counterintelligence tactic commonly used by the pigs specifically to destroy independent activists and organizations. Ward Churchill wrote about it in his book on the FBI’s counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) against the Black Panther Party and American Indian Movement, where he explained:

“Snitch-jacketing’ or ‘bad-jacketing’ refers to the practice of creating suspicion—through the spread of rumors, manufacture of evidence, etc.—that bona fide organizational members, usually in key positions, are FBI/police informers, guilty of such offenses as skimming organizational funds and the like. The purpose of this tactic was to ‘isolate and eliminate’ organizational leadership; such efforts were continued—and in some instances accelerated—when it became known that the likely outcome would be extreme violence visited upon the ‘jacketed’ individual(s.) Bad-jacketing was a very commonly used technique....

Churchill went on to explain that “jacketing” people is “well known in prisons where guards are adept” at playing prisoners against each other.

Indiana’s prisons present a particularly fertile environment for officials to snitch jacket prisoners. This is because the prison culture in Indiana is one where officials have successfully molded prisoners to think like them, and have cultivated a value system where prisoners inherently distrust and compete with each other, but trust and look to win acceptance, favors, and approval from the pigs. The Willie Lynch mentality and peer suspicion is deeply rooted in the culture.

The prisoners are mentally softened up to not think critically or seek unity among themselves, by the prevalence of officially facilitated addiction and petty materialism, and the uncritical practice of prisoners habitually gossiping, rumormongering, prying into others’ personal affairs, and readily discussing personal things and engaging in “friendly” banter with the pigs—a total reversal of the old prison and political culture of decades past. An informant culture prevails where the prisoners openly give information to officials and spread misinformation generated by them.

In any case, in Indiana my political work and writings have continued, alongside my having previously unavailable access to communicate with outside people using the phone via tablets we have use of inside our cells throughout the day. I have therefore been able to contribute more directly to the outside work of others and organizations I support and cofounded. I continue to experience the range of repressions, and remain undeterred as ever.

These have been the conditions I have experienced and contended with, and which prompted my ongoing domestic exile (being bounced from state to state) over the past nine years—
political oppression and COINTELPRO are alive and well in Amerika. Specific accounts of the conditions I experienced and witnessed over these years can be read in the many articles on my website, which are separated according to each state system I have been imprisoned in (see, rashidmod.com.)

Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!
All Power to the People!
Write to Kevin “Rashid” Johnson:
Kevin Johnson #264847
Wabash Valley Correctional Facility
6908 S. Old U.S. HWY 41, P.O. Box 500
Carlisle, IN 47838


6 Ward Churchill, Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret War Against The Black Panther Party And The American Indian Movement (South End Press: Cambridge, MA 2002.) p. 49; See, also, the U.S. Congressional (Church Committee) investigation report condemning the FBI’s COINTELPRO as unlawful; with specific reference to jacketing targets:

“The ‘snitch jacket’ technique—neutralizing a target by labeling him a ‘snitch’ or informant, so that he would no longer be trusted—was used in all [FBI counterintelligence programs]. The methods utilized ranged from having an authentic informant start a rumor about the target member, to anonymous letters or phone calls, to faked informants’ reports....

“The ‘snitch jacket’ is a particularly nasty technique even when used in peaceful groups. It gains an added dimension of danger when it is used—as, indeed, it was—in groups known to have murdered informants.”


7 Ibid., p. 211

Note: Several articles by Kevin “Rashid” Johnson have been published in Socialist Viewpoint.

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Jaan Laaman’s First Steps of Freedom

After 37-years, political prisoner Jaan K. Laaman has been released

By Sonja Wilde-de Vries


The first stop Jaan wanted to make, was not for food or anything like that, but to send a message to family and friends who had been supporting him all these long years. We stood on the side of the road, video rolling and Jaan shared some thanks and other thoughts, ending with his fist raised and the words—“Black Lives Mattered then (37-years-ago) and Black Lives Matter NOW”

Jaan also reflected on his beloved comrades Tom Manning and Richard Williams who had died in captivity.

“Richard and Tom never got to take these first steps of Freedom.” Jaan shared that he had always planned to leave prison and go stay with his son Ricky, it was something they had spoken of during visits, from the time Ricky was a child, but Ricky died in October of 2011, while Jaan was inside.

As Jaan stood there in the grass, still wearing his drab prison garb, relatively free (still on parole,) I remembered over 37-years-ago when my comrades and I heard about one of the biggest manhunts in U.S. history that ended in the capture of a group of white working-class men and women suspected of being part of an armed underground movement, the United Freedom Front.

At that time, we lived in a collective of anti-racist activists and were members of the John Brown anti-Klan committee as well as the New Movement in Solidarity with Puerto Rican Independence and Socialism. These organizations regularly received copies of communiques from the underground, in the mail, about actions within U.S. borders targeting racist police brutality and murders, representatives of South African Apartheid, and death squad governments such as El Salvador and companies supporting repressive and murderous policies. Activists helped disseminate those communiques to the wider public so that people would understand why these attacks (in which no human beings were targeted or injured) were happening.

These were the actions of the United Freedom Front, which was the organi-
zation that the Ohio 7 were being charged with having been part of.

The Ohio 7 trials were some of the most militarized court room situations. In a New York City courtroom, members of the Ohio 7 stood and denounced the injustices of the U.S. government and its support of Apartheid in South Africa, the colonization of Puerto Rico and support for death squad governments in power in Central America.

In March of 1985 I stood in the courtroom and watched as marshalls stun gunned and beat them for refusing to be silent, all the while other marshalls had their guns trained on us, the supporters. Needless to say, neither that beating, nor others, ever silenced this group of passionate and committed revolutionaries.

Jaan Karl Laaman is an Estonian, born in a refugee camp in Germany in 1948 and emigrated to the United States with his family. The family of mostly women and children were fleeing converging armies—they knew that regardless of the flags of the armies, they would be targets. In 1951, Jaan’s family moved to Roxbury, the heart of the Black community in Boston, Massachusetts.

In letters and visits, Jaan shared that living in Roxbury with Black friends and school mates, he developed a sense of solidarity with Black people in the community, and even at a young age he felt a connection in terms of economics, as a working class, immigrant family. Some years later when his family moved into a predominately white neighborhood in Buffalo, New York, he witnessed white supremacy and racism for the first time. These were some of his earliest influences in his understanding of life in America.

In 1966, Jaan was first locked up on a non-political robbery charge and his twenty months in prison helped radicalize him. In 1968, Jaan was released and went to Cornell and the University of New Hampshire, was an SDS and anti-war activist, worked in support of the Black Liberation Movement and the Black Panther Party.

...the American government will fight against Peoples’ quests for justice and freedom and is willing to commit unspeakable atrocities to hold onto its power...

In 1971 he was charged with a parole violation for speaking at an anti-war rally and was sent to Attica Prison. Jaan was there in the months leading up to the Attica Uprising. While there, he met and became friends and comrades with Sam Melville, (one of the early armed underground leaders of the 1960s.)

The Attica uprising, one of the most impactful prisoner uprisings of all time, happened in September of 1971. Sam had been a key participant and there was testimony that he had been shot down execution style when the prison was attacked and retaken by State Police and prison guards. Knowing Sam, and the way he died, had a deep impact on Jaan. “Attica was a bright light, a searing beacon showing that even the most oppressed in the tightest of conditions can rise up. It was also a blood-drenched reminder that the American government will fight against Peoples’ quests for justice and freedom and is willing to commit unspeakable atrocities to hold onto its power. It’s as simple as this: if We the People aren’t pushing them, they immediately begin pushing us back—all the way back to servitude and slavery, and that’s regardless of race or nationality if you are a prisoner.”

In 1972 Jaan was arrested and charged with bombing a Richard Nixon reelection headquarters building and a police station in New Hampshire and was sentenced to 20-years. He was released in 1978 after winning an appeal and having his sentence reduced.

Jaan immediately jumped back into anti-racist organizing and in 1979 he and Kazi Toure helped to organize the Amandla Festival of Unity. This concert, featuring Bob Marley, focused on fighting racism and police brutality in

Jaan Laaman on his first day out of prison after 37 years. (Photo by Sonja Wilde-de Vries)
Shakur's subsequent escape from prison took different forms. While originally charged with seditionous conspiracy, Laaman was found guilty of five bombings, one attempted bombing, and criminal conspiracy, and was sentenced to 53 years in prison.

As a young activist who began visiting political prisoners in the 80s, I soon came to understand that their activism did not end with their capture, it simply took different forms. With Jaan, it was writing and engaging in political movements through the written word including founding and editing 4StruggleMag.org and through interviews, sharing perspectives and always centering anti-racism and a revolutionary anti-capitalist vision. More than once, there were reprisals, such as when he recorded a statement over the phone for the brilliant lawyer, Lynne Stewart’s memorial.

Jaan also organized political study groups and political consciousness raising groups among the prison population.

In the prison visiting room we often talked about the Black Lives Matter movement, Palestine, LGBTQ—all of it—because Jaan is about all oppressed people getting free.

Jaan also worked diligently with his brothers in prison, teaching meditation classes and yoga for many years. In addition, Jaan developed a yoga class specifically for people with disabilities, limited mobility and people in wheelchairs. Jaan’s yoga class was, for many of the men, a small taste of freedom within the confines of captivity.2

In 2020, after Breonna Taylor was murdered by Louisville police in a no-knock raid, I shared with Jaan about the Say Her Name Bike Ride, founded by Erica Nicole Williams. The ride was about fighting for Justice for Breonna and other victims of police brutality as well as taking care of the folks involved in the movement. By the next time I talked to Jaan, he had not only begun riding in honor of Breonna but had inspired others to do the same, inside. Though they had only one or two stationary bikes, they took turns. It became a regular movement inside the walls. When he walked out of prison on May 15th one of his most prized belongings was a portrait of Breonna Taylor, drawn by a brother named Dion Holmes aka Brother Farooq. That is who Jaan K Laaman is—he organizes and inspires others by example and by his fierce commitment to justice on all levels.

Sonja Wilde-de Vries is a filmmaker, photographer, writer and avid cyclist. She has been an activist since she was a teen and is an organizer in Louisville showing up for Racial Justice and member of SayHerNameBikeRide.

2 https://www.prisonradio.org/commentaries/?_sft_commentary-tag=lynne-stewart

Time to Release Sundiata Acoli

By Reverend Lukata Mjumbe

Sundiata Acoli is an 84-year-old grandfather, mentor, teacher and artist who has been in prison for more than 48 years. He and Joanne Chesimard (Assata Shakur) were both convicted and sentenced to life in prison (with the possibility of parole) for their role in the tragic shooting on the New Jersey State Turnpike which resulted in the death of New Jersey state trooper, Werner Foerster and Black Panther Party member named Zayd Shakur. The highly publicized trial and Assata Shakur’s subsequent escape from prison in 1979 have framed Sundiata’s imprisonment as one of the most emotional and passionately debated cases in the history of the state of New Jersey. Though Sundiata has been eligible for parole for more than 25 years his petitions for parole have been summarily denied eight times.

By the grace of God, Sundiata has endured almost five decades of imprisonment in some of the most torturous prisons in America. He has expressed deep remorse and regret and has taken full responsibility for his actions that fateful night almost 50 years ago. There is so much that this veteran freedom fighter can teach a country that does not seem to be able to move beyond the cycles of protest, retaliation and revenge. I am a pastor at a historic Black Church in Princeton, N.J. and I am blessed to serve as Sundiata’s “faith based” counsel and representative in the Bring Sundiata Acoli Home Alliance.

I first “met” Sundiata Acoli over 25 years ago after sending him a letter to where he was imprisoned in a maximum-security prison in Leavenworth,
Kansas. Sundiata Acoli is a graduate of Prairie View University in Texas and was a mathematician and computer analyst who worked for NASA prior to committing his life full-time to the civil rights movement and as a leader in the Black Panther Party. When I learned about Sundiata, I was a recent college dropout turned full time activist working as a Human Rights Fellow for Amnesty International-USA. I was intrigued by his story, and I wanted to learn more. I was assigned the responsibility of working on a wide range of domestic human rights projects including the abolition of the death penalty and advocacy on behalf of those identified as “political prisoners” in the United States. I came to learn that Sundiata Acoli was so much more than his political history or an iconic symbol drawing passionate responses from both supporters and opponents.

As an octogenarian COVID-19 survivor in the early stages of dementia, currently suffering from heart disease and emphysema, Sundiata does not represent a safety threat to anyone, anywhere. As recently as May 2021, the New Jersey Board of Parole seemingly ignored the fact that Sundiata has had a perfect disciplinary record for almost 30 years and teaches a class in federal prison for young prisoners preparing for re-entry into communities on parole.

Currently, Sundiata sits in a federal prison cell on the verge of what many of his supporters see as a politically motivated death sentence. At last count, close to 10,000 women and men have signed an online petition calling upon New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy to grant compassionate release and allow Sundiata to go home to his family. I pray every day that those in power will submit to the call of a higher power which calls humanity for forgiveness, mercy and grace.

Over the decades of his incarceration, I have come to know him as a father of two daughters and grandfather that longs to hug his grandchildren outside of a prison. I know Sundiata as a source of wise and calming counsel to scores of young activists who needed to understand the connection of one generation of freedom fighters to the next. I know Sundiata as a mentor who encouraged me to be a committed father to my newborn children, return to college and complete graduate school as I discovered my true calling as an activist-minister. Two decades ago, I would have jumped at any opportunity to debate the details of Sundiata’s case and argue the tragedy of political calculations which extend prison sentences for prisoners such as Sundiata and many other aging political prisoners. No more. Today, I am focused on the moral tragedy of a government that waits for aging prisoners to die through the use of *de facto* death sentences. In this hour, I am committed to calling upon communities to prevent these political death sentences from being executed. The deaths of those identified as “political prisoners” stigmatize freedom movements, institutionalize vengeance, and revoke our best hopes for healing and reconciliation.

I remember in one of our first telephone conversations, I asked Sundiata, “When do you think that you will be released?” He answered, “That’s up to you. The people make that decision.” It is a decision that is overdue. If not now—Sundiata Acoli will die in prison. It is time for New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy to do what is right and exercise his executive power to release Sundiata Acoli by commuting his sentence to time served.

—*Amsterdam News*, June 17, 2021

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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.
Romaine Chip Fitzgerald Returns to his Ancestors

By Mumia Abu-Jamal

The name Romaine Chip Fitzgerald is perhaps not widely known except for his supporters. In his wild youth decades ago, he was a teenage member of the Los Angeles chapter of the Black Panther Party, which he joined after a brief stint in jail. He was a wild boy at a wild time in history, the sixties, when it seemed like the very world was on fire.

Chip once fell in with a crew of wild boys who were full of mischief, which landed him in reform school, known as Juvenile Hall, run by the California Youth Authority. Chip’s youthful rebelliousness led to stints in solitary where, now surrounded by silence, he read about and became captivated by the Black freedom movement.

These articles awakened him to the existence of the Black Panther Party, the boldest of Black freedom movements in the sixty’s era. Upon his 1969 release, Romaine Chip Fitzgerald formally joined the militant revolutionary organization. Chip took to the party like a fish takes to water by helping its free breakfast programs, selling Panther newspapers, and assisting in other party programs.

According to others who joined at the same time, Chip was an enthusiastic member, and more importantly, his mother proudly supported his new commitment to community work.

But good times sometimes don’t remain good, for 1969 marked Chip’s involvement in two shootings, leaving one victim dead. It also marked his return to prison as an adult. These charges, and California’s antipathy towards Black Panthers, led to Chip’s incarceration for 52 years despite his eligibility for parole in 1976.

March 28, 2021, Chip who suffered from a massive stroke, passed away in a California hospital while lying in shackles. Chip was the longest held ex-Black Panther in America. Romaine Chip Fitzgerald, after over a half-century in chains, returns to his ancestors.

Left: Romaine Chip Fitzgerald when first incarcerated, left; Right: shortly before his death on March 28, 2021.

The Longest Held Black Panther Party Political Prisoner
On the Front Cover: Cali, Valle del Cauca, Colombia, April 28, 2021, demonstrators block trucks in protest against the new government tax reform that will increase taxes on millions of workers. (Shutterstock) Read The Fight for Justice Must Be International and Anti-Capitalist on page 4.

Protesters commemorate the 36th anniversary of the 1985 MOVE bombing by carrying signs listing names of MOVE members who perished during that incident. Read Decades of War Against the MOVE Families on page 29.

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{A solidarity bike ride for Justice for Breonna Taylor took place inside a Federal prison. (Art by Dion Holmes, aka Brother Farooq) Read Jaan Laaman’s First Steps of Freedom on page 62.}
\end{array}\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{Attention Prison Mail Room:}
\end{array}\]

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.”